**Apostolic Hospitality**

(Acts 10:23-33)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A young boy in Macon, Georgia, was attacked by a pit bull one day, but before he could sustain any serious injury, a man passing by grabbed the dog and choked it to death with his bare hands! Seeing this, another man ran up to him and said, “You’re a hero! And I’m the editor of the biggest newspaper in Macon. And tomorrow morning, the headline is going to read, ‘Macon man saves young boy’s life.’” To which the hero protested, “But I’m not from Macon!” “In that case,” the editor replied, “it’ll say, ‘Georgia man saves boy’s life.’” The hero said, “But I’m from New York!” So the next day the headline read, “Deranged Yankee Kills Beloved Family Pet!”

Well as you may know, Southerners are known for what’s called “Southern hospitality.” But judging from that story, I’d say that *some* Southerners have had just about enough of us Northerners!

And speaking of hospitality, in the Bible the people of Israel were *forbidden* to show hospitality to Gentiles by the law of Moses, the law of their God. But here in Acts 10, *three* Gentiles have knocked on Peter’s door, and he not only invited them in, he put them up for the night! Speaking of the apostle and those Gentiles we read,

**“Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him” (Acts 10:23).**

Now if you know this passage, you know where Peter went with those men. God told a Gentile named Cornelius to send for Peter and ask him to come to his house and tell him how to get saved (cf. Acts 11:14). The problem with that was: it was *also* forbidden by the law of Moses for Jews like Peter to *accept* hospitality from a Gentile—and here he’d been invited to a Gentile’s house!

But God had recently given Peter a vision explaining to him how He had *suspended* that law back in Acts 9 when He saved Saul and introduced the dispensation of grace. But so far Saul was about the only one who knew about this revolutionary change. So Peter decided that if he was going to *break* the law of God that he wanted to be sure to have some witnesses who could later testify to what happened when he arrived in this Gentile home. That’s why verse 23 says that “Certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him”—and Peter’s brethren, of course, would have been Jews.

Now we’re not told how *many* brethren Peter brought, but later when he was telling the story, he said,

**“…*six brethren accompanied me,* and we entered into the man's house” (Acts 11:12).**

Now was that enough witnesses according to the law of Moses? In case you forgot, Deuteronomy 19:15 says,

**“…at the mouth of *two* witnesses, or at the mouth of *three* witnesses, shall the matter be established.”**

Two or three witnesses was all that the law required to settle *anything.* It was all that was required to put a man to death (Deut.17:6), and that means that would *also* be all that was required to settle every lesser matter. And Peter was bringing *two or three times that many witnesses* to visit Cornelius.

Now does that give you any idea of just how *nervous* Peter was about breaking the law and going to visit a Gentile? Whatever was going to happen, he wanted to make sure he had *plenty* of men who could stick up for him later when he was called on to account for his actions—and he knew he *would* be! If you know your Bible you know that in Chapter 11 of Acts he *was* called on to account for his flagrant disregard of the law of God.

But if Peter was nervous to begin with, what he finds at Cornelius’s house is going to make him even *more* nervous, for as we read on we read,

**“And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and he had called together his kinsmen and near friends” (Acts 10:24).**

Poor Peter had agreed to go to see a Gentile, but when he got there he found that Cornelius had called together his Gentile friends and the members of his Gentile family. So instead of having a discreet meeting with *one* Gentile, he’s going to have to have a town hall meeting with *many* Gentiles!

But while Peter was mighty nervous to see all those men of other nations, Cornelius was mighty *glad* to see *him,* as we learn as we read on in our text:

**“And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him” (Acts 10:25).**

So to say that Cornelius was glad to see Peter was putting it mildly—he *worshipped* the apostle as a god!

