



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 10:1–23

“Peter’s Blunder, or ‘Not So, Lord’”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We’re turning this morning to Acts chapter 10, and continuing our exposition of the Acts of our Lord Jesus through the apostles. And we’re reading today verse 1 through verse 23, for our Scripture reading. You’ll recognize that this is just a portion of the story of the conversion of Cornelius and, of course, one of the great lessons of it has to do with the fact that the Gospel, it is evident, is now going out to the Gentiles, and the Gentiles are being received on the same grounds that Jewish people were being received. But today, we are reading verse 1 through verse 23, which records the vision given to Cornelius the centurion, and the vision to Peter the Apostle and the other things that are found in these first few verses.

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of the Lord coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ And he said unto him, ‘Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the seaside: He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.’”

Now, for those of you who are reading a more recent version than the Authorized Version, you’ll notice that those clauses, “He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do,” are not found in your text. The reason for that is the manuscript evidence is not very strong. However, what is stated here is, of course, true and the story bears out the sense of the words. “He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do,” in verse 14 of chapter 11, as Peter is retelling the story, we read, “Who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.” So it was evident that Cornelius was given some such information.

Now, coming back to verse 7 of chapter 10.

“And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. 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: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten, but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, 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: Wherein, were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, ‘Rise, Peter and kill and eat.’ Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.’ And the voice spake unto him again the second time, ‘What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice and the vessel was received up again into heaven.’ Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon’s house and stood before the gate, and called and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, ‘Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: For I have sent them.’ Then Peter went down to the men, which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, ‘Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the

cause wherefore ye are come?’ And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we turn to Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, with thanksgiving and praise for the sovereign providence by which Thou dost direct our steps. We thank Thee that the same one who directed Peter and Cornelius and brought them together is the one who oversees our lives, day by day and moment by moment. And we are grateful to Thee, Lord, for the way in which Thou hast brought us to the knowledge of Him who has the words of eternal life, the Lord Jesus Himself. And we are grateful for the way in which Thou hast brought us into the body of Christ, through the gift of faith in Him.

We thank Thee today for the forgiveness of our sins, for the experience of the gift of righteousness; how marvelous to think, Lord, that in Thy grace Thou hast made us acceptable to Thee. We who are sinners and unacceptable in ourselves, Thou hast made us acceptable in our substitute, our representative, the Lord Jesus Christ. We give Thee thanks for Him, for this position that we enjoy in grace, and we ask, Lord, that through the Holy Spirit Thou wilt work in our lives to build us up in our faith and edify us; and may we be useful to Thee in the great things that Thou art accomplishing. Lord, we acknowledge our need of Thee; we acknowledge the fact that we could not possibly please Thee in ourselves. We need the ministry of the Holy Spirit and we ask, Lord, that we may be the recipients of that great ministry.

Lord, we ask especially Thy blessing upon the ministry of this local church, its leadership and its members and its friends, and we pray that Thou wilt in the day in which we live enable us to serve

our generation acceptably to Thee. We commit the elders and deacons especially to Thee and pray Thy blessing upon them. Give them wisdom and guidance as they have the oversight over us. And then, Lord, we thank Thee for this great land in which we live, and we pray Thy blessing upon the United States of America. We are grateful, Lord, for this privilege. And when we think of so many who would like to be here but who are unable to be here, and who do not live in lands in which there is freedom, we give Thee thanks. And may we, Lord, properly appreciate it and guard and protect our freedoms.

We pray for the whole body of Christ, for all of its members, wherever they may be. And wherever the Word of God goes forth, bless the ministry, Lord. We pray particularly for those who have difficulties and trials and we ask, Lord, that Thou wilt minister to them and give them comfort and consolation and strengthening and healing. And for those, Lord, who are bereaved, we especially ask for them, encourage them and be with them and supply them with the things which they need in times of trial. Now, Lord, bless our time of fellowship together.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] There is an old story about Robert Ingersoll, the famous infidel that is appropriate in the introduction to the message this morning. It seems that Mr. Ingersoll was coming to a small town to speak and a friend said to another friend that, “Did you hear that Robert Ingersoll is coming to town and he’s going to speak?” And the friend said, “No, what’s he speaking on?” And the other friend replied, “The blunders of Moses. Do you want to go? The tickets are only fifty cents.” And his friend replied, “No, I wouldn’t waste fifty cents to Ingersoll on Moses; but I’d pay five dollars to hear Moses on Ingersoll.” [Laughter]

