

Six Truths From Cornelius

Introduction. Cornelius is a mysterious character. This Gentile soldier's marvelous moral character and his noble influence, even among Jews, is well established. He was a worshiper of the one, true God. His life was characterized by piety. He prayed consistently and was generous to the poor. Moreover, the centurion was a force in his family, leading them in spiritual values. With all of this, he still knew that he had a burden of sin from which he sought relief.

Aside from these general references to his noble character, there is a further passage in Acts 10 that throws a floodlight upon his religious convictions. When Peter, who was dispatched to instruct the officer, arrived in Caesarea, Cornelius gave an explanation as to why he had sent for Peter (vs. 33). One of the amazing facts about the Bible is how much truth can be stored in such small places. This passage in Acts 10 illustrates this point. Careful study of this passage yields a wealth of information about this soldier.

I. ***Cornelius Understood That There Was Only One God***

- A. The officer referred to "God," not gods. As stated above, Cornelius was a monotheist. As a rule, Gentiles subscribed to the notion that there were many "gods" (1 Corinthians 8:4-6). The depravity of Roman polytheism is vividly portrayed in the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans 1:21-25).
- B. Even before he heard the gospel message from Peter's mouth, Cornelius already had turned from idols to serve the living God (Isaiah 43:10-12; Acts 14:15; 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).

II. ***Cornelius Believed That God Was An Observer Of Human Activity***

- A. He confessed, "we are all here present before God" (Acts 10:33). The phrase not only suggests that heaven was aware of this meeting, but approved of it.
- B. Even the Hebrews had a difficult time grasping the idea that God observes everything.
 - 1. When Jacob fled from his home, fearful of Esau, he came to Bethel. In a dream God spoke to him, renewing the promise that had been made to Abraham. When Jacob awoke, he said, "Surely Jehovah is in this place; and I knew it not" (Genesis 28:16).
 - 2. When Jonah was instructed by the Lord to do work in Nineveh, he sought to do otherwise. Rather than heading east to Assyria, he determined to go west, to Tarshish, and flee "from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah 1:3).

- C. It is, therefore, remarkable that Cornelius had such a clear understanding of this aspect of the Creator's nature (Psalm 139:7-12).

III. **Cornelius Learned That Truth Was Embodied In Divine Revelation**

- A. The Gentile officer knew that objective truth would issue from a man who had been appointed by God to instruct him. The group therefore was assembled to hear words spoken by Peter whereby they could be saved (Acts 11:14).
1. Cornelius knew he had received no special message from the angel, detailing the content of what he must do in order to receive salvation (Acts 10:3-6; Hebrews 1:1-2).
 2. He did not surmise that he could capture "spiritual vibes" from the atmosphere in some esoteric fashion (Proverbs 14:12).
 3. He did not subscribe to the view that he could merely follow the inclinations of his conscience and all would be right (Acts 23:1; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 1 Timothy 1:5).
- B. This is a powerful truth that throngs today, who are searching for answers in every place but the right one, need to learn (John 17:17).

IV. **Cornelius Acknowledged The Sovereignty Of God**

- A. He confessed that the Lord had "commanded" certain items to which human beings were amenable, and he was anxious to humbly submit. There are several interesting considerations that we need to observe:
1. "Commanded" is a military term translated from the Greek term *prostasso*, which means literally "to arrange toward," thus denoting to prescribe, order, or command something. It is used to depict a decree issued by a sovereign ruler.
 2. The verb is a passive voice form, suggesting that God is the giver of commands, and we humans are the receivers. We are not allowed in the driver's seat!
 - a) The word translated "covenant" or "testament" signifies a disposition of property by will or otherwise.
 - b) Although our English word "covenant" signifies a mutual undertaking, the word in the original language signifies an obligation undertaken by a single person; namely, God (Hebrews 7:22; 8:6).
 3. The term is in the perfect tense, reflecting an action that has occurred already, but the results are abiding or continuing. The effect is that God had commanded, and His will was to remain inviolable. There would be no disputing it.
- B. This was truly an amazing concept for this Gentile to have perceived. Earlier, even Peter had said, "Not so, Lord" (vs. 14).

V. ***Cornelius Realized He Could Not Selectively Obey The Lord***

- A. "All" was the goal. He said they were present to receive "all things" the Lord had commanded Peter to convey.
 - 1. How many there are today who would be so happy if only God allowed them "multiple choice" obedience.
 - 2. They would gladly believe if only they could dispense with baptism (Mark 16:16), or else they would be immersed if only they did not have to repent (Acts 2:38).
- B. Initially, Naaman the Syrian was not terribly disturbed about dipping in a river for cleansing from his leprosy, he just faulted the Lord's location of the ceremony (2 Kings 5:12). He needed to learn that deliberate, partial obedience is no obedience!

VI. ***Cornelius Saw That Peter Was A Spokesman For Deity***

- A. The centurion suggested that he and his family were there to hear from Peter what God commanded this apostle to tell them. Peter's words would carry as much weight as if the Lord had spoken to them personally.
- B. There are those who labor under the illusion that the "words in red" in some editions of the gospel accounts are of greater significance than what Peter or Paul wrote. I actually have heard members of the church state that they did not agree with Paul on some issues. What a reckless expression of disrespect!
- C. The Savior Himself said, "He that heareth you [apostles] heareth me; and he that despiseth you [apostles] despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16). Paul declared that what he wrote represented the "commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Conclusion. Cornelius' understanding and disposition, as reflected in this solitary sentence, is stunning. It truly reveals the depth of his soul. Are we willing to listen?