Now as a Gentile, you really can’t blame Cornelius for not knowing what the Lord told Satan when the devil asked Him to worship *him.* The Lord replied,

**“…it is written, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God,* and Him *only* shalt thou serve” (Luke 4:8).**

Cornelius obviously didn’t know that it was written in Moses’ law that only God should be worshipped, but Peter knew it! So as we read on in Acts 10, we see Peter set Cornelius straight:

**“But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:25).**

When it says Peter “took him up,” that suggests that Cornelius probably worshipped him in the same way we read that Joshua worshipped God in Joshua 5:14:

**“…Joshua *fell on his face to the earth,* and did worship…”**

Cornelius must have likewise bowed himself to the earth, prompting Peter to take him up and let him know that he was just a man who wasn’t worthy of worship, much as Paul did in Acts 14. When some men went to offer sacrifice to him as a god, he cried,

**“Sirs, why do ye these things? *We also are men of like passions with you…”* (Acts 14:15).**

But while both men were right to effuse to be worshipped, there is a sense in which Peter *was* a god to Cornelius. Look what God told Moses when He sent him to talk to Pharaoh:

**“…the LORD said unto Moses, See, *I have made thee a god to Pharaoh:* and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet” (Exodus 7:1).**

Now if you’re wondering why God would say that He made Moses a god to Pharaoh, it was because—in a sense—*all* the Jews were gods *to all the Gentiles,* as God later said to the Jews in Psalm 82:6:

**“*Ye are gods;* and all of you are children of the most High”**

Now if you’re not sure why He called them gods, the Lord Jesus explained it when He *quoted* that verse in John 10:34,35:

**“Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, *Ye are gods?...*He called them gods, *unto whom the word of God came…”***

The reason He called them gods was that *He gave them His Word,* and if Gentiles wanted to be saved, they had to *hear* how to be saved *from the Jews.*

But who has God’s Word *today?* We do! And while our apostle Paul never calls *us* gods, can you see why God wants us to do what Paul told Timothy to do and “exercise thyself…*unto godliness”* (ITim.4:7). The reason you want to live a godly life as a Christian is that *you represent God* in everything you do or say.

You know, speaking of Southern hospitality, down south they tell their kids to live right and “uphold your family name”—and some of them take that very seriously. And we should take it even *more* seriously, for we’re upholding the name of the family of God. Think about that each morning before you hit the door and start your day, and pray about it too.

Well, rather than standing around talking at the door of Cornelius’ house, they decide to go inside:

**“And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together” (Acts 10:27).**

Now what you’re seeing here explains something the Lord once told the apostles:

**“Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; *for they are white already to harvest”* (John 4:35).**

Did you ever wonder what He meant by that? He’d just finished getting a Samaritan woman to believe on Him, and she turned around and told all the *other* Samaritans in town about Him. A few verses later, we read,

**“…*many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him for the saying of the woman*…So…He abode there two days. *And many more believed because of His own word”* (John 4:39-41).**

That’s what the Lord had in mind when He said the fields were white unto harvest. When a bunch of Samaritans got saved, that showed that *all* the Samaritans were ready to get saved.

And when all of these Gentiles in Acts 10 came to hear Peter tell *them* how to be saved, that showed that the fields of the Gentiles were *also* ready to be harvested.

But up until now, it was against the law for Peter to *go* to the Gentiles. You know what that means, don’t you? It means that when the Lord commissioned him to go to “all nations” (Matthew 28:19), Peter hadn’t been *going* to all nations, for he knew that Israel had to get saved *first,* as we’ve seen in our past lessons. But when the people of Israel *refused* to get saved, God raised up Paul to go *directly* to the Gentiles.

And here in Acts 10, God is using Peter to *introduce* this change, as we see as we hear him explain as we read on in our text:

**“And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28).**

Peter told them that the only reason he was there was that God told him that Gentiles were no longer unclean.

Do you know what another way of saying that is? Look how Peter rephrased it when he told the Jerusalem council about all of this:

**“Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God…*put no difference between us and them”* (Acts 15:7-10).**

Do you see those words “put no difference” there? Do you know what verse Peter was thinking of—and what verse those Jewish leaders would *also* be thinking of?

