

Memory Verse

“He said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’” (Acts 19:2a)

| Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word] | Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature] | Good Work [Behavior] |
|---|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The gift of salvation is also for the Gentiles. 2. The evidence for receiving the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. 3. Water baptism is for the remission of sins. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. God’s salvation is for all. 2. God shows no partiality. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Show no partiality in preaching the gospel. 2. Study and understand the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and be filled with the Holy Spirit. |

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Cornelius Calls for Peter (Acts 10:1–33)
- B. Peter Preaches to Cornelius and His Household (Acts 10:34–43)
- C. The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–48)
- D. Peter’s Defense Before the Jewish Brothers (Acts 11:1–18)

Life Application

1. Treat Everybody Equally
2. Recognize the Holy Spirit
3. Pray to God for the Fullness of the Holy Spirit

Memory Verse

Conclusion: It is the will of God for the Gentiles to receive salvation. To be saved, we must believe and have faith in God, and be reborn of water and of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Cornelius was a Roman centurion of the Italian troops, described as a devout man who gave alms generously and who prayed every day. One day, an angel of God appeared to him in a vision, telling him that his prayer and alms “have come up for a memorial before God” (Acts 10:4). The angel instructed Cornelius to send men to Joppa to bring Peter, who would tell him what to do next (Acts 10:5–6).

A. Cornelius Calls for Peter (Acts 10:7–33)

1. Peter sees a vision (Acts 10:9–16)

Cornelius sent two of his servants to call on Peter, and during this time, Peter saw a vision during his prayer. In his vision, Peter saw heaven opened and “a great sheet bound at the four corners” coming down (v. 11). In this sheet were “all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air” (v. 12). During the vision, a voice spoke to Peter, instructing him to rise, kill, and eat (v. 13). Though the voice had given him this command, Peter refused, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean” (v. 14). At his refusal, the voice spoke again, “What God has cleansed you must not call common” (v. 15). This repeated three times before the sheet was taken up into heaven.

2. Peter is taken to Cornelius’ house (Acts 10:17–23)

As Peter pondered the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius arrived and called upon him. The Spirit told Peter, who was still deep in thought, “Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them” (Acts 10:19–20). Peter met the men, confirmed his identity, and inquired about why they came. After the men told Peter about Cornelius and the instructions given by the angel, Peter invited them in to stay with them. The next day, the three departed for Joppa, along with six brethren.

3. Peter meets Cornelius (Acts 10:24–33)

Meeting Cornelius would have been unusual for Peter and his companions because, as Peter explained, it was unlawful for Jews and Gentiles to meet like this. Many Jews also tended to treat Gentiles as lower than them due to such laws, as well as their long and bitter history with them in Mosaic times. But Peter forbade Cornelius from worshiping him, and from the moment they met, treated him as an equal. Peter continued, saying, “But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?” (vv. 28–29). Cornelius then explained his vision and added that he and the others that had gathered were ready to hear Peter speak.

B. Peter Preaches to Cornelius and His Household (Acts 10:34–43)

1. Peter’s message

As those gathered listened intently, Peter began preaching. Let’s read Acts 10:34–43.

There are several key points in Peter’s message:

- a. God shows no partiality.
- b. The word of God, the gospel of peace, had been preached throughout Judea.
- c. Jesus died, resurrected, and appeared to chosen witnesses.
- d. The Lord commanded the disciples to preach the gospel and to testify that Jesus is the Lord over the living and the dead.
- e. Whoever believes in Jesus will receive remission of their sins.

2. What does it mean to show no partiality?

From the gospel books and the Acts of the Apostles, we can see that Peter strictly abided by Jewish religious and social traditions (Jn 13:8; Acts 10:14). However, when it came to choosing between tradition and God's will, Peter did not hesitate to follow God's will. Let's read James 2:1–13.

To show partiality means to discriminate, prefer, or favor one over the other. We often treat others according to what we have learned, either from the past or from people we trust. Yet Jesus commands us to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:31), and James 2:9 says, "But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors." We likely are biased against certain groups of people or hold certain stereotypes about others, but we need to remember that God wants us to preach His gospel to all people. We have no right to withhold salvation from anyone, even if we dislike them.

