

"Seeing God's Vision of Racial Reconciliation" 6/23-24/07

6 p.m.; 9 & 10:45 a.m.

Acts 10:9-35

OPEN Bible to Acts 10:9

INTRODUCTION

We all have mental frameworks or patterns through which we see life and assess situations.

And there are moments in our lives when the way we see something changes forever.

"... in 1956 Floyd Bryant, a self-described 'sixty-three-year-old white man, a Baptist, and a Southerner,' wrote an article in *The Southern Baptist Review and Expositor* under the title, 'On Integration in the Churches.' This is what he wrote:

"Throughout the first sixty years of my life I never questioned but that Peter's confession that '**God does not show favoritism**' (Acts 10:34) referred exclusively to the differences among white Christians. Neither did I question that segregation was a valid Christian practice, and that it referred to the separation of white and Negro people.

"Three years ago these views were completely transformed. I became convinced that God makes no distinctions among people whatever their race. ... I exchanged the former views which I had absorbed from my environment, for the latter views which I learned from the New Testament.

"I came to understand the meaning of Paul's plea, '**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will.** (Romans 12:2)" (Quoted in The Good Book, Peter J. Gomes, p. 98-99)

We'll read today that Peter was this kind of man; a man like Floyd Bryant. He had been so influenced by Jewish culture that he had a huge blind spot. But, he also was willing to change his thinking once he saw the will of God.

READ Acts 10:1-35

To see "*God's Vision of Racial Reconciliation,*"

I. Identify Your Personal Makeup

All of us have been molded by a variety of influences: parents, other family members, friends, teachers, coaches, employers.

We have been influenced by what we have read, experiences we have had (*good or bad, pleasant or painful*) and the experiences of those we know.

We have been molded by the Bible, by the Holy Spirit, by the kind of church we are involved with and the people with whom we surround ourselves.

We are influenced by the areas of the country in which we were raised: the tendencies, biases, the ways of thinking, the values.

All of those and much more go into forming and influencing our personal makeup: how we see things, how we feel about issues, how we evaluate and what the grids are through which we evaluate. And we all have certain preferences and prejudices.

In the passage we're reading today, there are two predominant makeups:

Jewish (religious and cultural)

Gentile (primarily cultural)

Let's look at **Peter**, representing a Jewish cultural and spiritual mindset:

A Jew:

Yes, a Christian, but ethnically and culturally, a Jew.

He sees himself as a follower of Jesus the Messiah and continuing to live by many of the Jewish laws and

practices is not a contradiction to him.

The key Jewish mindset that God wants to change in his life is his view of Gentiles and the way he associates with them:

- Jews didn't eat with Gentiles due to food regulations.
- Jews didn't go into Gentile homes for fear of being spiritually contaminated by ritually unclean things, idols, etc.
- Jews didn't see Gentiles as equals, and didn't think God saw them as such.
- BUT, none of these practices were commanded by God in the OT. The Jews practiced these things to protect themselves from falling into sin.

Peter is also:

A Christian:

- The leader of the Apostles
- Present when the Holy Spirit was given to the Jews (Pentecost) and the Samaritans (half-Jews)
- Greatly used by God:
 - to proclaim the Gospel with power
 - to heal many sick and demonized people
 - to raise the dead to life

And, at the same time, he is a product of his Jewish culture and mindset.

In today's world, he would be called racist, a bigot.

But, he honestly didn't realize he was violating God's will.

We each need to know our own mindset, what has influenced and marked us. Why we may have knee-jerk reactions inside

when we encounter a person of a different race, or immediately distrust them.

IF that happens within you, you need to slow down and ask, "Why do I respond this way? Does it truly reflect the will of God?"

And, we need to take the next step:

To see **"God's Vision of Racial Reconciliation,"**

II. Let God Teach You (Acts 10:9-23a)

Be teachable!

In this story, we see that the Lord has determined that it is now time to bring the next major change to Jewish Christians.

And, so, he chooses Peter, the key leader of the Church. And he communicates through a vision.

Peter is sitting on the flat roof of the home of Simon the Tanner. As he is waiting for lunch to be prepared, God gives a vision; v. 11-12.