**“I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people. Ye shall therefore *put difference* between clean beasts and unclean…” (Leviticus 20:24,25).**

God told Moses to tell His people in Israel to “put difference” between themselves and the Gentiles, but Peter testified that now God “put no difference between us and them.”

And Moses’ words there should remind you of *how* God showed Peter that there was no longer any difference between the nations and *the* nation of Israel. It was by showing him that there was no difference between clean and unclean beasts in that sheet vision earlier in Acts 10.

But now, believe it or not, Peter *still* doesn’t know why God sent him to these Gentiles, as we see as we read on and see Peter say:

**“Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?” (Acts 10:29).**

The word “therefore” means that the *only* reason Peter had come unto Cornelius was that God had showed him the Gentiles were no longer unclean, as he just finished stating in the verse before. God hadn’t told Peter to give them the gospel, and he knew he *shouldn’t* give it to them until Israel was saved. So Peter told this Gentile clan, as it were, “Well, I’m here. What do you want?”

But now, if you stop and think about it, Peter’s attitude here is a good one to have. He did what God told him to do, even though he didn’t yet know why God told him to do it! Do you remember when you were a kid and your father told you to do something, and you asked why, and he said, “Because I said so!” He didn’t expect you to understand how it was for your own good. He just expected you to do it, knowing you’d understand *why* when you grew up.

Well, when the Bible tells you to do something, and you don’t understand why, just pretend you hear your heavenly Father’s voice saying, “Because I said so!” God knows you’ll understand why when you grow up *in Christ.*

Now you can *resist* God if you want to, just as Peer could have. Do you see that word “gainsaying” in verse 29? One of the definitions of that word is *to resist* (cf. Lu.21:15). But Peter says he went to the Gentiles *without* gainsaying, once he knew they were now clean in God’s sight. He didn’t resist when a Gentile invited him over.

Maybe he figured Cornelius would serve some bacon for breakfast, or a BLT for lunch. You can’t tell me Peter never woke up in the morning and smelled his neighbor frying up some bacon and wanted some. If you can *smell* bacon and not *want* some, you’re a stronger man than I am!

But I’m just having fun, of course. The *real* reason Peter went as soon as the Spirit told him to go is found in Psalm 119:60:

**“I made haste, *and delayed not to keep Thy commandments.”***

Haste doesn’t make waste once you’ve decided to keep the commandments of God. You can’t be too hasty when it comes to that, and Peter knew it!

But he still didn’t know what this Gentile wanted with him, so he asked about it in verse 29, and Cornelius began to answer him in verse 30:

**“And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing.”**

Now we know that this “man” was an *angel,* for Cornelius is describing what happened back in Acts 10:3:

**“He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.”**

Most Christians are unaware that all the angels in the Bible were *men.* I know you husbands think your wife is an angel, but there just aren’t any female angels in Scripture—despite all the paintings and other artist’s renditions that you’ve seen featuring them.

And there aren’t any guardian angels in Scripture either. The way most of us acted when we were young, if we had guardian angels they would have all had a drinking problem. I know mine would have!

God used angels to minister to people before the Bible was complete, but He is not sending them to minister to *us.* And that means they’re not *appearing* to us as they did with Cornelius. We know this because our apostle Paul wrote,

**“Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of *angels*, intruding into those things *which he hath not seen,* vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (Colossians 2:18).**

If someone tells you they saw an angel, put that someone on the pay-no-mind list, for Paul says otherwise.

You say, “But what if God changes His program again and sends an angel to tell us about it?” Well, we know that that can’t happen, for if it could, Paul couldn’t have said what he said to the Galatians:

**“…though we, *or an angel from heaven*, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, *let him be accursed”* (Galatians 1:8).**

God must have told Paul that He wouldn’t be sending any more angels to introduce any new dispensations or he couldn’t have pronounced a curse on any who might.

