

Holy Spirit

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

Focal Verses • ACTS 10:34-47

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives; VALUE the leadership of Peter in the early church and his relationship with Christ; and SPREAD the Good News that Christ is for all who want to know Him.

In Focus

One evening, Cheryl and Denise co-hosted the career adult Bible study group at their apartment complex to watch Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*. Denise's son Trey was home from college for the weekend and asked if he could join them with his teammate Todd. Trey had been trying to witness to Todd and encouraging him to place his trust in Jesus Christ. Todd would be the only white guy there, but Trey felt led by the Holy Spirit to invite Todd to see the movie. It turns out Todd likes movies, so it seemed a good way to spark a spiritual conversation with him.

After the movie, the group ordered pizza to discuss its emotional and spiritual impact. Todd had appreciated the movie's cinematography but raised a question about the casting. "I wonder if it would have been as successful if Mel Gibson had cast the role of Jesus more accurately, as a brown-skinned Jewish Israeli instead of a white guy. What do you think?"

Trey chose his words carefully as he answered the question. "No doubt, in our world, it would have made a difference in Mel Gibson's bank account." Everyone laughed. "But personally," Trey continued, "I have a problem with any portrayal of deity. Scripture states that we are not to create a graven image of God because images engender idolatry. They can even divide and bring confusion."

Nikki interjected and said, "God is not a respecter of persons. He created man and woman in His own image and yet expresses His image in a multitude of colors! Insisting that Jesus look a certain way in the past has done a lot of damage by limiting and distorting the message of Christ." The group shook their heads in agreement. "But come on now," Trey joked, "we all know neither Jesus, nor Adam and Eve, came from the Garden of Sweden."

Does culture constrain you, or can you witness to someone regardless of race or ethnicity? How can you partner with the Holy Spirit to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others?

Keep in Mind

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts 10:34-35, KJV)



Focal Verses

KJV Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

The People, Places, and Times

Cornelius. Cornelius was the first Gentile cited in Scripture to hear the Gospel, receive salvation, and influence many to believe. Cornelius adhered to Jewish customs but was a Roman centurion, a high-ranking army official. Evidence of his piety was in the conversion of his whole household, giving alms to the poor, and praying to God in accordance with the Jewish ritual. However, because he was not a circumcised Jew, he could not worship in the inner sanctuary of the Jewish synagogue. He worshiped God on the fringes of his religious culture, but he still worshiped God, and God heard his prayers (v. 4).

Peter's Vision. In a vision at a time of fasting and prayer, the Lord spoke to Peter. After showing Peter animals given for food of all

species, God commands Peter to rise, kill, and eat. However, as a devout Jew, Peter refuses to eat that which his culture has deemed common and unclean. The Lord rebukes Peter, declaring that which God calls clean is no longer subject to being called unclean. Peter did not immediately understand the meaning of the vision; but as he thought about it more, the Spirit of the Lord gave him revelation.

Background

God used Cornelius to minister to Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. Peter was surrounded by the cultural divisions between the Jews and Gentiles. Although he had heard Jesus preach salvation to all nations, Peter struggled to think outside the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion. The

contrast between Jew and Gentile was great and buttressed by many barriers—culture, language, prejudicial hatred, and geography.

Through a vision and instructions to join Cornelius’s entourage, the Lord helps Peter understand that His gift of salvation is available to the Jews, the Greeks, and all who believe. From this revelation, Peter vows never again to call any man common, unclean, or unworthy of the Gospel.

Why are all people—Jew, Gentile, male, female, any race—equal before God?

At-A-Glance

1. The Witnesses (Acts 10:34–39)
2. The Facts (vv. 40–43)
3. The Baptisms (vv. 44–48)

In Depth

1. The Witnesses (Acts 10:34–39)

Peter declares that God shows no partiality but accepts all people who revere Him and do what is right (vv. 34–35). The same Peter who considered non-Jews, and especially Greco-Romans, as unclean now stands preaching the Gospel to a Greco-Roman congregation. He confesses the truth that God does not play cultural favorites, but that He favors people from any nation who reverence Him in righteousness.

