

What God Has Cleansed, You Shall Not Call Common

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The video version is available at: <https://youtu.be/fujP7s-oQbg>

The scripture reading is Acts 9:32-11:18

The Jewish believers in Yeshua, called followers of the Way, continued to grow and flourish after Paul turned from persecution of the assembly to becoming one of its staunchest proponents. In the ten years since Yeshua's death and resurrection, the message of Yeshua as the Messiah spread throughout all of Judea, Galilee and Samaria. Peter, the acknowledged leader of the Way, traveled extensively throughout the region sharing the good news of Messiah, encouraging the believers, and teaching them all that Yeshua had taught him.

Acts 9:32 KJV 32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

Luke records the events of this visit to the cities of Lydda, Joppa and Caesarea in the coastal region of Israel. Luke describes how the power of the Holy Spirit was displayed through Peter before relating the account of how the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles.

Luke's phrasing indicates that the events at Lydda were typical occurrences when Peter visited a city. Peter immediately found a man who needed healing.

Acts 9:33-35 NKJV 33 There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. 34 And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately. 35 So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

The healing of Aeneas, like the healing of the lame man at the temple, opened the door for Peter to share the good news of the gospel. The Jews in Lydda and the region around Lydda called Sharon heard the good news and embraced Yeshua. Peter was clear that he wasn't the one who healed Aeneas; it was Yeshua the Messiah who healed him!

Word of Peter's presence in Lydda spread throughout the region including to the nearby city of Joppa. When a beloved member of the Joppa assembly got sick and died, the disciples in Joppa immediately sent for Peter!

Acts 9:37-38 NKJV 37 But it happened in those days that she (*Tabitha*) became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them.

It seems clear that the disciples expected Peter to be able to raise Tabitha from the dead! They beseeched Peter to come quickly! If they didn't think he could do anything for Tabitha, there would be no reason for Peter to travel quickly to Joppa. Joppa was about 11 miles up the coast from Lydda. Traveling quickly, Peter could have arrived that same day. The mourners showed Peter all that Tabitha had done for widows in the community. Peter didn't linger over the displays of affection; he went right to work!

Acts 9:40 NKJV 40 But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.

Like in Lydda, word of this miracle quickly spread and many people believed in Yeshua as Lord and Messiah! As a result, Peter stayed to teach and guide the community. He stayed with a tanner named Simon.

Acts 9:43 NKJV 43 So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

Why does Luke include this seemingly irrelevant information? A tanner is one who works with animal skins preparing them to be used as leather goods and garments. Tanning is a process that just plain stinks all the time! Most cities required that tanning be done outside the city limits. First Fruits of Zion in Chronicles of the Apostles explain:

Tanners were notorious for the odor of their occupation. The smell of carcass and decay always hovered heavily around a tanner's home....Jewish law did not allow a man to become a tanner without his neighbors' permission.ⁱ

Perhaps Peter saw Simon as the most worthy member of the community following Yeshua words in Matthew 10:11

Matthew 10:11 NKJV 11 "Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out.

Perhaps Peter saw it as a refuge from the people where he could go without being followed. Perhaps it was an expression of his own humility and that those many counted as unworthy were worthy in God's eyes. It certainly serves as a contrast to Caesarea, the next place that Peter would visit!

Herod the Great built the city of Caesarea, its harbor, and a great palace perched over the sea as a tribute to Caesar Augustus and Rome. It was all about ostentatious wealth and flaunting Roman culture! A large population of wealthy Jews lived side by side with a Gentile population which looked down with contempt on Jewish culture and religious practices.

Caesarea was about thirty miles up the coast from Joppa. This is the city that Philip, one of the seven deacons, settled in after fleeing Jerusalem. A God-fearing centurion named Cornelius was stationed in Caesarea.

Acts 10:1-2 NKJV 1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

Unlike the greater Gentile population, Cornelius respected and adopted the worship of the God of the Jews. He gave generously to the Jews who were in need. One day while Cornelius was at prayer at the time of the afternoon prayers, an angel appeared to Cornelius in a vision

Acts 10:3-4 NKJV 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" 4 And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.

