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Peter and Cornelius , God Shows No Favoritism

Scripture: Acts 10:1-48

Theme: The Gospel is for every nation and every person

High School (Ages 15-18)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

This Sunday school lesson explores the radical inclusivity of God's grace through the story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1, 48), a pivotal moment in the early church that dismantles ethnic and religious barriers to the gospel. While Peter, a Jewish disciple, initially hesitated to eat with a Gentile (Cornelius, a Roman centurion) due to Jewish dietary laws, God intervened through a vision, where the boundaries between clean and unclean foods dissolved, revealing that the Spirit of God transcends cultural and legal distinctions. Cornelius himself sought God through faith in Jesus without Jewish ceremonial observances, demonstrating that salvation is not tied to ancestry or tradition but to a heart open to the divine. The lesson challenges high school students to confront their own assumptions. Optional reflection: children can draw a picture of Jesus helping their friends, then share one way they can help someone else this week. This extra activity supports the lesson's theme and gives teachers a simple, lowprep option for extending the discussion.

Bible Story

In the city of Joppa, near the sea, lived a devout man named Cornelius, a respected centurion in the Roman army. He was a God-fearer, a man who worshiped God but did not yet fully belong to the Jewish faith. Cornelius and his household were faithful in their prayers, regularly offering sacrifices and obeying the Jewish customs, though he had never set foot in Jerusalem or attended the temple. His home was a place of deep devotion, where he and his family often gathered to pray, and he sought God with sincere humility.

One evening, as Cornelius was praying with his household, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a vision. The angel, glowing with divine light, stood before him and said, 'Cornelius! Your prayers and gifts to God have been heard! Now send for Simon, called Peter.' The angel's message was urgent, and Cornelius immediately sent messengers to the apostle Peter in Caesarea, a city on the coast of the Mediterranean. Peter, though initially skeptical, would soon

learn the profound purpose of this divine appointment.

Meanwhile, in Caesarea, Peter was staying with the disciples when a Roman official named Cornelius arrived with his household. The men who brought him had explained how an angel had commanded Cornelius to send for Peter. Peter, though Jewish, was deeply troubled by the request. He had been warned by the Holy Spirit not to go to Cornelius's house, yet he obeyed God's leading, recognizing that this was a moment of great spiritual significance. As Peter approached Cornelius's home, he was met with a group of Jewish Christians from Joppa, eager to learn why he hesitated.

When Peter arrived, Cornelius was already waiting with his entire household, a large gathering of men, women, and children, all eager to hear God's word. Peter was astonished to see such a diverse group, including Gentiles who had never before entered a Jewish home. He had been taught that the Spirit of God rested only on the children of Israel, yet here was a room filled with foreigners who worshiped God with earnest devotion. As he stood there, Peter asked, 'Why have you sent for me, Cornelius? Have you come without a Jewish guest to talk about Jewish customs?' Cornelius replied, 'God has shown me that I must not call anyone impure or unclean.' The words struck Peter deeply, for they challenged his own understanding of who could receive God's grace.

In the midst of their conversation, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard Peter preach. The Spirit was evident in their tongues, their speaking in prophecies, and their understanding of the message. Peter was astonished, for he had only been commanded to speak to Cornelius and his household, yet the Spirit had supernaturally granted them the ability to hear and respond. Cornelius and his family, who had never been baptized before, now understood that God had made them clean in His sight. Peter, too, was filled with wonder, recognizing that God had broken down the barriers between Jew and Gentile to reveal His inclusive love. The Spirit of God had spoken through Peter's words, and the hearts of these Gentiles had been opened to receive the Gospel.

That evening, Peter and the Jewish Christians with him returned to the house of one Simon, a pious Jew in Joppa, where they shared the good news with Cornelius and his household. Peter explained how God had called him to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles, declaring, 'No one can take God's gift of salvation and say, "It is for Jews only." God is no respecter of persons, for He has made everyone who fears Him and does what is right acceptable in His sight.' Cornelius and his family, moved by Peter's words, were baptized in the name of Jesus, and they joined the Christian community in Joppa, marking the beginning of a new era in the Church's mission to reach the nations.

Key Verse

Acts 10:34-35 , 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right.'

The key verse (Acts 10:34-35 , 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right.') calls us to respond to God's truth.

Discussion Questions

- Identity and Prejudice: The Bible states that "God shows no favoritism"
- Tradition vs. Revelation: Peter initially hesitated to visit Cornelius
- The Role of the Holy Spirit: In this passage, the Holy Spirit falls
- Divine Grace and Mission: If God's love and salvation are intended for all
- Application: If God has no preference based on nationality or ethnic

>> Missions Spotlight

The caste system in India has divided people for thousands of years. Missionaries share Peter's vision and the story of Cornelius to show that in Christ, there is no caste. The Gospel is breaking down barriers across India.

-> To the Cross

Peter learned that God doesn't show favoritism , the Gospel is for everyone. The cross broke down every wall: Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female. Because of the cross, we are all one in Christ Jesus.