Take some time and study the epistles of Paul, the epistles that talk about what God is doing today, and you’ll see that all that angels do today is *watch us,* as Paul says in I Corinthians 4:9, where—speaking of himself and his fellow apostles in the Body of Christ—he wrote:

**“…we are made a spectacle unto the world, *and to angels,* and to men” (I Corinthians 4:9).**

Angels looked at Paul and his coworkers, and all the buffeting and beatings they experienced, and marveled that they endured all of that just to keep serving the Lord.

May I ask if that’s what angels wonder about you? Or do they wonder why you’re letting some of the petty things we have to endure stop you from serving the Lord? You know, you can measure your Christianity by what it takes to stop you from serving Him in every detail of your life.

But now, when it says the angel wore “bright clothing” in verse 29, that agrees with other descriptions we have of angels in Scripture:

**“…two men…*in white apparel…”* (Acts 1:10).**

**“His countenance *was like lightning,* and his raiment *white as snow”* (Matthew 28:3).**

**“…two men…*in shining garments”* (Luke 24:4).**

That means there must be some sense in which angels are made in the image of God, just as we are, for the psalmist prayed,

**“Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, Thou art very great; Thou art *clothed with honour and majesty.* Who coverest Thyself *with light as with a garment…”* (Psalm 104:1,2).**

If God Himself is clothed with light, and angels are said to be similarly garbed, that means angels are a chip off the old block, so to speak.

And since Adam and Eve were also made in God’s image, they too were probably clothed with light. That would explain why it says they suddenly knew they were naked after they sinned. Evidently the light in which they were clothed disappeared after their fall.

By the way, when the first autumn came and all the leaves started falling from the trees, do you know what Eve said to Adam? “Would you *please* quite leaving your clothes on the floor!”

Now I think light is *also* what you and I will be sporting when we get to heaven, where the curse of Adam’s fall will be a thing of the past. We know that this is true of Jewish kingdom saints, for the Lord said that once they enter the kingdom of heaven on earth,

**“Then shall the righteous *shine forth as the sun* in the kingdom of their Father…” (Matthew 13:43).**

And our apostle Paul says of us that “one star differeth from another star in glory” (I Cor.15:41). That means if you’re saved, you have a “bright” future ahead of you!

All right, let’s finish by hearing Cornelius report what the angel said to him:

**“And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.**

**“Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.**

**“Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:31-33).**

We commented on the details of these verses in our previous lessons, and in our next study we’ll consider the details of Peter’s response to Cornelius’ words here.

But in closing, I remind you that what God is doing in Acts 10 is using Peter to pave the way for Paul to introduce the dispensation of grace, where Gentiles are no longer unclean. Instead, saved Jews and Gentiles are “baptized into Christ,” where

**“*There is neither Jew nor Greek,* there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27,28).**

Under the law of Moses you couldn’t say that! But you can say it now that we are all one in the Body of Christ. Getting saved is the solution to the racial tension that used to exist between Jews and Gentiles, and it’s *also* the solution to the racial tension that exists today between blacks and whites.

Many years ago a black missionary from South Africa was scheduled to visit us at *Berean Bible Society* on a Wednesday, but he called to say he needed a place to stay the night before. Since I stay in a motel near BBS every Monday and Tuesday nights, I told him he could stay in my motel room with me. But he wasn’t scheduled to arrive until 2 in the morning, and by that time I’m jusually busy conducting a snore-chestra. So I told him when he arrived at the motel to get a room key from the desk clerk and just come on in and hit the other bed. Well, he did, and it worked out just fine.

But on Wednesday night he came to visit our midweek service at the church that I pastor in addition to my duties at BBS. When I got up to introduce him, I decided to have some fun with the introduction and said,

“Last night, in the middle of the night, I heard a noise, and woke up to find that a black man had entered my motel room. So I did what any other white guy would do—“ But before I could finish the story, one of our men blurted out, “You hid under the bed?” We all got a good laugh out of that. But what I *really* did was roll over and go back to sleep. All because—even though I’d never met him before—I knew he was my brother in Christ.

So if you want to work on fixing racism, just keep leading people to the Lord and adding people to “the church, which is His Body” (Eph. 1:22,23). Amen?