As a Gentile, Cornelius could not go into the temple to offer sacrifices to God. However, the angel told Cornelius that his acts of charity were accepted as a sacrifice to God. The prophet Micah writes that before an animal sacrifice is acceptable to God, a man's heart and actions must be right before God.

Micah 6:7-8 NKJV 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

Cornelius' prayers and acts of charity were received by God as acceptable and pleasing sacrifices! The angel gave Cornelius instructions to send for Peter who would instruct him in what he must do. Cornelius sent men to ask Peter to come to Cornelius.

As Cornelius' men were on the way, God was preparing Peter for this invitation from a Gentile. As we examine the habits of the followers of the Way, we see that they practiced an intense form of Judaism. Those living in Jerusalem were in the habit of going to the temple every day. In order to enter the temple, a person had to be ritually clean. This meant that they had to abstain from anything that would make them unclean. The biggest challenge would be to avoid touching anything or anyone who had come into contact with a dead body. Many of the Gentile practices involved keeping the bones of their dead family members inside the house. If a Jew went into the house, they would automatically become unclean. Also, touching someone who lived in the house would make them unclean. As a result of these and other practices, Gentiles as a whole were considered unclean. For the followers of the Way, this would mean a general avoidance of Gentiles; not due to prejudice but because they wanted to be as close to God as they could! It is this perception of Gentile uncleanness that God had to address with Peter.

Acts 10:9-16 NKJV 9 The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. 10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance 11 and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." 15 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

The animals that Peter saw in the vision were all animals that God had designated as unclean.

Leviticus 11:43-44a NKJV 43 'You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creeps; nor shall you make yourselves unclean with them, lest you be defiled by them. 44 'For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy.

Peter would definitely not have eaten anything unclean. However, what is Peter referring to when he says he hasn't eaten anything common? The word "common" is from the Greek word "koinos," number 2839 meaning common as in shared by all, unholy or ceremonially profane. First Fruits of Zion in [Chronicles of the Apostles](#) explain about common or unholy food:

"Food and meat that fall into this category are not unclean or forbidden, but they cannot be used for sacred purposes. They may be eaten by people who are not ritually pure... Like the Pharisees, Simon Peter and the other Jerusalem disciples tried to maintain a state of ritual purity because they congregated daily in the temple."ⁱⁱ

Peter wasn't sure what this vision meant! Surely God wasn't changing His Torah! Yeshua Himself had stated that He came to uphold the Torah!

Matthew 5:17 NKJV 17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

As Peter was pondering this vision, Cornelius' men arrived at the house and asked for him.

Acts 10:19-20 NKJV 19 While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. 20 "Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

Peter went down to greet the men to discover that they were emissaries of a Gentile! Although Cornelius was a God-fearer, he and his household were all Gentiles. Peter was to go with these men whom God had assured him were sent by Him! Peter was beginning to understand the vision. He and six brothers from Joppa traveled to Caesarea to meet Cornelius. Peter willingly entered the home of a Gentile!

Acts 10:27-29 NKJV 27 And as he (*Peter*) talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. 28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. 29 "Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"

Peter understood the vision to mean that he wasn't to call any man common or unclean. The specific words Peter heard in the vision were "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." The word cleansed is "Katharizo," #2511 in Strong's Greek Concordance meaning to clean. It used in connection with making something or someone clean that had come into contact with something unclean. For example, when Yeshua healed the lepers, He, also, made them clean. Anyone who is clean can eat of food that has been designated for sacrificial purposes. For example, they could participate in the feast of a peace or thanks sacrifice to God which is a shared meal between God, the one bringing the offering and all his friends! Those whom God had cleansed must not be considered as being unworthy of being used for sacred purposes. There is a cleanliness that God imparts that is separate from temple worship. When Cornelius shared the vision that he had received from God, Peter then understood this concept in the vision he had received.