Well, our subject this morning is “Peter’s Blunder, or ‘Not So, Lord’,” and I’m sure that the most interesting subject of all would be for Peter to speak on my blunders rather than for me to speak on his blunders. It certainly would be more interesting to hear him on mine. But, nevertheless, Peter did blunder in chapter 10 of the book of Acts, and the incident in which he does is one of the

really important ones in the exposition of this particular book because you’ll notice the great space given to it. For example, beginning in chapter 10, verse 1, and not really concluding until chapter 11 in verse 18, the Holy Spirit speaks of this incident in which Cornelius’ house was brought to the knowledge of the Lord. And not only is a great part of the book of Acts devoted to this story, but the story is told at least twice within this account.

And then in chapter 15 in verse 7 through verse 9, when Peter is speaking at the Jerusalem gathering, he again refers to this incident. And so it’s regarded by Luke, the author of this book as being of some significance. And perhaps the reason for it is that what we have here is the opening of the door of the good news to Gentiles as Gentiles, as a group with apostolic sanction they are now to be brought into the knowledge of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, of course, Gentiles could be saved from the beginning, but in the Old Testament times when a Gentile came to the knowledge of the Lord, he was required by the divine revelation to become a Jew; that is, he should put himself by God’s grace and commandment under the Law of Moses and become a part of the people of God. This is seen in the Old Testament in the conversion of people like Ruth, the Moabitess, who converted, nevertheless, must become a member of the commonwealth of the nation Israel.

But here, now, in New Testament times, we have Gentiles coming to the knowledge of the Lord and they are not required to observe the Mosaic Law. So this is an important step forward in the universal appeal and preaching of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the fact that this is done by the clear initiative of God, who gave the vision to Cornelius and then the vision to Peter is evidence of the fact that God is in this movement of the Gospel to the Gentiles. It also has an appealing message of hope to seekers after a deeper knowledge of the Lord God and Cornelius, the Gentile soldier, is an illustration of that important truth. “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” So far as the Scriptures go, they teach that if there should be within the heart of an individual a desire to know the Lord God, the Lord God in his providence and in his direction will bring us to the place where we obtain that knowledge of him.

The vision that Cornelius had is described in verse 1 through verse 8. And remember, Peter has come to the city of Joppa and there he has been responsible for a remarkable miracle; and he’s staying in Joppa and he’s staying in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. Now, Peter when he came to Joppa must have been a bit surprised at where he was staying because a tanner, as we said a couple of weeks ago, was by his very occupation an unclean person because tanners had to deal with dead bodies. And, according to the Mosaic Law, individuals who dealt with the dead bodies of animals were unclean according to the Mosaic Law. So, therefore, Jews did not like the prospect of having any contact with tanners. So you can imagine Peter coming to Joppa and the Christians there talking with him. And he might be saying, since he was engaged in some preaching up and down the area, so we are told in the preceding chapter, Peter, you can imagine him saying, “Now, where am I going to be staying?” And some of his friends saying, “Well, Peter, you’re going to be staying with Simon.” “Oh, that’s wonderful two Simons staying together; we could lick the world. By the way, what kind of business is he in?” “Well, Peter, he is a tanner.” And you can just see Peter, with a gulp, saying, “What! A Tanner!” And then the Holy Spirit bringing to him some conviction that in spite of his occupation, he could stay with him. Peter, nevertheless, a little uncomfortable about it is spending his time with Simon the tanner.

Now, Luke tells us of the vision that Cornelius had. And Cornelius is described, first of all, as a centurion. That is, he was the equivalent of something like a sergeant, perhaps even a captain, although most feel that the centurion who commanded a century, ideally an hundred individuals, a part of a legion, a part of a cohort. A tenth part of a cohort or a sixth part, would be the equivalent, perhaps, of a captain. But, at any rate, he was probably what we would say, the highest non-commissioned officer in the Roman Legion.

Whether his name was really Cornelius originally or not, we’re not sure because Cornelius, it so happens, was a name that was given to a lot of soldiers and a lot of individuals who had been freed, because there was a well-known Roman family by that name who had been responsible for the

freedom of a number of individuals. And so his name may have been derived from that or it may be that he was a member of that noble patrician Roman family.

