

# Conversions 5

## Cornelius

1

2

*Acts 10:1*

3

1 Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,

As we have looked some of the different conversions in the book of Acts, we noticed that their circumstances are as varied as the converts involved in them. People who are carrying the guilt of the crucifixion of Christ, a man who was devoutly dedicated to serving God, people that were desperately seeking the opportunity to belong once again to the people of God, a man who believed and then let his greed and pride draw him away, and Saul, a man who was violently opposed to...

4

### *“The Way”*

So passionate about his belief was he that he was actively persecuting Christians, having them beaten, thrown into prison, and even killed. I guess the point of this disparity is to found in the fact the Gospel appeals to all sorts of people, people from every walk of life, every level of education, and every level of economic success. There is no recipe for the perfect candidate for conversion, whether someone is poor or rich, sophisticated or coarse, educated or not, the only thing that matters is their heart. Is the heart good and honest or is it bitter and stubborn, we cannot know, but God knows what is in a person's heart. The only way we can know, is how that someone responds to the Word of the Gospel. So far in the conversions we have looked at we have seen hearts that were convicted, sorrowful, seeking, but honest and good. That is the prerequisite to conversion, a good and honest heart. And who knows what kind of person that kind of heart dwells in?

The heart is spoken of as the seat of man's desires and hopes. It is spoken of as the source of a man's character...

*Ps 7:10*

5

10 My shield is with God, Who saves the upright in heart.

This idea of upright in heart is what we have seen before in this series, it is the heart that seeks after God.

*Ps 28:7*

6

7 The Lord is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart exults, And with my song I shall thank Him.

It is the heart that trusts and it is the heart that rejoices in God. In our discussion of these conversions, what we are seeing in those that are coming to God is just that, people with good hearts.

Our next discussion again reveals this dynamic at play, that of Cornelius. Remember the thoughts that we are looking at in these conversions...

- 7 1) The Opportunity
- 2) The Character of the Convert (s)
- 3) The Nature of the Message

We have been looking at these ideas to see what they tell us when applied to each of the conversions. So the first thought...

- 8 1) The Opportunity

Once again we are looking at a devout man, one who is seeking after God to worship...

*Acts 10:2*

9

2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

This is truly an interesting dynamic happening here. Cornelius was a centurion, that makes him a type of officer or leader in the Roman Legionnaires. He was part of the police force, if you will, that enforced Roman law amongst the Jews. Yet we are told that he was a devout man. This term devout comes from the Greek...

Eusebes (yoo-seb-ace'); NT:2152

10

Well-reverent, i.e. pious: KJV - devout, godly.

This speaks to attitude. How do we regard God, Christ, and the scriptures? How do we view our lives in relationship to what we really are as opposed to what we should be?

A quick aside here, just for clarification purposes, it is very possible to be devout, to be devoted, to the something other than God and His Word. In every religion there is in the world there are people that are truly devout in their efforts to worship according to whatever tenants they hold to be true. Here is the point, devoutness, like faith, speaks to attitude. We have to be careful that we don't fall into the trap of thinking that only those of the Church of Christ have faith. That just isn't true. Faith is a generic term that is defined as a belief in something for which is unseen and or unknown. The difference is in what the faith is founded on. People who are dedicated to the tenants of Catholicism have faith. People who are sincere in worshipping in a community church atmosphere have faith. The point is that they don't have scriptural faith. Their faith is founded on something other than God's Word. Now, when I say that, we need to understand that there are facets of almost all religions of the world that contain elements of the true Word, but they leave so much of it behind in their application of their tenants, the elements of the standard that they have chosen to follow. Faith is not an exclusive of the Church, it's just that you can't be a part of the true Church without having true, obedient faith based on the true Word. The Lord adds to the Church those that are save, and you can't be saved without the Gospel because the Gospel is the power of God unto Salvation.

Back now to our lesson, Cornelius was a devout man, he had an attitude of Godliness. He sought after God, the true God. He was a Roman and part of the Roman guard. He had sworn

allegiance to Rome, the emperor, and to Roman law, yet we see him seeking after God. We also see that he recognizes that the true God is the God of the Jews.

**Acts 10:2**

**11**

2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

Cornelius helped the Jews and he prayed to God continually. This makes a very important point and answers a question for us. Many times people will use as their excuse to not respond to God, what about those who have never heard the Word? Their reasoning is since there might be people have not heard the Word then why should I bother. Real sound reasoning there isn't it?

