

# **OUR** *Guide* FOR USE IN *the Protestant Reformed Sunday School*

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## Lesson 68

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### *Gentiles Receive the Spirit*

#### **The Scripture Lesson** *Acts 10:19-48*

After receiving the vision of the clean and unclean animals, Peter must have just sat there on the housetop for a while, wondering what it could all mean. The voice had warned him not to call unclean what God had cleansed. He knew therefore that he must no longer think that some kinds of animals may not be used for food. But he was sure that there was a deeper meaning too. And he wondered what that could be.

As he was thinking about these things, the Holy Spirit told him that three men were at the door of the house, looking for him. Peter must arise, the Spirit said, and go with them, nothing doubting, for God had sent them. So Peter went down and found it just as the Spirit had said. The three men were from Caesarea, sent by Cornelius, a Roman centurion. They told him how God had commanded their master to send to Joppa for Peter.

As soon as Peter heard that, he began to understand what the meaning of his own vision was. For, had it not been for that vision, Peter would have thought that he ought not to go with these men, for it would mean that he would have to keep company with *Gentiles*. And that would be against Jewish laws. It must be therefore,

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Peter thought, that God was showing him that the difference between *Jew* and *Gentile* was gone, so he would not have to worry about going into the house of one who was uncircumcised.

So Peter invited the men to stay overnight, and then, the next morning, he and six other Christians from Joppa set out for Caesarea. When they arrived, Peter saw that Cornelius had called together his relatives and friends. He wanted to share with others the good thing that God promised to him. So there Peter was, standing before an audience of uncircumcised Gentiles, all eager to hear what God had to say to them.

“Of a truth,” Peter said, “I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.” The Jews had always thought that God had favored them because they were Jews. Peter could see now that that was not true. God receives all those who fear Him, whether they are Jew or Gentile.

Peter therefore preached to them about Jesus. These Gentiles *knew* about *God*; and they loved God. They had also heard some things about Jesus of Nazareth, but they had no idea what it all meant. So Peter explained to them that their very salvation depended on Jesus, for the forgiveness of their sins was possible only through Him.

Then something wonderful happened. While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon all

of the Gentiles gathered there, so that they began to speak in other languages about the wonderful works of God.

Peter and his companions did not before know how Gentiles were to be admitted to the church. Would they have to become Jews? Would they have to be circumcised? The answer, they now knew, was, No. For *God*, who alone could give the Spirit, had accepted them *just as they were*.

### ***The Gospel Goes Out to the Gentiles***

*Acts 11*

After baptizing Cornelius and his household, Peter was eager to return to Jerusalem. He knew that Jewish Christians everywhere would soon learn that he had gone into the house of a Gentile and had baptized those who were uncircumcised. He knew, too, that they would wonder how he could ever do that.

Peter could easily understand why they would wonder. After all, before he had received that vision in Joppa, and before the Spirit had told him to go with the men from Cornelius, he himself would not have thought of doing what he had just done. Peter was eager, therefore, to share with the Christians in Jerusalem what the Lord had taught him in Joppa and Caesarea.

So he went to Jerusalem. And when he got there he found that the brethren there already knew what he had done. And they immediately asked Peter to explain. Happy to do that, Peter told them everything, exactly as it had happened to him. He told them how he had received a vision in which he was told that God had cleansed what was before unclean. He told them how the Spirit commanded him to go with the men sent by Cornelius. He told them how Cornelius had received a vision telling him that Peter would show him the way of salvation. He told them how, when he had begun to preach, God Himself had given the Spirit to the Gentiles. The work was therefore not *Peter's*. It was from beginning to end *God's* work. "What was I, that I could withstand God?" Peter asked.

And the Christians in Jerusalem could see that he was right. They agreed, in other words,

that it was God's will, not only that the gospel be preached to Gentiles, but also that Gentile believers be admitted into the church without requiring that they first become Jews.

Soon afterwards that idea was put to the test in far-off Antioch. This city was outside of the land of the Jews, but there were many Jews living there nevertheless. And Christians fled to Antioch in order to escape persecution in Jerusalem. When they came to Antioch they told others about Jesus. At first they spoke only to Jews. But then some of the Christians decided to begin to preach to the Gentiles. When they did that, they found that the Lord blessed their work more than they could ever have hoped for. Gentiles by the hundreds believed and were added to the church.

When news of this new kind of work reached Jerusalem, the church there decided to send Barnabas to go and see what was happening. When Barnabas reached Antioch he could see right away that the grace of God was working powerfully through the preaching among the Gentiles. Barnabas was glad about that, and he wanted to help. When he saw how much work there was to be done, he decided to travel to Tarsus in order to find Saul. Saul returned with Barnabas, and the two of them worked together among the Gentiles in Antioch for a whole year.