One striking thing about centurions in the New Testament is that they appear in about four different places and all of the centurions who are set out in the New Testament have favorable things said about them, which is, of course, a good word for the Roman soldiers. He is described as a devout man. He, probably, was what might be called a God-fearer. He was a Gentile who had become attached to the doctrine of the “one God” of Judaism. He was not circumcised, and so, therefore, he was not really a proselyte to the faith. Now, we know he was not circumcised because in the 11th chapter in the 3rd verse, after we read in verse 2, “And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,” we read, “Saying, thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.” So he was a God-fearer; a man influenced by Judaism but who, nevertheless, had not yet come to be a part of Judaism. He is said to be a man who gave much alms. And, in fact, he is said to be an individual who had a good report among all the nation of the Jews, a devout soldier, who gave much alms, of good report among the Jews. And then, in addition, in the 7th verse, we read that he had household servants and an orderly who was attached to him who was also described as a godly man. So, I think, we can say with reference to Cornelius that he presents a lovely picture of a godly man, influencing his whole household; and, yet, in spite of that, not a saved man. For as we read in chapter 11, he was told that if he would send to Peter, Peter would tell him words whereby he and all his house should be saved.

In the 4th verse of the 10th chapter, Luke tells us that when the vision took place, the angel of God came to Cornelius and he said to him, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.” I would gather from this that what this means is that the Holy Spirit had so worked in Cornelius’ heart that he had produced a desire for the knowledge of spiritual things, and now God is going to bring that to its consummation in his personal salvation.

You know, in Scripture, we read of what may be called “common grace” and we read about what may be called “efficacious grace.” Common grace is ordinarily a term that refers to the general

blessing of all creatures with divine gifts, such as food and drink and clothing and shelter. Included in the common grace of God, in the sense that these are blessings that extend to all men, are such things as the exercise of the Holy Spirit’s moral influence over men, the general influence of Christianity, for example, or the truth as the case may be, the special revelation of God that curbs sin has some influence in others and there is, therefore, according to common grace the restraint of sin in human society. In fact, all of the work of God in the restraint of sin is, ultimately, traceable to the God of the Scriptures. The fact that we have order, any kind of order at all, in our society is part of the common grace of God. So common grace promotes order and civil righteousness, the general operations of the Spirit influencing men toward redemption, bringing them to think about spiritual things are common grace operations.

But common grace is not sufficient for salvation. Men may be influenced toward the truth but unresponsive to it. Common grace is resistible. And as you well know, if you’ve studied the Scriptures much, the Scriptures say that, generally speaking, men resist common grace. So this grace is resistible and all of us experience it, and were it not for the special grace of God, we should never be responsive to the blessings of common grace. The means of the blessing are of the creation, conscience, and the indirect operations of the Holy Spirit.

This is, incidentally, one reason why in our society, we often look at individuals who appear to be good according to human standards and some people find it very difficult to think of some individuals who appear to be so good according to human standards; it’s hard to believe that they really are not going through Jesus Christ to heaven. One of the reasons that many non-Christians are good men is simply the common grace of God.

Now, infallible grace or effectual grace is the grace that comes to elect individuals immediately, by the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of the Word of God, and that produces the responsiveness that leads to eternal life. Infallible grace is the grace of God that changes the unwilling to willing; in other words, by God’s marvelous grace, he moves in the hearts of those who are the objects of his effectual grace and he brings them to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We all resist common grace; but sooner or later God brings through his efficacious ministry those who are his own to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what we mean when we talk about divine election. It is something that is set out in Holy Scripture and we are responsible as individuals who believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God, to explain what is found in the Scriptures.

Now, Cornelius, then, is an individual who has received the common grace of God and he has been responsive to the common grace of God and for those who are responsive to the common grace of God, God gives efficacious grace, as is evident in this case. So the time is right for Cornelius’ salvation and the angel of the Lord appears to him and tells him to send for Simon Peter and he will tell him things that will bring him to the knowledge of salvation.

I have a good friend, we’ve had a lot of times of fellowship together, who insists that as he understands Acts chapter 10 and 11, that Cornelius was already a Christian. Because he says, “Did you not see thy prayers and thine alms have come up for a memorial before God. And does God answer the prayers of an individual who does not really belong to him?” That’s not a bad argument. And, we’ve discussed this back and forth a great deal and I’ve just tried to suggest to him that chapter 11 in verse 14, which says, “Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and thy house shall be saved,” is evidence that Cornelius was not saved at this point.