So how do we become more objective towards those who are different from us, whatever those differences may be? Very often our bias is a result of ignorance or indifference to those who are not like us. Simply learning more about others makes us more friendly or sympathetic towards them. Other times, our bias is a result of our ego. When we believe we are smarter, wealthier, or even kinder or more generous than someone, we treat them differently. Yet everything we have comes from God (1 Chr 29:14), and God may take away anything that we have at any moment He wishes (Job 2:10). As Paul said, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7). Knowing this, who are we to claim that we are better because of what we have?

C. The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–48)

1. The Holy Spirit descends

While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit descended upon all those who were listening. The circumcised Jews who accompanied Peter witnessed this outpouring, and were amazed that God had bestowed His Spirit upon the Gentiles, too. They recognized that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit because the Gentiles were speaking in tongues and magnifying God (v. 12). Since Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit, Peter saw no reason they should not receive water baptism, so he "commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (vv. 47–48).

2. Proof and necessity of the Holy Spirit

There are many different beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit among Christians denominations. For example, some do not believe speaking in tongues is necessary. Others claim that to receive the Holy Spirit, you "learn" to speak in tongues, while others think that you receive the Holy Spirit immediately upon believing. How do we make them understand that speaking in tongues is not a foreign language, nor a tongue that can be learned, and that we can only receive the Holy Spirit when we are baptized correctly and pray to God?

The best way is to show them passages from the Bible. Acts 10:46 clearly states that Peter and his fellow apostles knew that Cornelius and his family received the Holy Spirit because "they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God." If the Holy Spirit comes to us quietly, how could the apostles have witnessed Cornelius' family and friends speaking in tongues? Later, Paul asks of some believers, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2). If we receive the Holy Spirit when we accept God as our Savior, why did Paul ask this question?

Some believe that good behavior is all that is necessary for salvation. But we need to understand that simply calling ourselves Christians or changing our conduct is not enough to save us. We are saved by being baptized in both water and the Spirit so that we can be reborn. Then, with the help of the Spirit and His guidance, we show our faith by reflecting God's will in our good deeds, for faith without deeds is dead (Jas 2:17). Cornelius' story reminds us that even a good person such as he needed to follow God's will and receive the baptism of water and the Spirit in order to be saved.

D. Peter's Defense Before the Jewish Brothers (Acts 11:1–18)

1. Peter's defense

Eating with uncircumcised people was a major offense for religious Jews (Gal 2:11–14), and baptizing Gentiles even more so. Thus, when Peter reached Jerusalem, the Jewish brethren confronted him (Acts 11:2–3). Let's read Acts 11:5–17 and examine the defense that Peter gave before them. There are several key points in his defense:

- a. God showed him a vision in which He told Peter not to regard things that He claimed clean as unclean. God has the ultimate authority to decide whom He wants to save.
- b. The Holy Spirit told Peter to go to Cornelius to preach the gospel to his family.
- c. Six Jewish brethren witnessed the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles.
- d. Peter remembered the Lord's command that to be saved, one needs to receive both the baptism of water and baptism of the Holy Spirit. So, since they had clearly been baptized in the Spirit, he went ahead and baptized Cornelius' family with water.

The two events of Peter's vision and the Holy Spirit's descent upon the Gentiles were so incredible that the brethren immediately agreed that it was God's will to open the door of salvation to the Gentiles.

2. Following God's will

If we are in a position where we have to make important decisions for the church, what attitude should we have in order to make the correct decisions? We need to put God's will first. But in order to do God's will, it is vital that the decision-makers know how to find out what His will is. So, before we can even be in a position of importance, we need to cultivate our spirituality constantly and make God our friend.

Part of God's nature is that He does not show partiality, as we have learned in this lesson. We should never take anything at its face value. Doing so will often lead to incorrect choices. A thorough study of the matter at hand and prayer for God's will are always necessary before making decisions.

