

Including
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Acts 10:34-48

Opening: What do churches, families, bars, and street gangs have in common? (All contain sinners, hopefully in the church most are saved sinners ☺). What else?

Human beings have a natural need for belonging – feeling included. Why is that? How can those three very different groupings of people provide that sense of belonging? What is the unique opportunity the church has for people wanting to belong?

Our world offers many places that can fill that need for belonging; some good, some not so good. The church is the only place that can offer a place to belong now and for all of eternity thanks to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. His gift of salvation is available to anyone regardless of race, creed, color, or background (Gal.3:28). Christ died for every sinner and God shows no favoritism (Rom. 2:11). That's the good news of the gospel!

The point: The old hymn says, *"There's room at the cross for YOU."* Followers of Christ should be humming that line in our heads whenever we encounter anyone who doesn't know Him regardless of whether they look, act, or think like we do.

God shows no favoritism, but unfortunately His church hasn't always practiced that truth. That was the case with the Jewish religious establishment in the first century. In Acts chapter 10, Luke shifts our focus to the two main characters in this drama. A God-fearing Roman military man and the passionate and complex Apostle Peter. Here's a little context before the text.

- In the seaside city of Caesarea lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius.
- Despite his background, he was moral, generous, and devout. He prayed to God more regularly than some Christians do! He loved God but didn't know Jesus.
- One afternoon in prayer Cornelius encountered a vision of an angel of God.
- The message: *"God appreciates your devotion, but He wants a relationship."*
- The instructions: Send some men to Joppa to bring back a man named Peter.
- Like any good soldier, Cornelius took action sending three men to find Peter.
- Meanwhile, in Joppa, Peter was doing some praying himself about noontime.
- Hunger overtook Peter. As lunch was being prepared God put him into a trance.
- A bizarre vision appeared: Picture a bed sheet being let down from the sky and in the sheet were all sorts of "animals, reptiles, and birds."
- A voice said, *"Get up, Peter; kill and eat them."* Peter refused, *"No, I have never eaten anything our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean."*
- Verse 15 is important: *"Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean."*
- Because Peter was a hard-headed former fisherman this happened three times.
- Peter wondered what it all meant. Just then God would answer that question.
- There was a knock on the door. It was the three men sent by Cornelius.

- The Holy Spirit said to Peter, *“It’s okay, I sent them.”* So, Peter invited them in.
- They described Cornelius, his vision, and God’s instructions for Peter to come.
- It was late so Peter invited the three Gentiles to stay the night. (A big deal!)
- The next day they traveled to Caesarea to the home of Cornelius.
- The large house was filled with family and friends; an eager congregation.
- Peter didn’t mince words: *“...[I]t is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean.”⁴*
- Boom! That was a major shift in Peter’s thinking and that of the Jewish followers of Christ. It was so major that later in chapter eleven Peter would be challenged.
- Peter asked, *“What can I do for you?”* Cornelius said, *“Give us God’s message!”*

(ESV) — 34 So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, **35** but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. **36** As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), **37** you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: **38** how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. **39** And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, **40** but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, **41** not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. **42** And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. **43** To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

- Let’s pause and analyze Peter’s textbook presentation of the gospel.
- The Headline (Breaking News): In verse 36 Peter says Jesus is “Lord of all.”
- God shows no partiality. Christ died for EVERYONE.
- The opportunity: Anyone of any nation can be saved if they fear God.
- The good news: Who Jesus is, why He died, how He rose.
- That Jesus is King and Judge of all people and He offers forgiveness of sin.
- It was a classic sermon, but Peter didn’t get to finish! God took over!

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.

- Why do you think God interrupted in this dramatic way? Why was this amazing?

- Just as He did at Pentecost, God dramatically displayed confirmation for Peter and his Jewish associates that God was giving His Spirit to the Gentiles.
- We're not going to linger on the topic of supernaturally speaking in tongues.
- I like what Warren Wiersbe said, *"This does not suggest that every new believer gives evidence of salvation by speaking in tongues, though every true believer will certainly use his or her tongue to glorify God (Rom. 10:9–10)."*ⁱⁱ
- The Jewish people were undergoing a major cultural shift:
 - First big shift: Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah!
 - Instead of a conquering warrior He was crucified, died, and resurrected.
 - He ascended to Heaven leaving His followers to share His good news.
 - Now, the latest shift: The Messiah didn't just come for the Jews only – He came and died to forgive the sins of ALL PEOPLE. Wow!
- Caesarea was the first city to have Gentile Christians and a non-Jewish church.ⁱⁱⁱ
- This was a major cultural shift for the Jewish people, but not a new concept.
- When we study the Old Testament, we see that God always planned to bring salvation to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Genesis 12:3 (ESV) — 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Emphasis mine)

Isaiah 49:6 (ESV) — 6 [Speaking of the coming Messiah] "...I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Emphasis mine)

Joel 2:28 (ESV) — 28 "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. (Emphasis mine)

- Then in the New Testament, Jesus left us with this instruction:

Matthew 28:19 (ESV) — 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:28 (ESV) — 28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- Scripture declares that Christ died for everyone regardless of race, nationality, or background. As we said, people need a place to belong, and the church is the ultimate place to belong for all eternity. When we trust Christ we are in His family.
- Why is this encouraging for someone who might feel intimidated by the church?
- How can we do our part to make visitors to our church feel welcome?
- How is this a lesson for those of us who have found our place in the church?
- How is what God taught Peter also a lesson for us and our biases about people?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- In summary: Christ died for all sinners and God shows no favoritism.
- Unfortunately, His church hasn't always acted that way sometimes even today.
- In James chapter two, the half-brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem church warned Christ-followers about showing favoritism:
 - "...[H]ow can you claim to have faith in...Christ if you favor some people over others?"^{iv}

- He gave the illustration of a rich person and a poor person showing up for church. The rich person gets a prime seat. To the poor person they say, “Sit on the floor over there out of the way.”
- James wrote: “[I]t is good [to say you] “Love your neighbor as yourself.”⁹ But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin.”^v
- Illustration: “Is this group uptight?” “Christians behaving badly.”
- Sadly, some church members might sing, “There’s room at the cross for you – just not in MY PEW!” Let’s don’t be THOSE church members!
- As we encounter those who don’t yet know Christ, especially those who are different from us, let’s be thinking in our hearts: “There’s room at the cross for you. Come sit by me because Jesus died for everyone. No favorites here!”

ⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Ac 10:28). Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 447). Victor Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tyndale. NKJV Life Application Study Bible, Second Edition . Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

^{iv} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Jas 2:1). Tyndale House Publishers.

^v Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Jas 2:8–9). Tyndale House Publishers.