But, nevertheless, he had been responsive and he was on the way to salvation. We’ve argued this back and forth and to my knowledge, he’s not yet come to the truth. But when we get to heaven, I’m sure that he will come to the truth; but it’s made a very good topic of discussion around a number of cups of coffee. Men may differ over this; I do not see that there is a whole lot at stake. In my opinion, Cornelius was not saved. But now, efficacious grace is to be given to him because God the Holy Spirit has prepared his heart for the reception of it.

And so he now is sending two of his household servants, together with an orderly, who waits upon him, to this man, Simon who dwells in the house of Simon the tanner. Well, the next morning, Joppa and Caesarea were about thirty miles apart, the next morning the three men leave

from Cornelius’ place. And about noon of that day, Peter the Apostle, in Joppa, decides that he wants to be alone and so, he went up to the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. It was about noon, and the Jews prayed three times a day and, evidently, Peter is still following out some of the customs that he had practiced as a Jewish man. And he’s on top of the house because that’s a place, in those days to be alone. The housetops were largely flat, and since Simon’s house was by the Mediterranean Sea, he could go up and he could be quiet, and he would have a nice view, as well. And he became a little bit sleepy and at the same time, he was a bit hungry. And, evidently, he had made his desires known because they were making preparations for food. It wasn’t customary for people at that time to have a large meal in the middle of the day. Much later was the time in which they observed dinner. But he had become hungry and, now, he’s sitting on the housetop reflecting.

And he falls into a trance, Luke says. His bodily needs may have determined something of the form of this vision because in his vision he sees a large sheet, let down from heaven. It’s knit at the four corners and in the midst of it are all kinds of four-footed beasts and wild beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air. Now, it is obvious that this is intended to suggest the unclean animals which Jewish individuals under the Law of Moses were forbidden to eat. Remember, in Leviticus chapter 11, in the Old Testament, very detailed descriptions are given of the clean things and the unclean things. Generally speaking, Jewish people could eat animals that chewed the cud and had cloven feet. But other animals were forbidden to them. They were unclean. And the sheet that is let down from heaven is obviously intended to represent the unclean animals. And so Peter is in his trance and he sees this come down. Some have suggested that his situation may have suggested the kind of vision that he received because on the top of the house, looking out over the Mediterranean, he no doubt would have seen sailing vessels passing by, and the sails of the sailing vessel would have been something like the sheet that was let down. And so his mind may have been thinking about them. Or he may even have been seeing them, and that became the basis for the vision.

Others have suggested that normally those houses had awnings on the top, and that may have been confused in his sight, as he had fallen into this trance. That’s unimportant. What he did

see is very important. And then, the voice came to him, “Peter, arise. Slay and eat.” The word translated, “kill” is the word that was used for the sacrifice of animals. And so it’s, “Peter, arise, sacrifice, and eat.” That would be clearly an abrogation of the Mosaic Law; if he were to do this because Peter, as a Jewish man, was not permitted to eat these things, if he were living in the Old Testament age. These were parts of the Law of Moses; and he was under the Law of Moses as a Jewish man, before the time of our Lord’s death on the cross. So what is signified here, obviously, as we look at it now, is the abrogation of the ceremonial Law of Moses. Peter’s response contains his blunder. “Not so, Lord!” is his reply. Today’s English version renders it, “Certainly not, Lord,” or the New International Version has, “Surely not, Lord.” I like the New English Version; it’s a little free, but it’s, “No, Lord, no.” Which illustrates, and I think emphasizes, how contradictory these words are. Think of it? If you are speaking to the Lord, and he has told you to do something, how can you possibly say, “No,” or “Not so” or “Certainly not,” or “No, Lord, no.” And so God has called the apostle to a new thing and he refuses to do it. That, in a sense, is a denial of his Lordship. So how can he possibly say, “No, Lord.” You can see how he might say, “No.” But not, “No, Lord.” Those two things are contradictory.

Notice, too, why he says he will not do it. He says, “I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” In other words, the Lord calls him to do something new and how does he reply? I cannot do it, because it’s new. So many of us are like that, aside from the point at issue here. We cannot do anything because it’s new. It’s charmingly illogical in what he is saying. It is a blunder on his part.

Now, he receives the answer, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” And this happened three times, and I think of the three times that the Apostle Peter confesses that he loves the Lord; and here, again, he’s put to the test. And, in this case, he has a very difficult time in responding to the command of the Lord.

But we read here, “What God hath cleansed.” In other words, God is no law-breaker, Peter. And, Peter, now, is beginning to get something of an intimation of the fact that a Gentile may enter the body of the people of God, without going through the gate of Judaism.