It was in Antioch that the followers of Christ were first called "Christians." People outside the church gave them that nickname because they were always talking about *Christ*. That is a beautiful name — one that shows the connection of God's people with their Lord. Christians have kept it ever since.

### **MEMORY WORK**

#### *Group A*

Acts 10:34, 35 "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."

#### *Group B*

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

## ACTIVITIES

*This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.*

### DO YOU AGREE?

*If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.*

- \_\_\_ 1. Peter told Cornelius and his friends and relatives that he now knew that God is no respecter of persons.
- \_\_\_ 2. Peter preached Christ to Cornelius and his acquaintances, telling them that whosoever believeth in Him shall have remission of sins.
- \_\_\_ 3. While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon all those who heard his word.
- \_\_\_ 4. Peter's companions were astonished when the Spirit was given to these Gentiles because they had before thought that only natural-born Jews could be saved.
- \_\_\_ 5. Peter thought it best not to baptize Cornelius and his household until after conferring with his fellow apostles in Jerusalem.
- \_\_\_ 6. When Peter came to Jerusalem and was questioned about his having eaten with Gentiles, he was able to satisfy the people that he had done nothing but follow the leading of the Spirit.
- \_\_\_ 7. Christians who brought the gospel to Gentiles in Antioch of Syria were disappointed that so few people believed the preached Word.
- \_\_\_ 8. The church in Jerusalem decided to send Barnabas to evaluate the work being done in Antioch.
- \_\_\_ 9. When Barnabas arrived in Antioch he discovered that Saul was already working among the Gentiles in that city.
- \_\_\_ 10. It was in Antioch that members of the church first came to be called Christians.

### QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. Where was Peter when the three messengers from Cornelius arrived? What was he doing there?
2. What did the Holy Spirit tell Peter to do?
3. What did Cornelius do when he saw Peter? What did Peter tell him?
4. Who were gathered in the house of Cornelius to hear Peter preach? What was, for Peter, unusual about this kind of audience?
5. Looking at the audience, Peter said that he could tell that God was no "respecter of persons." Do you know what he meant by that? What was it that made the Old Testament Jews think that God *is* a respecter of persons?
6. What great, good news did Peter tell these Gentiles about Jesus?
7. What happened while Peter was still speaking? What important truth did Peter learn from that?
8. Why was Peter eager to return to Jerusalem?
9. How did Peter show to the Christians in Jerusalem that what occurred in Caesarea was not *his* work but *God's*? Did they believe him?
10. How did it happen that Christians were living in Antioch? What did some of these Christians do when they heard what Peter had done in Caesarea? What was the result of their preaching?
11. Why did Barnabas go to Antioch? Whom did he get to help with the work there?
12. How did believers get the name Christians?

## COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. After coming out of his trance, Peter was greatly perplexed concerning the meaning of the vision. He would take for granted, surely, that the Lord was teaching him, and through him the New Testament church, that the Old Testament laws about clean and unclean animals were now ended. But what else was involved? While Peter \_\_\_\_\_ on the vision, the \_\_\_\_\_ said to him, Behold, three men \_\_\_\_\_ thee. Arise and get thee \_\_\_\_\_ and go with them, \_\_\_\_\_ nothing, for \_\_\_\_\_ have sent them (Acts 10:19, 20).

2. Since this latest instruction followed immediately after his vision, Peter understood that the arrival of the three men had something to do with the command of the Lord that he not call common what God had cleansed. What the connection was he soon learned; for the men at the door informed him that they came on behalf of Cornelius the \_\_\_\_\_. Had it not been for his vision, Peter would have had serious doubts about whether he should go with the men to the house of a Gentile. But the Spirit said, "Go"; and the reason was that "God hath cleansed." So, Peter called them in and \_\_\_\_\_ them overnight, and on the morrow went with them. And certain \_\_\_\_\_ from Joppa \_\_\_\_\_ him (Acts 10:21-23). Why these brethren went with Peter we are not told, but the Lord was surely thus providing witnesses for something very important about to happen in Caesarea.

3. In anticipation of Peter's arrival, Cornelius called together his \_\_\_\_\_ and near \_\_\_\_\_ in order that they might, with him, hear the words of the apostle. And, when Peter arrived, Cornelius was so overwhelmed with admiration for this man of God, that he fell down at his \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ him. In so doing, he was showing to Peter a reverence that should be reserved for God alone. Peter therefore answered, "Stand \_\_\_\_\_; I myself also am a \_\_\_\_\_" (Acts 10:24-26).