Acts 10:34-35 NKJV 34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

Peter, then, began to explain about Yeshua the Messiah. He carried out the task of witnessing that Yeshua was sent by God, anointed by the Holy Spirit, and how Yeshua was crucified and rose from the dead. Peter explained his commission.

Acts 10:42-43 NKJV 42 "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. 43 "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

As confirmation of Peter's testimony and understanding of the visions both he and Cornelius had received, the Holy Spirit immediately fell on Cornelius and his entire household.

Acts 10:44-46a NKJV 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. 45 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. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.

This is the third massive outpouring of the Holy Spirit which began with the one hundred twenty disciples at Shavuot, continued with the Samaritan believers in Samaria, and culminated with Cornelius' household. The gospel message had touched each of the groups Yeshua commanded his disciples to reach.

Acts 1:8 NKJV 8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The six men from Joppa were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to a household full of Gentiles! The usual prerequisites, at least in the minds of the disciples, would have been that the Gentiles converted to Judaism first and were baptized entering fully into the nation of Israel. They would, then, bring their first offering to God to the temple. The instructions for those seeking to be Yeshua's disciple were similar. The new disciple was to repent and turn back to Torah, and then be baptized. After this, the gift of the Holy Spirit would be given and received.

Acts 2:38 NKJV 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Everything was out of order here! Cornelius and his household had not converted to Judaism; they hadn't been baptized into the children of Israel! However, the Holy Spirit indicated that God had accepted them as Gentiles. As God-fearers, they would have followed all the tenets of the Torah holding back only that of being circumcised. They received the message of the remission of their sins through Yeshua the Messiah just like the Jews did. Peter advocated that they participate in the next step of baptism.

Acts 10:47-48 NKJV 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

Talk about a major paradigm shift! This shift was not easily accepted among the other leaders of the Way. Peter was immediately confronted with his actions when he returned to Jerusalem.

Acts 11:1-3 NKJV 1 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, 3 saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

It seems like the major objection to Peter's actions was that he went into Cornelius' house and ate with those residing in the house. The issue of kosher food was not the point; as God-fearers Cornelius would have had only kosher food in the house. The issue was the current Pharisaic law that stated that Jews were not to go into the home of a Gentile, nor were they to eat with them. It was an objection about failing to maintain ritual purity and of maintaining separation between Jew and Gentile.

Peter carefully explained his actions beginning with the vision he saw concluding with the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles even as he spoke.

Acts 11:15-17 NKJV 15 "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. 16 "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 "If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"

At the conclusion of Peter's words, the gathered disciples were speechless. They momentarily did not know how to respond. After a time of reflection, they allowed their lifelong view of Gentiles to change. They allowed their understanding of who could receive salvation to broaden.

Acts 11:18 NKJV 18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

In the first ten years after Yeshua's resurrection, the gospel message of salvation went out to the Jews and the Samaritans. It spread with power followed by signs, wonders and miracles including raising the dead. It was a firmly established sect of Judaism. With the events at Cornelius' house, everything would begin to change. God was bringing about the fulfilment of His plan for the children of Israel to be priests to the nations. However, resistance to Gentile inclusion would anger both the traditional Jew and those who followed the Way. How would God bring these two disparate groups together to worship Him? This struggle continues today and won't be fully resolved until Yeshua's return.

Study Questions:

1. What does the relating of Peter's journeys to Lydda and Joppa reveal about Peter and the early believers?
2. Give examples from the Bible where God says that prayers and acts of charity are acceptable sacrifices. How does this relate to the concept of "cleanliness that God imparts separate from temple worship?"
3. What was the intense form of Judaism that the early believers followed? How did Peter's vision modify these practices and force a change in their concept of "ritual purity?"
4. Why were the leaders in Jerusalem focused on Peter going into Cornelius' house and eating with the members of his household? How does Paul address this issue in Ephesians 2?
5. Why was this incident between Peter and Cornelius necessary to get the followers of the Way on the path to fulfilling the mandate for the Children of Israel to be priests to the nations?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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ⁱ Chronicles of the Apostles. First Fruits of Zion. ©2011, 2016 D. T. Lancaster. Page 238.

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