Now, this is very new, for these Jewish individuals who had been converted in the Old Testament age and are now living in the age of the Church of Jesus Christ. It’s very hard for them to be immediately accustomed to the fact that the Mosaic Law is no longer a valid law for them. We are no longer under the Law of Moses, as a code. We’re not under the ceremonial law; we’re not under the moral law as a code. Now, that of course is not intended to suggest that we are not under the moral law, as an expression of the mind of God. The moral law of the Ten Commandments is largely repeated in the New Testament and the morality set out in the New Testament, ultimately, expressed in the fact that believers should walk by the Spirit of God, is the highest form of morality. So we need to be careful in our affirmation of the fact that we are not under the Mosaic Law to either believe or create the impression that we are not responsible for the highest standard of holy living, as a Christian.

But, here, it’s evident from what has happened that now, as a result of the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary’s cross, and as a result of the rending of the veil of the temple in twain, from top to bottom, that the Mosaic Law has been done away with as a code. A Gentile may now enter the church and experience fellowship in the people of God, without going through the gate of Judaism. And, in fact, as a result of what Christ has done, and as a result of the age, the present age, into which we have been brought, the Gentiles are fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the Gospel, the apostle will say and emphasize in other parts of the New Testament.

One might ask, what does this reference to eating unclean things have to do with salvation of the Gentiles? Well, it’s a short step from clean Gentile food to clean Gentiles because Peter had been taught that it was not proper for him to eat with Gentiles. That, incidentally, was not taught in the Old Testament but it was a practice because the Gentiles so often dealt with things that were

unclean, according to the Mosaic Law, that the Jews just had the general principle of not eating with Gentiles. And that way, they would not be exposed to the possibility of defilement, which so often was characteristic of eating with Gentiles. So it’s a short step from the clean Gentile food, to clean Gentiles. And so that’s the reason that this is given as it is given.

Well, Peter now, after this was done thrice, the vessel was received up again and Peter was perplexed in himself over what the vision should mean. Just at that time, by the providence of God, the three men from Cornelius arrived. They came into the city of Joppa. They enquired where the house of Simon the tanner might be. And at this very moment, they were knocking on the gate outside and asking for the man who was called Simon.

Sometimes the interpretation of things are not given specifically in our experience. They arise out of what follows. And Peter was not told all of the truth of the present age, at this point. He’s going to learn the real interpretation of what is happening to him, by the events that follow. And so the Spirit says to him, “Three men are seeking you, Peter.” I can see that the sounds of their arrival are in the distance, as far as Peter is concerned. He’s told by the Holy Spirit three men seek him. Get up and get down. And when they speak to you and tell you to go with them, you go with them. “And go with them without any misgivings, because I have sent them.” And so, Peter goes down and the men are there, that have come from Cornelius. And as they ask for the man Simon, he says, “I’m the one that you’re seeking.” Notice, he says, “What’s the cause why you’ve come?” He’s looking for more information. And so they say, “Cornelius the centurion, a very just man, one who fears God, has a good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned by God, through a holy angel to send for you and to hear words from you.” And so Peter recognizing this as the sovereign hand of God invites them in and tells them, evidently, that he’s going to go with them. But it’s thirty miles away and it’s later now in the afternoon, let’s wait and go in the morning. So we see God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform. And the angels watched over the house of Simon the tanner that night, God within the shadows, keeping watch over his own. Peter is going to have one

of the great experiences of the New Testament times, when he will make his journey north to Caesarea and preach in the house of Cornelius the Roman centurion.

Now, let me stop at the conclusion of the message and just make a few points drawing them out of this particular passage in closing the message. One can see, first of all, that the cross is the abrogation of the Mosaic dispensation. No more are sacrifices to be offered. No longer is worship to be carried on in the temple in Jerusalem. No longer is there a visible priesthood which wears certain garments and perform certain sacrifices. No longer are the taboos of the clean and the unclean animals and other practices that are set out in the Mosaic Law, valid for us in this age. As the Apostle John will write later in the 1st chapter of his gospel, “The Law came through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

