

Acts 10:28-29

28 and he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"

The story takes place in Caesarea, a Gentile city north of Jerusalem. There was a man named Cornelius who was a Roman Centurion which is an officer in charge of approximately 100 men. To put that into perspective it would be roughly equivalent to an Army captain in command of a company. The story takes place during the conversion of Cornelius. It is a very significant event as it opens up the church to the Gentiles. It is not about Cornelius or Peter; it is about God and how God ordaining Gentiles into church.

Cornelius was a religious man; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. He had a vision where an angel of God connected him to Peter. Meanwhile, Peter was praying and also has a vision that connected him to Cornelius. The simultaneous visions and instructions confirm each other and demonstrate that this is God's will. It is God's will to open up the church to the Gentiles. It is God's initiative and God's direction. Peter and some believers from Joppa went to Cornelius in Caesarea who called together some of his friends and relatives and the Jews and the Gentiles then gathered together in an assembly.

The Scripture takes place when Peter addresses the assembly. In his address to the assembly he reminds them that the law discriminates. At the time, Peter violates this law by associating with Gentiles. He does so because the human made law violates the will of God. This is not the kind of law that is enforced and you get fined or arrested, it is just something which is not done. It is considered a law because it is a rule that they lived by.

The lesson is in regards to how the Scripture prohibits judging others as being either worthy or unworthy. I am going to repeat that because it is a frequent violation that is committed from the self righteous within contemporary society. The Scripture prohibits judging others as worthy or unworthy. God is impartial - God shows no partiality - no preferential treatment. The story that Peter tells is a summary of the Good News. Jesus was anointed by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, raised from death, and is the only one that is specifically allowed to judge.

The Good News is spread through witnesses. Cornelius and his gentile friends and family were attracted to Jesus due to the apostolic witness. God's story is of Jewish origin but it is not local or national; it has a universal appeal. Jesus is Lord of all. God accepts all on equal terms. We are not only accepted by God but we are to also accept each other just like God accepts us. Not accepting others as they are is a sin. The fences that we build are built for separation which comes from an attitude of superiority and entitlement.

This is the sin. I emphasize the words *the sin* because it is so hard for people to get this. The sin is the same sin over and over again that repeats in the Bible as hundreds of different sins. There is basically just one sin. All sin is based on one founding principal, and that is transgressing from the will of God. The sin is humans doing their own thing vs. God's thing. Whenever a human goes against the will of God it is a sin.

The conflict repeatedly manifests in many different ways. The list of vices is a large list. However, every one of them is based on one basic principle - going against the will of God.

Take a moment and think about Jesus. The biggest challenge was not Satan, the Devil, and the forces of evil. Defeating demonic powers was easy for Jesus. The miracles show just how easy the triumph was. The biggest challenge that Jesus had to face was the self-righteously indignant institution. They viewed themselves as the ones that were righteous and that they were better than others. They not only viewed others as deficient but they did so in the name of God. Judging the righteousness, or lack of righteousness, of another is a sin. It is discrimination when the self-righteous reject others.

When I finished seminary, I thought about pursuing a doctorate degree. When I was getting my bachelor's degree I pursued courses in counseling and psychology. I enjoy the work of ministry more than I would have enjoyed the work of counseling but I enjoyed the study of counseling better than I enjoyed the study of theology. So, I thought about getting a doctorate in counseling. When I found out that Liberty had a doctorate in counseling I applied. During the application process I was alarmed at the admissions criteria. They originally rejected my application based on doctrine. This indicates that they were more interested in people that fit their type of doctrine than actual education. When I took out a lengthy explanation about living a new life of devotion and discipleship and replaced two paragraphs with the words "born again" they accepted my application. All I had to do was say "born again" without explaining what the concept actually means. In essence, I had to narrow down the language to fit dogmatic doctrine. I withdrew my application.

We are one in Christ. This means that God accepts all, Christ accepts all, and we are to accept all. To reject others is a sin. In Christ there is no judgment and discrimination. God shows no partiality; everyone who fears the Lord and does what is right is accepted and everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness. The gift of the Holy Spirit is poured out even on the Gentiles. We are all baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. We are one in Christ. When people take on the role of judging whether someone is worthy or unworthy, they take on the role that is specifically reserved for Jesus. We are to accept everyone as they are because we are one in Christ.