4. Coming, then, to the assembly of Cornelius'

friends and relatives, Peter reminded them that it was an \_\_\_\_\_ thing for a man that is a \_\_\_\_\_ to keep \_\_\_\_\_ or come unto one of another \_\_\_\_\_. Peter hastened to add, however, that such distinction between Jew and Gentile, which had been made by God Himself, was now apparently ended; for God, said Peter, "hath \_\_\_\_\_ me that I should not call any man common or \_\_\_\_\_. Therefore came I unto you without \_\_\_\_\_." Peter thus understood that his vision had to do not only with *animals* but also with *men* (Acts 10:27-29).

5. When Peter asked Cornelius "for what \_\_\_\_\_ ye have sent for me," the centurion briefly recounted the vision that he had had from the Lord, and concluded, "Therefore are we all here \_\_\_\_\_ before God, to hear all things that are \_\_\_\_\_ thee of \_\_\_\_\_" (Acts 10:29-33).

6. "Of a \_\_\_\_\_," Peter began, "I \_\_\_\_\_ that God is no \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_." God had indeed, throughout much of the old dispensation, made the Jews His own peculiar possession. But, contrary to what the Jews had come to believe, God's choice was not based on anything *in the Jews*. Were one to insist that Gentiles must *become Jews* in order to be saved, he would be making God a "respector of persons." Peter was, from events, perceiving that "in every \_\_\_\_\_ he that \_\_\_\_\_ him, and worketh \_\_\_\_\_, is \_\_\_\_\_ with him." Not nationality, therefore, or circumcision, but *godliness* makes a man acceptable to God (Acts 10:34, 35).

7. Peter then went on to preach Christ to the people in Cornelius' house. It was, Peter concluded, to Christ that all the \_\_\_\_\_ gave witness, that through His name \_\_\_\_\_ believeth in Him shall receive \_\_\_\_\_ of sins. It was while Peter spoke these words that the \_\_\_\_\_ fell on \_\_\_\_\_ them that heard the word (Acts 10:36-44).

8. The brethren from Joppa who had accompa-

nied Peter were men “of the circumcision” — that is, they believed that circumcision was necessary for Gentile converts. These men, we read, were \_\_\_\_\_ that on the Gentiles also (that is, on *uncircumcised* Gentiles) was poured out the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ God. There could be no doubt then to what extent God had removed the distinction between Jew and Gentile. Circumcision was not necessary for admittance into the church of Christ. “Can anyone,” asked Peter, “\_\_\_\_\_ water, that these should not be \_\_\_\_\_, which have received the \_\_\_\_\_ as well as we?” (Acts 10:45-48).

9. It did not take long for news of this revolutionary development to reach the ears of the apostles and \_\_\_\_\_ that were in Judea. When therefore Peter came up to \_\_\_\_\_, they that were of the circumcision \_\_\_\_\_ with him, saying, “Thou wentest in to men \_\_\_\_\_ and didst \_\_\_\_\_ with them” (Acts 11:1-3).

10. Apparently those who challenged Peter in Jerusalem had heard that he had gone to the house of Cornelius, but had not yet been shown how Peter was led by the Spirit to do exactly as he had done. Peter therefore simply \_\_\_\_\_ the matter from the \_\_\_\_\_. He let the facts speak for themselves. That the ceremonial distinction between clean and unclean was abolished by God was clear from Peter’s vision. And that this applied also to the distinction between Jew and Gentile was clear from God’s having given His Spirit to the uncircumcised Gentiles in Cornelius’ house. To Peter, this was decisive. He therefore concluded by saying, “Forasmuch then as \_\_\_\_\_ gave them the \_\_\_\_\_ gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was \_\_\_\_\_, that I could \_\_\_\_\_ God?” (Acts 11:4-17).

11. And Peter’s hearers were persuaded. When they heard these things, they \_\_\_\_\_ their peace, and \_\_\_\_\_ God, saying, Then

hath God also to the \_\_\_\_\_ granted \_\_\_\_\_ unto life (Acts 11:18).

12. Thus was the way opened to the work of evangelizing Gentiles. Evidence of that was seen first in Antioch. The gospel had come to this city earlier by those who were \_\_\_\_\_ abroad upon the \_\_\_\_\_ that arose about Stephen. But the Word had been preached at that time to \_\_\_\_\_ but unto the \_\_\_\_\_ only. Now, after the church in Jerusalem had come to recognize the place of uncircumcised Gentiles in the church of Christ, there were Jews in Antioch who began to speak unto the \_\_\_\_\_, preaching the \_\_\_\_\_. They preached, that is, to pagan Greeks, and found that the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord was \_\_\_\_\_ them, so that a \_\_\_\_\_ number believed and \_\_\_\_\_ unto the Lord. Such fruit was of course further proof that God Himself had opened the door of the church to Gentiles (Acts 11:19-21).