But there is a more practical lesson that I would like to lay a little stress on, as we close. I’d like for you to notice the character of the old man in the Christian. Peter’s blunder, “Not so, Lord.” Mr. Spurgeon says with reference to this, “This is an odd jumble of self-will and reverence, of pride and humility, of contradiction and devotion. Think of what Peter is really saying. He’s trying to put together things that cannot be put together. But he illustrates the fact that the old man remains in the Christian man.” In other words, the best of men are men at their best. And even though we have been converted and brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and given a new nature, we should not be surprised to see evidence that there is a whole lot of the old man still there. And, furthermore, the very specific kinds of things that characterize us before we are saved are the things that often characterize us after we are saved. We should not expect such a tremendous transformation when a person is saved that you cannot even recognize them as the same person. Let me assure you that almost every one of us who has been converted is still known to our mothers and fathers after we have been saved. As a matter of fact, one of the reasons that we often make it so difficult for them too to have the experience is that we tell them that we are entirely different when they see so much of the old life still there.

Now, think of Peter? Peter was an impetuous individual. It’s not surprising that he should say, “Not so, Lord.” That’s characteristic of Peter. He still has the things that characterize him. Think of what he said before the Holy Spirit came to indwell him, when the Lord Jesus said, a long time before this, “Peter, I’m going to Jerusalem and I’m going to suffer there and die and be buried, and be raised again the third day.” What did Peter say? “O Lord, let it not be true of you!” And then, later on, the Lord said, “You’re going to deny me. In fact, you’re going to deny me three times before the cock crows twice.” And Peter said, “O Lord, I will not deny thee.” And Jesus said, “You’re all going to be offended in me.” And Peter said, “Lord, though everybody is offended in you, I’ll never be offended in you.” But, of course, he was offended in him.

Now, around the Last Supper, the last Passover supper and the first Lord’s Supper, our Lord takes off his garments, puts on the servants napkin and begins to wash the disciple’s feet. And when he comes to Peter, Peter says, “Lord, you’ll never wash my feet.” And Peter receives the reply, “Well, Peter, if I don’t wash your feet, you don’t have part with me.” And then he says, “Don’t wash my feet only. Give me a whole bath, Lord”; both of the things impressive of his impetuosity; but, also, of his failure to understand spiritual truth. So “Not so, Lord.” That’s characteristic of Peter. The old man remains in the new Christian; and often it is many months and years before we see the old man begin to make some disappearance.

But one thing about Peter, it’s not all bad. There is some good in this man and you can see the work of sanctification taking place, because later on when he must go to Jerusalem and explain things to the people in Jerusalem, he’s careful to repeat just what he said on that rooftop.

In other words, he doesn’t pass it over and deny that he ever said this or just omit it. He says before everybody in Jerusalem, “I said, ‘Not so, Lord.’” So he’s honest. And that’s a good step forward. That’s part of sanctification and you can see it in Peter.

You can also see one other things about the old man; the old man fights the truth. Grace is free grace. Now, actually, you don’t have to say free grace. If you something is grace, it’s free. If you say it’s free, it’s grace. But there is a kind of blessed redundancy in free grace because it lays stress

upon something that we really need stressed because it’s so difficult for us to believe in the grace of God. We like to add this or that to make it appear that there’s really something of us in our salvation. And so we think of our salvation as related to our faith in Christ plus our water baptism or faith in Christ plus our confirmation of which there is nothing stated in Holy Scripture at all. And, in the case of baptism, baptism is set out in the Word of God as a testimony to something that has already transpired in us. That will be so plain, when we read in the end of the 10th chapter, of what happened in Cornelius’ house.

What a grand article of the faith it really is to believe in the forgiveness of sins through the grace of God? It’s so difficult for people to believe in the pure grace of God. We have nothing with which to commend ourselves to God, and the only basis upon which we may glory is the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some years ago in Scotland, in a Bible conference, one of the men preaching in the conference, and I was one of the other preachers as the American, this man, in Falkirk, in Scotland, said, “I spent too many years looking at the Bible through the eyes of my teachers.” And that is a danger that we all face. Spend too many years or too many months or too much time looking at the Scriptures through the eyes of the church or through the eyes of our teachers, and, thus, we become subject to custom and tradition. I like that little stanza. “Custom, which all mankind to slavery brings, that dull excuse for doing stupid things.” Custom. Or I like what Tertullian said, “Custom without truth is simply error grown old.” “Custom without truth is simply error grown old.” And when we come to the teaching of the Word of God, the thing that we are responsible to do is to read, to believe the things that the Scriptures set forth.