In the vision Peter sees all kinds of animals, including ones that the Jews had been commanded to never eat.

He also hears a voice saying, **"Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."**

In v. 14 Peter responds, **"Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."**

And in v. 15 **"The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'"**

And, in v. 16: we read that the Lord really gets Peter's attention by repeating this vision three times.

In v. 17a we see that Peter is pondering the vision and what the Lord was wanting to tell him. He is allowing God to teach him. He is listening, meditating, seeking to understand what God is saying.

And right at that time, three Gentiles representing Cornelius, show up at this house looking for Peter.

And, then, v. 19-20: **"While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you.**

20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.'"

Through the vision of animals and the message that Peter can eat all kinds of foods, God is wanting to communicate a much bigger issue.

That He loves the Gentiles and wants them to be included in His family as completely as are the Jews. And God is going to use Peter, as the leader of the Church, to help bring this about.

And Peter demonstrates his willingness to learn from God by obeying Him:

He welcomes the three Gentiles into the home. **He NEVER would have done this if the Holy Spirit hadn't told him to do it!**

And the next day they leave together to go see Cornelius. **He NEVER would have done this if God hadn't told him to!**

Key lesson: Don't assume your mindset is correct! Let God teach you! Be teachable!

To see **"God's Vision of Racial Reconciliation,"**

III. Accept God's Mindset and Act Upon It (Acts 10:23b-48)

And by the time they have walked the 33 miles from Joppa to Caesarea;

by the time he has had two days to have the vision and the words of the Holy Spirit sink into his mind;

by the time he gets to Caesarea, the new picture is coming into focus in his mind:

- God's vision of reconciling all people to Himself through Jesus Christ.

- God's vision of racial reconciliation between the Jews and the Gentiles.

LOOK AT THIS:

Racial reconciliation: v. 28: "He said to them: 'You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.'"

Reconciliation to God: v. 34-35: "Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.'"

The light has gone on! Peter sees God's vision!

He had previously been blind to his racism, God showed him His will, it took root in him mind and spirit and he reconciled it emotionally and embraced it to where He could say, in a Gentile home, to a bunch of Gentiles, "**Now I realize that God doesn't show favoritism!**"

"God didn't just give me a vision, He gave this Gentile a vision too!"

"God doesn't just love my race, He loves this man's race too!

"God doesn't just want to save Jews, but this whole room full of Gentiles too!"

God wants His family to include every race, tribe, language, and ethnic group on the face of the Earth.

So, Peter explains the Gospel to all the people in Cornelius' home, the Holy Spirit comes upon them, and then they are baptized in water as followers of Jesus Christ.

Here's God's mind; here's the framework God wants built and established in our minds:

A. God says every race is equal to the other

Acts 10:34: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism."

God accepts all people the same!

No difference, no preference!

B. God commands that I fully accept people of other races

Acts 10:28: "But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean."

Do you accept, fully accept people of different races, different colors, different ethnic groups?

C. God welcomes all people to Himself through Jesus Christ (v. 35)

Acts 10:34c-35: "God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right."

I've met many people like Cornelius through the years. They respect God, they seek to do what He wants them to do, they honor His name and often honor the Bible.

But, they don't know what it means to really know God through faith in Jesus Christ.

D. God calls us to be reconcilers: to take peace and the message of peace to everyone

2 Corinthians 5:18-20: "All this is from God, Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

19 that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God

were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

It's not enough to be free from racism or free from prejudice. We must take the steps of reconciliation!

CONCLUSION

Peter moved in the direction of the Gentiles for one reason: God told him to do it! It violated all his previous learning, teaching, experience, practice, etc.

How do we do the same?

"One missionary said, 'I don't know how to love the poor except one at a time.'

"We can embrace that same wisdom in taking the steps of reconciliation -- one relationship at a time."

(New Man Magazine, Vol. 1, Num. 1, p. 25-26, "Portrait of a Promise Keeper," Bill McCartney)

"Father God, thank You for making Your will so clear on Your desire for all people to know You and for not showing favoritism to one race above another. Please forgive me for the prejudices I have shown. Please come into my life and live through me. And, please use me to reflect Your heart and Your will to other people. In Jesus' Name, Amen."