3. Learning God's will

Jesus once said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn 20:29). We do not need to ask for wonders or miracles if none of these were shown to us. All we need is faith that as long as we continue searching, God has already prepared a way for us to understand His will. So, without signs and wonders, what other ways can we find out God's will in matters where we need to make decisions?

First, God's general commands are all written in the Bible. We can find out His will by studying

His word in the Bible and become proficient in it. Of course, this proficiency must be accompanied by wisdom from God, because without God's spirit, even the most authoritative biblical scholars are unable to fully understand His words (Eph 1:17; 1 Cor 1:24–25). Many brothers and sisters have testified of God revealing His will by moving them to turn to certain passages of the Bible, or by helping them to understand what they previously did not

Constant prayer will also lead us to God's will. As we know, prayer is a way to communicate directly with God (Heb 10:19–22). Jesus once said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Mt 7:7–8). We should take advantage of this direct line with God and ask Him to reveal His will to us.

Check for Understanding

- 1. What did Peter see in his vision? How many times was the vision shown to Peter?** Peter saw a large sheet coming down from heaven bound at its four corners. Bound in this sheet were all kinds of four-footed animals, beasts, and birds of the air. This vision appeared three times before the sheet was taken back to heaven.
- 2. What was the message in Peter's vision?** In this vision, God was teaching Peter that whatever God makes clean, he should not regard unclean.
- 3. What kind of man was Cornelius? What did the angel tell him?** Cornelius is described as a devout man who gave alms generously and who prayed every day. The angel instructed him to send men to Joppa to bring Peter, who would tell him what to do next (Acts 10:5, 6).
- 4. When did the Holy Spirit descend upon Cornelius and those gathered at his house? How did those present know that the Holy Spirit had truly descended?** The Holy Spirit descended upon Cornelius and those gathered at his house as Peter was still preaching the message of salvation. The Jewish brethren knew at once that the Holy Spirit had descended upon them, for they heard them speaking in tongues and magnifying God.
- 5. What convinced the brethren in Jerusalem to accept Gentiles as church members?** Peter spoke of God's abidance with the Gentiles by recounting the vision shown him and confirming that the Holy Spirit had descended upon the Gentiles. These two events were so incredible that they all immediately agreed that it was God's will to open the door of salvation to the Gentiles.

Life Application

1. Treat Everybody Equally

When we encounter new people, we often judge these individuals or groups of people based on pre-existing stereotypes. These stereotypes may include anything from their weight, skin color, social status, wealth, education, lifestyle, fashion, and more. So how can we learn to avoid partiality or discrimination towards certain individuals?

Our biases and stereotypical beliefs originate from our experiences, the media, such as movies or the Internet, and our peers, such as friends and family. Therefore, it is critical that we have a firm foundation in biblical knowledge and spiritual wisdom to help us avoid acting based on these biases. Only when we rely on the truth can we discern between right and wrong when interacting with people. For example, the prophet Samuel quickly learned that it is not God's will for us to judge others by their appearances when God commanded him to anoint the smallest and youngest of brothers, David (1 Sam 16:7). All people are created by God, and it is God's will that all men be saved (1 Tim 2:4). Who are we to favor some while disliking others?

2. Recognize the Holy Spirit

The Bible describes the Holy Spirit as something that you can “see and hear” (Acts 2:33). The Acts of the Apostles teaches us clearly that the sign of receiving the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. The Greek words *glossa*, “tongue,” or *glossai*, “tongues,” are used in the original text to describe this phenomenon:

- “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to **speak with other tongues**, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:4)
- “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them **speak with tongues** and magnify God.” (Acts 10:44–46)
- “And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they **spoke with tongues** and prophesied.” (Acts 19:6)

In Acts 10, the circumcised brethren who had accompanied Peter to Cornelius’ house were astonished when they witnessed the Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit. Later, when Peter returned to the church in Jerusalem, he reported how “the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15), referring to the disciples’ own experience on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 15:8).

