

## Acts 10

# The “Gospel of Grace” Community

(Becoming people of grace is an adjustment that we like Peter need to make if we are to be authentic disciples of Christ.)

### Introduction:

- At the heart of the Gospel message is the radical grace of God – the good news that God fully accepts us in Christ without approving of all that we do or believe.
- This story may help us also to come to grips with the radical grace of God and what it means to be an authentic Christian church. The ancient social and cultural distinctions were removed in the church of Christ. Gal.3:28, Col.3:11, Acts 20:21, Rom.1:16, 10:12.

1. **The Gospel of Grace reveals God’s heart for all people.** *A Gospel Community is evangelistic sharing God’s heart for those outside the sphere of God’s grace.*

“<sup>1</sup> Now {there was} a certain man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, <sup>2</sup> a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the {Jewish} people, and prayed to God continually. <sup>3</sup> About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had {just} come in to him, and said to him, "Cornelius!" <sup>4</sup> And fixing his gaze upon him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. <sup>5</sup> "And now dispatch {some} men to Joppa, and send for a man {named} Simon, who is also called Peter; <sup>6</sup> he is staying with a certain tanner {named} Simon, whose house is by the sea."<sup>7</sup> And when the angel who was speaking to him had departed, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were in constant attendance upon him, <sup>8</sup> and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

- a. Note that it is God who is reaching out to the Gentile world. The Gentiles are not initiating their own inclusion within the covenant.
- b. Cornelius was a God-fearing man as were many Gentiles outside Israel. This love for God did not automatically include him. He needed to be initiated into the Kingdom (Baptism, and Holy Spirit).

2. **The Gospel of Grace reveals the extent of the “boundaries of fellowship” for God and His people.** *A Gospel Community respects the full extent of the cleansing power of God’s grace.*

<sup>9</sup> And on the next day, as they were on their way, and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. <sup>10</sup> And he became hungry, and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; <sup>11</sup> and he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, <sup>12</sup> and there were in it all {kinds of} four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup> And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!" <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." <sup>15</sup> And again a voice {came} to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no {longer} consider unholy." <sup>16</sup> And this happened three times; and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

- a. This challenge to regard as holy all that God has cleansed is one of the great challenges to our faith along with trust that God is good in spite of our circumstances, and God's Word is true in spite of our experience.
- b. If we could accept our own forgiveness and extend that grace to others, most of our distress and dysfunction in relationships would go away.

### What has God cleansed?

- Natural barriers of race, culture, class, sex, etc.
- Our sins and the sins of other believers.

### 3. The Gospel of Grace will challenge our impulse to wrongly judge others.

*A Gospel Community resists the legalism of the Old Covenant and the homogenous church model.*

<sup>27</sup> And as he talked with him, he entered, and found many people assembled. <sup>28</sup> And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and {yet} God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. <sup>29</sup> That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. And so I ask for what reason you have sent for me." <sup>30</sup> And Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, <sup>31</sup> and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. <sup>32</sup> 'Send therefore to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon {the} tanner by the sea. <sup>33</sup> "And so I sent to you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

**Eph.2:14-19** "14 For He Himself, is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. . . . 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of god's household,"

**Gal.3:27-28** "27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; but you are all one in Christ Jesus."

- a. The evangelical church has tended to favor homogeneous congregations because they tend to grow faster and are more effective in reaching a targeted non-Christian audience.
- b. While cultural diversity does produce numerical growth it does so at a price. Homogeneous cultures may make it easier to bring people to salvation but harder to make of them authentic disciples of the Kingdom.

### Culture and the Healthy Church

<i>Culturally Homogeneous</i>	<i>Culturally Diverse</i>
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Narrow focus	Broad focus
<i>Growth is goal</i>	<i>Authenticity is goal</i>
<i>Culture focused</i>	<i>Kingdom focused</i>

### Discernment and Discrimination

<b>Personal Preferences</b>	<b>Irrational Prejudice</b>	<b>Unjust Discrimination</b>
tastes, styles, etc.	Preferences + a judgmental attitude	Prejudice + power to shape social systems
<i>This is to be tolerated.</i>	<i>This is to be discouraged.</i>	<i>This is to be controlled.</i>

- **Personal preferences** are neither good nor evil as long as they are “personal”. When my “personal preferences” are exported as God’s preferences they become abusive and evil to those who have different “personal” preferences.
- **Irrational prejudice** is evil not because it is prejudiced but because it is an irrational fear. There is a rational prejudice that is a part of discernment and should be encouraged as a virtue of mature wisdom. We must tolerate but not encourage irrational prejudices.
- **Unjust discrimination** is the coupling of irrational prejudice with political power and applied to the social culture. Discernment of good and evil will involve discrimination. It is the “unjust” discrimination that is the problem. Public policy and law can address unjust discrimination.

#### 4. The Gospel of Grace is linked to faith in Christ. **A Gospel Community is Christ centered.**

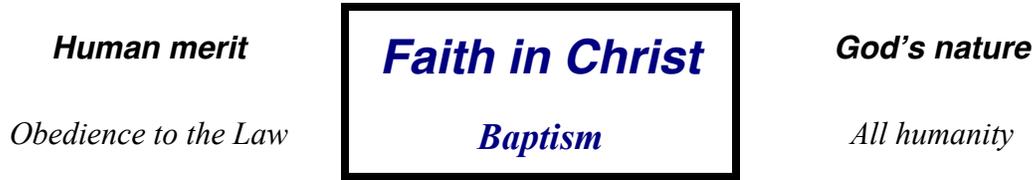
34 And opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand {now} that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him. 36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)-- 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 {You know of} Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and {how} He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him. 39 And we are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that He should become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, {that is,} to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. 43 **Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.**"

- All Christians embrace the grace of God in Christ. They differ however in the conditions and basis of that grace.
- Some feel that because God is love, He, She or It accepts everyone no matter what they believe or do. This is called universalism and is found in liberal congregations.
- Others believe that God’s grace covers past sins and inadvertent slips into sin but it is conditioned on genuine repentance from all moral failure. If there is no moral discipline

there is no grace available. This is expressed in some fundamentalist, some Wesleyan, and some Calvinistic churches.

- d. The Biblical basis for grace (In my view) is the merit of Christ, which is accessed by faith alone.

### **Three spheres of God's Grace**



#### **5. The Gospel of Grace is the heart of the New Covenant community.**

**A Gospel Community embraces as family, all who share Christ's Spirit.**

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 45 And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. 46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 47 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we {did,} can he?" 48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days."

- a. Each Christian community (church) projects a different emphasis. Sometimes the emphasis is spelled out, while at other times it is "sensed" but not expressed openly.
- b. A test question that might reveal the emphasis of a church is the answer to this question – What does a person have to do or believe to be officially (or unofficially) excluded from the community?
- c. Authentic Gospel communities should (I believe) be centered on the Grace of the Gospel. This Word of Grace should be preached, felt, expressed, and protected.

### **Three types of "Christian" community**

