

THE GOOD MORAL MAN

The 10th chapter of Acts tells a very interesting and important story of the conversion of a man named Cornelius. Although Cornelius lived almost 2,000 years ago, what happened to him has particular significance today because it clearly gives God's attitude toward a good moral and even religiously devout man who has not been baptized into Christ. It's important to note that God directed the events of this story and then guided the hand of Luke, the writer, as he recorded them for us.

Cornelius was an Italian, a Roman officer in charge of 100 soldiers sent to Caesarea to keep the Jews in subjection to the Roman government. He was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always". (Acts 10:2) Most likely Cornelius learned of God through his association with the Jews while on military duty in their country. His acceptance of God was complete insofar as his knowledge of God's requirements permitted. He was prayerful, generous to others and dedicated in God's service.

Each day Cornelius prayed at about the ninth hour which, by our reckoning of time, was three in the afternoon. One day, during his prayer, the Lord's angel spoke to him in a vision. The angel told Cornelius that his prayers and alms were a memorial before God and that he must send to Joppa for the apostle Peter who would tell him what he must do. At first glance it might appear strange that a man who was already doing so much to serve God had something else that was required of him. Many people today claim they have done enough to please God if they are decent neighbors, good parents, honest businessmen and generous to the poor. According to the laws and moral code of the land, they are fine upstanding people. What have they to fear at the hands of a loving, merciful God?

Cornelius was all that and more. He worshipped God dutifully. Acts 10:2 describes him as a prayerful and devout or earnestly religious man, yet God instructed him to send for Peter to tell him what to do to be saved. Cornelius did not hesitate or argue. He sent immediately. As the story unfolds we find Peter arrives at the house of Cornelius where he finds Cornelius has gathered all his relatives and friends to await the wonderful news of salvation Peter was bringing to them. Being a devout man, Cornelius was eager to learn what God required, and being a benevolent man, he wanted to share his good fortune with those he loved.

Peter, seeing their eagerness, immediately began to preach to them. He explained that God was not a respecter of persons; "But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (verse 35) Thus the door to eternal life was open to Cornelius who was not a Jew just as it is open to all men today. But wait! Cornelius already feared God and worked righteousness. Was that not enough? Evidently, it was not because Peter continued to preach, relating the personal ministry of Jesus Christ and testifying to the death of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the grave on the third day. And who was better qualified than Peter to

testify concerning these things for he was there, an eye-witness to Christ's suffering and especially to His miraculous victory over death. Finally, Peter told Cornelius and his household of the commission which Christ gave to him and to the other apostles who had witnessed His resurrection. "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. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." (Verses 42, 43)

What a reassuring promise! The Holy Spirit then fell on them to fully convince Peter that even Cornelius and his friends, non-Jews, were approved by God to be recipients of salvation. Then they were baptized with water. And with baptism, their conversion from sinners to Christ was complete. It's a wonderful experience to be born again, free of all past sins, a new man in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6; Galatians 3:27)

As we can see from the story of Cornelius, conversion is absolutely necessary if we are to be pleasing to God. Christ said, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 18:3) Becoming as little children requires that we believe that Jesus is the Son of God; that we have such faith in that fact and in his teachings that we are willing to obey his commands completely. And, we are told to repent, or turn away from past sins, and endeavor not to commit these sins again. Christ promised, "...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3) Then, confess Christ before men. The writer of Romans tells us, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Rom 10:9) Then, as with Cornelius, one must be baptized for the remission of sins. The first sermon preached by Peter enjoined those gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost to "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38) All previous steps lead one to the threshold of Christ's church. A person becomes a Christian when raised from the watery grave of baptism in likeness to Christ's resurrection, and God then adds those which should be saved to the church.

Unless you have become a Christian according to the plan presented by the Lord's own Word, all that you might do which is morally right or earnestly religious will not be enough to save you in the day of judgment. No, we do not earn salvation, but we are saved by God's grace on the basis of our faithful obedience to Him. (Ephesians 2:1-10) If you are not already a Christian on Christ's terms, do not hesitate. Cornelius did not put off for a minute what was required of him. Why should you? If you want to become a Christian or if you do not yet fully understand the Lord's plan of salvation, please [contact us](#). We will be happy to assist in your obedience to Christ. Do it now. You may not have tomorrow!