Peter preaches the Good News of Christ to the people gathered with Cornelius (vv. 36–39). He tells them of the Gospel, John’s water baptism, Jesus’ anointing of the Holy Spirit and of the good works, healings, and crucifixion which would follow.

2. The Facts (vv. 40–43)

But praise God, the crucifixion is not the end of the story. Peter affirms himself as an eyewitness to the truth that Jesus came to life

again. Following Christ’s command, he preaches that Jesus “was ordained of God to be the Judge” (v. 42). The Good News does not consist of judgment only, though. Peter further affirms that Jesus—in fulfillment of prophecy—takes away the sin of those who believe Him, who submit to His leadership. The simple message, based on then recent historical facts, must have immediately moved the hearers to belief, because the next thing that happens is a sign of such.

How would you present a simple Gospel message to someone who had not heard it before?

3. The Baptisms (vv. 44–48)

While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit came upon the people who heard him (v. 44). As the Word was preached, the hearers believed and were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Jewish believers were amazed as they watched the Gentiles speak in tongues and worship God (vv. 45–46). This evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the Gentiles could not be denied.

The Jewish believers had questioned the possibility of regarding the Gentiles as full members of the Christian church—namely, including them in the ceremony of baptism. Peter settles the questions, saying that any who received baptism in the Holy Spirit could not be denied the baptism by water. The baptism in the Spirit was indicative of an inward conversion; the baptism by water was indicative of an outward inclusion into the family of God. Therefore, Peter commanded that Cornelius, his family, and his friends—the Gentile converts—be baptized with water in the name of Jesus as they had been baptized by the Holy Spirit.

Recall and share the story of your own baptism. Was it joyous? Bittersweet? Solemn?

Search the Scriptures

1. What happened as the people listened to Peter preach? (vv. 44–45)

2. After the Gentiles were baptized in the Holy Spirit, evidenced with speaking in tongues and magnifying God, what question arose among the believers? (vv. 46–47)

Discuss the Meaning

Divisions in the Church have led to the formation of new denominations, or worse, schisms within the professing Body of Christ that dilute our unified testimony and preaching of the Gospel. The circumcised Jewish believers questioned the extension of water baptism to Gentile believers who had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. What do you believe are the purposes of the water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit? What does your church or denomination practice regarding them both?

Liberating Lesson

Like trees in a forest, Christians need to support one another. When we find Christians of dissimilar races, cultures, classes, genders, callings, and expressions of worship, we should become like a forest of trees and link up to nourish one another in the faith. Through our inclusion of all believers, the Church is fortified and God is glorified. Instead of excluding Christians who do not look like us or worship like us, we must extend our roots of righteousness to give what we have and get what we need to grow as the church until Christ returns.

Application for Activation

When was the last time you or your church had worship or fellowship with another body of Christian believers that you know has doctrinal differences? A good place to begin to know others in the body of Christ is through

neighborly relationships. If someone in your family, workplace, or neighborhood belongs to a different church or denomination, ask them if you might accompany them to a fellowship or worship service, and extend a reciprocal invitation. Resist the temptation to rank or condemn the various styles of expressions of worship; but rather, seek to experience God through the eyes of another.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*. Vols. 1-6. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009.
- Strong, James. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.
- Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: American Book Company, 1889.

Say It Correctly

Cornelius. core-NEE-lee-us.
Centurion. sin-TUR-ee-on.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 246

Mark 10:1-40
Psalm 102:12-22

DAY 247

Mark 10:41-11:33
Psalm 102:23-28

DAY 248

Mark 12:1-44
Psalm 103:1-6

DAY 249

Mark 13:1-37
Psalm 103:7-18

DAY 250

Mark 14:1-42
Psalm 103:19-22

DAY 251

Mark 14:43-72
Psalm 104:1-9

DAY 252

Mark 15:1-47
Psalm 104:10-18

Notes