**Luke 11:9**

**12**

9 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

This is what the Lord tells the disciples. The principle is that God will supply the needs of those that come to Him. If a man is truly seeking after God in his heart, doesn't God promise that He will lead that man to finding Him. I have to believe that that is true. Cornelius desired to worship God and sought after Him and God provided a way for him. That is the opportunity that we see being presented.

The next thought we want to look at is...

**13**

2) The Character of the Convert (s)

As we have already seen, Cornelius is called a devout man by God. He prayed continually, seeking God. That speaks volumes about his character, his faith, and his commitment. Note what he is told...

**Acts 10:3-4**

**14**

3 About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!" 4 And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

I can't imagine the shock that Cornelius must have felt when he had this vision. The ninth hour of the day is about 3:00 PM in the afternoon. He was most likely not taking a nap, it was a time of day when people were working and there is no reason to assume that Cornelius wasn't about his duties and that when he had the vision, it was not like he was having a dream. I don't know how the vision appeared to him, maybe as a daydream, but I don't think that that was even the greatest shock he might have had. Look at what he is told...

**15**

***"Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God"***

Cornelius had to have been stunned that the almighty God in heaven knew who he was. This is such an important statement to all men. We must realize that God knows us, He knows what we

do, what we say, the thoughts of our hearts, everything there is to know, He knows. Think about what you have done this past week, yesterday, God knows.

**1 Cor 14:22-23**

**16**

**22** So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe. **23** Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?

Paul presents an explanation here that is important for us as we look back at Spiritual gifts, to understand. Tongues were meant to be a sign to unbelievers that what is being taught is from God, so that they might believe. But prophecy, teaching, the Word of God, is for believers to further their knowledge and understanding of what God wants man to know. The point he is making that if all prophecy, then the unbeliever is not convicted, but if all speak in tongues, foreign languages that they can't understand, they think everyone mad, but if all work together...

**1 Cor 14:24-25**

**17**

**24** But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; **25** the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

Here then is the truth that we need to recognize, when we are compared to the standard of the Law of God...

**18**

***“The secrets of his heart are disclosed”***

God knows the secrets of our hearts just like He knew Cornelius'. In his humility and devoutness Cornelius bared his soul to God and God responded.

There is an underlying story here that we will touch on briefly...

**Acts 10:5**

**19**

**5** Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter;

Cornelius is told to send for Peter. Now, I suppose that this part of the account could very well have been part of the point of opportunity.

**Acts 10:9**

**20**

**9** On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

Without going into great detail on what occurred. Peter was shown three visions of a sheet coming down from the sky filled with all manner of animals and he was told to eat. His response was that he did not eat unclean things and was told by a voice that came to him that...

**21**

***“What God has cleansed, do not make unclean”***

Peter was confused by these visions and didn't understand the implication of them.

Peter receives the message from Cornelius and is told by the Spirit to go to him. This brings us to our last point...

**22** 3) The Nature of the Message

*Acts 10:34-35*

**23**

**34** Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, **35** but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

I find it interesting that Peter recognizes that this particular message is as much for him as it is for Cornelius. God does not show partiality. Even when the Jews were God's chosen people under the Law of Moses, provision was made for the rest of mankind. There was the possibility of becoming a proselyte and there was still the Law of the Patriarchs. From all indications, Cornelius was practicing this law. He was not a proselyte, he could not have been and still have been a centurion, yet he was called a devout man. Christ came for all men and that's what Peter proclaims to them. Beginning in verse 36, Peter speaks of Jesus from the day He was baptized by John, his life and teachings, how He performed miracles and healings, doing good to all people, opposing Satan because God was with Him. He speaks of the disciples, now Apostles, who witnessed these things, being with Him in Jerusalem witnessing His crucifixion and seeing Him after his resurrection when He commanded them to preach Him to all people that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God through whom salvation can be found.

That is the message that Peter preached to Cornelius and his household. The message Peter received is that the gospel is for all men, Jew or Gentile. All men.

*Acts 10:44*

**24**

**44** While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.

The Holy Spirit comes upon those that are hearing this message that Peter is preaching which astounds all that were with him...

*Acts 10:44*

**25**

**45** All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. **46** For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,

As we saw earlier, speaking in tongues was a sign of truth, and these Gentiles speaking in tongues indicates the truth that the Gospel was for all men. Now here we see again that those that the Holy Spirit had come upon were still told...

*Acts 10:47-48*

**26**

**47** "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" **48** And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.