3. Pray to God for the Fullness of the Holy Spirit

The Bible describes being filled by the Holy Spirit in two contexts. First, a moment where the Holy Spirit fills a believer at a significant or critical moment, such as when they are:

- Filled at the moment they received the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 2:4)
- Conferred with boldness by the Spirit to witness for Jesus (Acts 4:8–13, 31)
- Empowered by the Spirit in specific circumstances (Acts 9:17–18; 13:9–11)

Second, an ongoing process in a life that is fully submissive to the direction of the Spirit, where the Spirit helps believers to live lives obedient to Him, so that they:

- Overcome the deeds of the flesh (Gal 5:16–21; Eph 4:30–32)
- Live godly lives and bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–25)
- Are empowered with wisdom and faith for God’s work (Acts 6:3, 5; 11:24)
- Have joy and comfort, even in the face of persecution (Acts 7:55–56; 13:52)

Since pursuing the fullness of the Holy Spirit is a lifelong process, we must submit completely to His direction so that we continually walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16; Rom 8:1, 5). Once the Holy Spirit becomes our source of spiritual power, we will be able to put off the deeds of the flesh with determination (Gal 5:19–21).

Memory Verse

“He said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’” (Acts 19:2a)

Context

Paul was asking the disciples in Ephesus about the Holy Spirit to understand the extent of their knowledge regarding the truth.

Meaning

1. We do not receive the Holy Spirit simply by claiming that the Lord is our Savior or by receiving water baptism. (Though it is possible to receive the Holy Spirit during correct water baptism, the Bible does not state that you receive the Holy Spirit when you receive water baptism. Rather, the majority of believers receive the Holy Spirit by praying to God steadfastly.)
2. When the Holy Spirit descends, He can be seen and heard, for the sign of receiving the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. This is the only evidence the Bible has provided for believers to discern whether the Holy Spirit has truly descended upon an individual.

Conclusion

God has a wonderful salvation plan that does not follow man's traditions, and the spreading of the gospel of salvation to the Gentiles was part of this plan. This task carried such importance that God showed Peter a vision, teaching him that God had opened the door of salvation to the uncircumcised (Acts 10:15). Peter, a law-abiding Jew, did not hesitate to set tradition aside in favor of God's command, teaching us the importance of setting aside our own expectations and following God's will in the decisions we make.

After this event, Cornelius and his family became the first Gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit, proving that the door of salvation for Gentiles had been opened wide. But even Cornelius, a man who worshiped God fervently even before meeting Peter, needed to be baptized in water and the Spirit in order to be saved, proving to us that the Holy Spirit is necessary for our salvation. Our deeds alone can never save us, only the grace that we have received through faith (Eph 2:8).

Lesson 5 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What does Paul's question in Acts 19:2 tell us about how one receives the Holy Spirit?
We do not receive the Holy Spirit simply by claiming that the Lord is our Savior or by receiving water baptism. When He descends, He can be seen and heard, for the sign of receiving Him is speaking in tongues.
2. What was the Jewish custom regarding interacting with Gentiles? How did Peter react to God's instruction to go to Cornelius?
It was strictly against Jewish custom for Jews to interact with Gentiles. Peter immediately followed God's instructions without hesitation despite having followed Jewish tradition his entire life.
3. What are two reasons we often show partiality to certain people or groups of people?
We are often biased because of ignorance or indifference to those who are not like us. Other times, our bias is a result of our ego. When we believe we are smarter, wealthier, or even kinder or more generous than someone, we treat them differently.
4. How did those present know that the Holy Spirit had truly descended upon the Gentiles?
The circumcised brethren knew at once that the Holy Spirit had descended upon them, for they saw them speaking in tongues and magnifying God.
5. What attitude should we have in order to make the correct decisions for the church?
We need to put God's will first. But in order to do so, we must set aside our own expectations and seek out the path that God wants us to follow. This means learning to avoid partiality, thoroughly studying God's word, and praying for His wisdom.
6. Have you ever treated someone with partiality? How can you avoid this in the future?
Personal answer.