

# Unit I: Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors

## Putting an End to Prejudice and Discrimination

DEVOTIONAL READING: Colossians 3:1-11

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Ruth 1:1-18; John 4:5-10; Acts 10:1–11:18;  
Romans 1:14; Galatians 3:28-29

PRINT PASSAGES: Acts 10:9-15, 30-35; Galatians 3:28-29

### KEY VERSE

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 3:28, KJV)

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There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28, NIV)

### Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Develop a reconciliation plan grounded in Christian love.
- Offer personal and communal prayers of confession for failures to love “the other.”
- Build alliances within the broader family of God to help dismantle racism.

### \*Key Terms

Earth (Acts 10:11)—Greek: *gḗ* (ghay): land; soil; the world.

Free (Galatians 3:28)—Greek: *eleutheros* (elyoo'-ther-os): liberated; not a slave.

Heaven (Acts 10:11)—Greek: *ouranos* (oo-ranos'): the heavens, sky, or spiritual realm.

Pray (Acts 10:9)—Greek: *proseuchomai* (pros-yoo'-khom-ahce): to speak with God, offer prayers.

Slave (Galatians 3:28)—Greek: *doulos* (doo'-los): a bondservant; “bond” (KJV).

Trance (Acts 10:10)—Greek: *ekstasis* (ek'-stas-is): a state of mental displacement, astonishment.

\*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



## The Biblical Context

In its earliest days, the Christian movement was rooted in Judaism. The first followers of Jesus were Jews who continued to attend the synagogue, adhered to dietary laws, and viewed themselves as a sect within the Jewish faith, rather than as founders of a new religion. Initially, the church primarily focused on reaching its fellow Jews.

Acts 10 marks a significant turning point. Peter's vision of clean and unclean animals challenged his Jewish convictions about purity and separation. When the Holy Spirit led Peter to share the Gospel with the Gentile centurion Cornelius, Peter realized that God was opening the way of salvation beyond Israel. As he witnessed the Holy Spirit's outpouring on Cornelius and his household, Peter understood that the Gospel was not limited to Jewish people.

Later, God called Paul, a Jew, to lead the church's expansion beyond the Jewish community to the Gentiles. In Galatians 3:28-29, Paul declares that in Christ, the old divisions no longer define God's people: "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (verse 28, NIV). This was not simply a theological statement but a practical redefinition of the community of faith. God was calling the church to embrace Jew and Gentile alike as heirs of the same promise.

## Introduction

When many think of "church," they picture only their local congregation. Yet, the church is much larger. One pastor wanted his congregation to see the bigger picture. He prepared a presentation that highlighted his work with the National Council of Churches and the Baptist World Alliance. On one occasion, he traveled to a Baptist World Alliance meeting in Birmingham, United Kingdom.

The Alliance includes 266 Baptist groups from 134 countries, with members from South America, the United States, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Africa, and Australia. Hearing this, one local church leader exclaimed, "Pastor, I never thought there were so many Baptists around the world! This is eye-opening." Sometimes, when people discover others who are different from themselves, they are tempted to treat them as outsiders. But in Christ, the same blood that saves one saves all.

### ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

## God's Revelation Can Be Sudden (Acts 10:9-15)

### KJV

**9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:**

**10 And he became very hungry, and would**

**have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,**

**11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:**

**12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.**

**13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.**

**14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.**

**15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.**

## **NIV**

**9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.**

**10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.**

**11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.**

**12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds.**

**13 Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”**

**14 “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”**

**15 The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”**

Peter did not expect the rooftop vision. He was not praying about Gentiles or wondering how to expand the Gospel; he was simply hungry. Yet, God broke into that ordinary moment with an extraordinary revelation. The act of the sheet's being lowered from heaven with all kinds of animals in it shattered Peter's assumptions about purity. His protest was immediate, but God's command was clear: “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (verse 15, NIV).

Scripture shows that God often works suddenly to redirect His people. Moses met God in a burning bush, Samuel heard His voice in the night, Isaiah was overwhelmed in the temple, and Paul was stopped on the Damascus Road. In each case, God interrupted to move His mission forward. Peter's vision was another of these defining moments, forcing him to see God's wider plan.

## **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**Has God ever surprised you—or your church—with a mission you had not planned?**

## **God's Revelation Can Be Startling (Acts 10:30-35)**

## **KJV**

**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,**

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

**32 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.**

**33 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.

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

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

## **NIV**

30 Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me

31 “and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.

32 “‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’

33 “So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

34 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism

35 “but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”

The vision challenged Peter, but stepping into Cornelius’ home tested his obedience even more. For a Jew raised to avoid contact with Gentiles, entering a Roman centurion’s house went against everything he had learned. The Law had once defined Israel’s distinct identity through food, dress, and circumcision. Now Peter saw that God’s kingdom would not be confined by old boundaries. This was startling because it overturned deep-seated habits of separation. Peter realized that God was not simply setting aside traditions but fulfilling them in Christ. Purity was no longer about diet or distance but about the heart transformed by the Spirit.

Such moments remain unsettling. They confront our traditions, challenge assumptions, and call us beyond comfort zones. Yet, they also open the door to grace. For Peter, the Spirit’s presence in Cornelius’ household proved God’s inclusive vision. For the church today, it is a reminder that God’s kingdom still reaches further than our categories.

## **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that Sunday morning was the most segregated hour in America. Is this still true? How should the church respond?**

## **We Are One (Galatians 3:28-29)**

### **KJV**

28 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.

29 And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

## NIV

**28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

**29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

Paul's bold declaration summarized the Gospel's unifying power. His background uniquely prepared him: with a Jewish mother, he knew the Law deeply; as the child of a Roman father, he understood the wider Greco-Roman world. His encounter with Christ brought both worlds together. Called as an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul embodied the unity he proclaimed. For Paul, unity was not abstract theology but lived reality. The categories that divided—ethnicity, gender, or social status—no longer defined worth. Christ had created one new family of faith. To belong to Him was to belong to one another.

This remains a challenge for today's church. Do we still draw lines that Christ has erased? Do we see people as unreachable because of culture, class, or ability? Paul's message calls us to see in Christ a unity that transcends every barrier.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

**Do you see others as outside the reach of the Gospel because of differences in culture, ability, or age?**

## A Closing Thought

Humanity spread across the globe, forming many languages, cultures, and religions. People built distinct identities that often divided them. Yet, in Christ, God revealed the common bond uniting all people. Through His life, death, and resurrection, He broke down barriers. In Him there is no Jew or Gentile, no slave or free, no male or female. All who belong to Christ are truly one family.

## Your Life

Some communities live in fear because of racially biased over-policing. Routine activities like driving, gathering in public spaces, or even walking home have become moments of suspicion and danger. The church cannot remain silent. How could your congregation offer reassurance, advocacy, and a visible witness that affirms the dignity of all people, showing that they are God's children?

## Your World!

Debates about issues like race and immigration often question people's worth. Yet, no one chooses their race, ethnicity, or place of birth. Scripture reminds us that everything God created is good. Ask God to open doors for you to affirm human dignity and welcome others as Christ has welcomed you.