Notice, also, the old man’s willfulness hinders his usefulness. And Peter as long as he is saying, “Lord, I have never eaten anything that is common or is unclean,” is not useful to the Lord. We must never say, “I’ll not do this because I’ve never done it.” If the Scriptures set forth a pattern of action for us, we must do it whether we’ve done it or not. And I’d like those individuals who get

up every morning and sing as if it were their “Gloria as it was in the beginning, is now and ever be, world without end.” We’ll just do the same old thing.

Mr. Spurgeon says, “Shake yourself up a little, my brother.” And we, who are Christians, and say we follow the teaching of the Word of God, we need to realize that. The practices of the local church are to follow the teachings of the Word of God, insofar as we are able. So many things may be done, but are not necessary. And, so many things are done, which are actually contrary to the teaching of the Word of God. May God help us to really follow the Holy Scriptures.

It’s a terrible thing to have, to be responsible for a divided allegiance. I like the story of Sir John Ramsden, a wealthy merchant who lived in the English village of Huddersfield. He wanted to acquire the whole of the downtown area, because he had a business and the purposes of his businesses to him seemed to demand that he have all of downtown. And so he bought everything, with the exception of one plot of ground. It was owned by an old Quaker and it was situated right in the center of the township, and it was part of the land that Sir John Ramsden wanted. So after his agents were unable to do anything with the old Quaker, he decided to go to see him himself. So on entering the house, he said to the Quaker, “I suppose you know who I am and why I’ve come?” And the Quaker said, “Yes, I know you are Sir John, and I know why you’ve come.” Sir John said, “What price will you put on your section?” He said, “I don’t desire to put any price on it, thank you.” And, Sir John said, “If you will put a price on it, I will cover it with sovereigns.” And then, with a twinkle in his eye, the old Quaker said, “Put them on sideways, Sir John, and we might do business.” Well, Sir John didn’t want to put them on sideways, and so, he walked off rather crestfallen. As he was walking away down the path, the old Quaker called after him, “Remember, Sir John, Huddersfield belongs to thee and to me.” And the Christian whose loyalties are both to the Lord and to Satan, the god of this age, is a person of whom Satan may well say to the Lord Jesus, “Remember, he belongs to thee and to me.” We should never say to the Lord, “Not so, Lord.”

Oswald Sanders, for many years was the head of the overseas missions, the old China Inland Mission. He was teaching in a school once, and a young man came to him to talk over a problem. It

was obvious after they had talked for awhile that he had some particular ambition that was, evidently, not God’s will for him, because he was greatly troubled over it and that really was the source of his problem. And Oswald Sanders had heard Graham Scroggie speak on these words, “Not so, Lord.” And so he talked to the young man along that line. And, finally, at the end of the interview, he gave him a little piece of paper with the three words, “Not so, Lord,” and he said, “I suggest that you go to your room and you pray over this matter and that you just erase, either “not so” or “the Lord” and settle your question. So the next morning, Mr. Sanders came down, walked into his office, and there was a piece of paper on his desk. And he went over and looked at it and was rejoiced to see that the young man had marked out “not so” and had then put the words, “Master and Lord.” And he knew by that he had made the decision to give the Lord the preeminent place in his life.

So Peter, yes, it was a blunder. It’s the same kind of blunder of which we are so often guilty. Cornelius was a man who illustrates the insufficiency of human goodness for salvation. A praying man, a religious man, a benevolent man, an earnest man, a witnessing man, evidently, to the limit of his understanding but, nevertheless, a lost man.

And so, you, it’s possible for you to have a great deal of religion and still not be saved. We trust that through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died upon the cross as an atoning sacrifice sufficient for the sins of sinners, we trust that by the grace of God, you may be so moved by what Christ has done, and by your need that you will come to him. And upon the basis of what he has done claim the forgiveness of sins through the principle of grace.

May God help you to come and receive as a free gift eternal salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. You can never earn it. For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. Or as we read in the Old Testament Scriptures, Abraham believed in the Lord, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.

Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we give Thee thanks and praise, for the Holy Scriptures, which so marvelously set out the free grace of God in Jesus Christ. We thank Thee, Lord, for the forgiveness of sins in grace. And we pray, Lord, that if there should be some in this audience who do not know the grace of God, through Jesus Christ, Lord, at this very moment, bring conviction and conversion. And may by Thy grace, they be enabled to say, “So, Lord,” to the good news that Christ has died for sinners. And then, Lord, we pray that Thou wilt go with us, and through the days of this week, may our lives reflect Him who loved us and has loosed us from our sins in His own blood.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.