13. Then \_\_\_\_\_ of these things (the conversion of Gentiles in Antioch) came to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the church which was in \_\_\_\_\_. Considering it to be appropriate for a representative of the mother church to evaluate the work, the church in Jerusalem sent forth \_\_\_\_\_, that he should go as far as \_\_\_\_\_ (Acts 11:22).

14. Barnabas not only decided to remain for awhile in Antioch, but, because of the amount of work to be done, recognized the need for additional help. He therefore went personally to \_\_\_\_\_ for to seek \_\_\_\_\_; and when he had found him, he brought him to \_\_\_\_\_. The two of them, then, labored as co-pastors in the church in Antioch for a whole \_\_\_\_\_ (Acts 11:23-26).

15. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called \_\_\_\_\_. It was in Antioch, too, that a prophet by the name of \_\_\_\_\_ stood up and signified by the \_\_\_\_\_ that there would soon be a great \_\_\_\_\_

throughout all the land. The church in Antioch therefore set up a kind of relief-fund so they could help the brethren who dwelt in \_\_\_\_\_, where the effects of the famine would evidently be more grievous. This gift they sent to the \_\_\_\_\_ of Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and \_\_\_\_\_ (Acts 11:26-30).

### QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. According to Acts 10:17 Peter's vision on the housetop left him quite perplexed. Surely he must have understood that the Lord was teaching him that the distinction between clean and unclean animals was abolished. What, then, did he *not* understand? At what point in the story, would you say, did it finally become clear to him exactly what the Lord had meant by His command, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat"?
2. The men who were sent by Cornelius began by telling Peter that this centurion was "of good report among all the nation of the Jews" (Acts 10:22). Why did they think it important to tell Peter that?
3. Read Acts 11:2, 3, 4, and 12. From those verses can you tell why it was later important for Peter that "certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him" (Acts 10:23) to the house of Cornelius?
4. Read Acts 10:25. To "worship" someone can mean to give that person divine honor. However, Cornelius did not at all see Peter as some kind of a god. Why was it nevertheless improper for him to "worship" Peter as he did? Do you see how verse 33 shows that Cornelius must have learned from Peter's rebuke?
5. There is nothing in the Mosaic law that specifically forbids eating with Gentiles. Were the Jews doing right when, in the old dispensation, they were careful to avoid close fellowship with those of other nations? Why did Peter feel free to sit among the people gathered in the house of Cornelius?
6. At the very beginning of his sermon here (see Acts 10:34), Peter had already observed that "God is no respecter of persons." Was he implying, do you suppose, that he himself had before believed that God really was a respecter of persons? Do you understand how the Jews would have come to that conclusion? How can we today perhaps fall into the same kind of error in thinking?
7. Cornelius was led to believe that he would learn something very important from Peter. Was he, do you suppose, disappointed by Peter's message? (Why, or why not?)
8. Read Acts 10:47. Do you see why God's giving the Spirit to these Gentile believers would give Peter confidence that it was proper for him to baptize them?
9. Read Acts 11:2, 3. If Christ Himself commanded the church to preach the gospel to all nations, how could there be doubts about the correctness of what Peter did in Caesarea? What do you think, did Peter anticipate the "contention" in Jerusalem, or was he surprised by it? (See also Acts 10:16, 17.)
10. Acts 11:18 indicates that the first response to Peter's careful explanation was favorable. But read also Acts 15:1-5 and Galatians 2:11-16 and 6:12-15. What evidence do you see in those verses that the contention of Acts 11:2 in fact persisted in the early church? Was the issue involved an important one in the church, or was it relatively unimportant (see also Gal. 5:1-6)?
11. Do you see the connection between Acts 11:18 and the three verses that follow it? How was the effect of the preaching in Antioch (see Acts 11:21) further evidence that Peter had done the right thing in Caesarea?
12. According to Acts 11:20 there was in Antioch a preaching of Christ to "the Grecians." Do you think it likely that all of those Grecians were Gentile proselytes (that is, converts to Judaism)? If not, how was this preaching an advance on the work of Peter in Caesarea?
13. When Barnabas went to Antioch to evaluate the field, and found that there was much work to be done, he decided to fetch Saul from Tarsus. Can you think of any reason why he would have thought of Saul for the kind of work that needed to be done in Antioch?
14. It is generally believed that the name Christians was first applied to the disciples in Antioch by people outside the church. Can you think of a reason why it is unlikely that the *Jewish* enemies of the church would have given them that name?
15. Read Acts 11:27-30. Why, do you suppose, did the inspired writer include an account of this particular gift in the history of the early New Testament church?