

Accepting
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What kinds of prejudices cause people to avoid certain types of people? Let's say it stronger: What are some things that cause people to SHUN other people? Is it always race or culture? What else might cause someone to say, "I want nothing to do with THEM"?

It's human nature to want to be around people you like, or who are like you. That means it's also human nature to want to avoid certain people or groups.

How did Jesus treat people who were different (Luke 15:2; 7:34; John 4)? What did Jesus say about who should hear the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)?

The big idea: Salvation through Christ is for all people; not just those like us, or those that we like. The big question: Do we ever say, "*I want nothing to do when them! Somebody else will have to reach them with the gospel?*" Bluntly put: Is God calling you to reach someone you otherwise can't stand?

Acts 10 and 11 is the story of two different men, from two different races, and two different cultures, who experienced the same salvation, through the same and only Savior, Jesus Christ. The way God intersected their lives not only changed their hearts, it began the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles.

Because we don't have time to read all of this account in class, let me give you some context. Then we'll look at some specific verses to see what they say; what they mean; and how they should change us this week.

In the mostly Gentile seacoast city of Caesarea lived a military officer, Cornelius. He was a Roman soldier who loved God. He was generous in giving to God's people and devout in worship and prayer. As devout as a non-Jew could be that is. We would call him a "seeker" One day while praying he saw a vision of an angel of God.

Though it frightened him, he had a great response: “What is it, Lord?” What happened next proves that Cornelius didn’t just ask what God wanted him to do; he acted on it.

The angel said, send for a man named Peter who is over in Joppa. Then he was gone. No further instructions. Cornelius sent two servants and a soldier as ordered. Meanwhile, over in Joppa, Peter is still at the house of Simon the tanner of leather. It’s about noon, and Peter had missed breakfast. Look at Acts 10:9:

Acts 10:9–15 (ESV)

Peter’s Vision

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

¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” ¹⁴ But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.”

- The New Living Translation of verse 15 reads: "If God says something is acceptable, don't say it isn't."
- Peter was a devout Jew. So far he and the other apostles had pretty much only taken the gospel to Jews (Acts 11:19).
- Some in the first century church (the “circumcision group”) believed the only way for a Gentile to come to Christ was to become a Jew and keep Jewish laws and traditions.
- That wasn’t Jesus’ plan. Jesus died for everyone.

In John 10:16 (NLT) Jesus said:

¹⁶ I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

In 1 John 2:2 (NLT) the apostle John tells us:

² He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

- Suddenly Peter got it. And at that moment God was going to put it to a test. Just as Peter had these visions, the men Cornelius had sent arrived.

Acts 10:22–23 (ESV)

²² And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.” ²³ So he invited them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.

- Peter, went with these men to the home of Cornelius, the Gentile, Roman Centurion. There he shared the full gospel message.
- He told how Jesus had come as God’s Son, the promised Messiah. How he died and was raised from the dead. He closed by saying:

Acts 10:43–48 (ESV)

⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

The Holy Spirit Falls on the Gentiles

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

- That moment represented the beginning of the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles. That means people like you and me!
- To you and me today it might be hard to imagine why this was such a big deal for the Jews. **Why was this a huge change for the Jews?**
- John MacArthur gives some examples: See endnote below¹

- Is prejudice like this so hard to imagine? Our world has changed a lot in the last fifty years. When I was a little boy, Baptist churches in the south weren't very welcoming to people with skin of a different color, or hair that was long, they hadn't even heard about goths, "tats," and piercings.
- Today in our church it's not unusual or uncomfortable to see people in our congregation who don't look or speak like us. Thankfully, that's changed for the better.
- But, I want us to think about a different kind of person we might not feel comfortable sharing with about Christ.
- A person who has wounded us; a person who by all accounts is a bad person; a person we might, with good reason consider our enemy.

In Matthew 5:44–45 (ESV) Jesus said,
⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Many of us have heard the story of Elisabeth Elliott who was a Christian author and speaker. Her first husband, Jim Elliott, was killed in 1956 while attempting to make missionary contact with the Auca tribe in Ecuador. Elisabeth went back with her little girl and one of the other widows, and spent two years as a missionary to same the tribe members who killed their husbands. Talk about the grace of God!

That story might feel so exceptional you might admire it but not relate to it. Let me share Greg Laurie's story of reaching out to his mother's abusive, alcoholic ex-husband (<https://www.harvest.org/devotions-and-blogs/daily-devotions/2013-01-30> <https://www.harvest.org/devotions-and-blogs/daily-devotions/2011-07-15>)

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Salvation through Christ is for all people; not just those like us, or those that we like. Jesus died for everyone, even our enemies.
- As hard as it may be to imagine, he may be calling us to witness to someone who has hurt us deeply.
- Is there someone like that in your mind right now?

- Is there anyone so repulsive to you (based on race; culture; their bad behavior) that you would say: *“Somebody else will have to witness to them; I just can’t do it?”*
- What if someone had not shared the gospel with YOU because of their prejudice?
- Your teacher himself is convicted by this text. I would confess there’s someone on my prayer list like this. Someone I’m fairly sure doesn’t know Christ. Someone hard for me to love, much less to witness to. Is God calling me to be the one to share the gospel? I’m praying about that.
- This week when you confront someone who is absolutely unlovable and unappealing to you, remind yourself of the words of Peter: “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism.” (Acts 10:34) “If God says something (or someone) is acceptable, don't say it isn't (they aren't.)” (Acts 10:15)
- Here’s the hard truth, one day God may point to that person we disliked and hold us accountable with the question: *“What was stopping you from sharing the gospel with them?”*

¹ A strict Jew wouldn't allow himself to be a guest in a Gentile house, neither would he invite one to be a guest in his own home. A scribal law said that the dwelling places of Gentiles were unclean.

The dirt from a Gentile country was also considered unclean. If anyone happened to track some Gentile dirt into Israel, the dirt remained defiled; it never mingled with Israel's soil; it just continually defiled the dirt of Israel. Consequently, whenever travelers left a Gentile country, they would always shake the dust off their feet, so they wouldn't bring Gentile pollution into Israel. When Jesus sent out the seventy to preach the gospel, He told them that if anyone didn't hear their words, they were to shake the dust off their feet ([Mt. 10:14](#)). In other words, they were to treat him as a Gentile.

The Jews viewed Gentiles as unclean, and that had great ramifications. For example, milk that was drawn from a cow by Gentile hands was not allowed to be consumed by Jews. Bread and oil prepared by a Gentile could be sold to a stranger, but could never be used by a Jew. No Jew would ever eat with a Gentile. If a Gentile was ever invited to a Jewish house, he couldn't be left in the room lest he defile all the food in the room. If cooking utensils were bought from a Gentile, they had to be purified by fire and water.

<http://www.gty.org/resources/study-guides/40-5122/the-salvation-of-the-gentiles-part-3>