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Listen to this note from a jail cell in downtown Birmingham in response to clergy and the church.

“Wherever the early Christians entered a town the power structure got disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being 'disturbers of the peace' and 'outside agitators.' But they went on with the conviction that they **were a 'colony of heaven' and had to obey God** rather than man. They were small in number but big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be 'astronomically intimidated.' They brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contest.

Things are different now. The contemporary Church is so often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the Church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the Church's silent and often vocal sanction of things as they are.” MLK April 16, 1963 in a jail cell in downtown Birmingham

Church, the world is watching, and they are waiting. This morning we open the Word of our Lord to Acts 10:28. We are continuing a series called “the model church.” I believe today’s message is not only at the **right time**, but it is the **needed treatment** for our culture that is starving for a model community. We find in Christ what and who we all are created to be.

**Big Idea: The church is our glimpse into the perfect heavenly community**

**[Good News for All People Acts 10:28-36]**

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**Hostility: The Forbidden Gospel (10:28)** Peter, the leader in the early church says to his new friends, “You know its forbidden.” **Have you ever said or felt that statement?** Have you ever had someone reject you because of some barrier? Peter is talking to another man named **Cornelius**, a commander of one of the six units of one hundred roman soldiers. Peter uttered these words not out of spite but religious commitment, because Cornelius was a Gentile, not of Jewish decent like Peter.

Peter reminds us in vivid honest language that we all live with a certain set of rules, prejudices, and norms. Peter reinforces for Cornelius the religious limitations into why his **taboo (forbidden)**. The concern is that a Jewish person would become unclean during the visit with a gentile who had

contact with unclean food. **Can you imagine how Cornelius felt in this moment?** This man was not converted from idolatry or pagan life, he was a God-fearing righteous man, and yet pushed away. **Ever been hurt by someone in the name of God?** Many of us can identify with the weight of Peter's statement on the ears of an outsider. **The forbidden Gospel.**

Peter in one of the most vulnerable interchanges in all the Bible, reveals his **orthopraxy**—his soul. And in speaking from the heart, Peter peels back the layers of the forbidden gospel. You see Christ radically breaks barriers, and it is in the demolition of our organic **boundaries that makes the world—makes us—uncomfortable with the message of Christ.**

And know what you're thinking, **"I don't have any prejudices."** And yet the pure Gospel belies our thinking. **We all live with a certain tint to our vision:** whether it be cultural, social, religious, or familial. And these bents are not necessarily sinful in themselves. However, when your natural biases control your ability to pursue Christ, spiritual decay ensues. **Will you let the Holy Spirit do work this morning?** What in your life today hides the gospel?

You will never grow until you give the Spirit of the living God unmediated access to your heart. It's the places where we say to God, "stop," that hinders your growth.

How would you fill in the blank, **"I can't believe these \_\_\_\_\_ people."** Maybe for you that person is a liberal or conservative, democrat or republican, illegal immigrant, homosexual, or even a fan of the opposing team. Who is the one who has you proclaiming, "You know its forbidden!"

What person if they walked in and sat by you in worship would not receive the warmest welcome? What person if they sat with you would hinder your worship? Muslim, a person of a different color, a mother or father who abandoned you, a convicted felon? Someone with special needs, mental illness, the addict, or the one who is dressed provocatively because that the only clothes they have? Remember the words of Peter, "You know it's forbidden... **but God.**"

**The Gospel's answer to all your personal barriers and hang-ups is this:** *God has shown me that I must not call any person impure or unclean.* Our world is bombarded with messages that only include ½ of the verse, but we the church can bring the whole gospel.

### **Hunger: The Beautiful Gospel (10:28)**

There was no formal law that strictly forbade Jews from associating with Gentiles, it was just that they had to be prepared to **pay a price for doing so**, the price being becoming ritually unclean. Right now, Jesus asks us,

“are you prepared to pay the price and become socially unclean so that another will hear that they can be washed clean by the blood of the Lamb?” **Church, it’s worth it.** It is worth becoming unclean today so that someone will know Christ forever.

Although the initial greeting was awkward, “You know its forbidden,” the gospel had so **radically shaped Peter’s and Cornelius’ heart** that an outsider could declare with enthusiasm, “**it was good of you to come.**” Cornelius recognized Peter’s kindness, and that he deviated from normal Jewish practice. **Brother Christian, do others recognize your kindness?** Do they recognize that you are willing to deviate from societal norms so display the love of our Father. **The incarnation, the death of God upon a cross was the grandest cosmic deviation the world has ever seen.** This is what our world hungers for!

And in one of the most beautiful sentences ever spoken in the history of the world, Peter opened his mouth and said, “I understand that God doesn’t show **favoritism.**” This word is only found in Christian literature and appears only here in and James 2:9. **It literally means to “lift the face.”** Jesus is the one who lifts your face and says, “look at me.”

**Why is this such a glorious truth?** A partial God would never leave the 99 for the 1. A partial God would never seek and heal the lost and broken. A partial God would never invite Cornelius in with kindness and goodness. This is glorious because I am the 1, I am the broken, I am the lost, I am Cornelius. **Church rejoice that our God doesn’t show favoritism!**

**This is the news that our world hungers for.** Our culture is looking and longing for a church that is a shelter for the broken, marginalized, outcast, and prodigals. Our world secretly hopes that this is true, that the people of Christ will always be a community who keeps an eye out for “those people.” Why? **Because the gospel vividly reminds that you are those people.**

We must find in the church what our world longs for, a community where all stigmas are removed and the only thread that holds men and women together is the power of the Holy Spirit. We must be a community in which others say, “y’all should not be together. Apart from Jesus, we can’t explain this collection of vagabonds.” To this we reply: In Christ alone.

**Are you ready to be the people God has called us to be? How does this look?**

**Love.** Our goal is not to get people to trust us so they will hear; our mandate is to love in such a way they will beg us to tell us about our great Savior!

**Hospitality.** What would happen if we were known for having open doors and invited Cornelius in? How radical would our lives be if we invited one person, one family, in a month. Will you make a commitment to Christ to open your doors up to your neighbors?

**Conversation.** Are you ready to give a reason in season and out of season for the hope that is within you? 2 Tim. 4:2 Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. One day in the early part of the 1900's a chief in Malaysia was repairing one of his wooden idols when he told his wife, "this is foolish. Here we are worshipping these wooden objects, but our hands are greater than they are" So for twenty-five years they went into their prayer room every day and prayed to the unknown God. One day a Christian missionary came along and introduced the chief and his wife to the Bible and to Christ. When they heard the good news, they rejoiced and said, "This is the one true God we have been seeking all these years." (NIV, 342). We must be people who speak of our redemption, and our stories. When was your last gospel conversation? **Crossover**

**Marginalized.** Do we speak up and step up for those who can't speak for themselves? The broken, outcast, hurting? We have ministries in our church for those in need, take ownership. The Maltose people are a mountain tribe in India that has had such a high mortality rate that they were expected to become extinct by 2025. They almost never bathed since they have no access to water. Consequently, the rest of society rejected them, and people will not go near them because of the smell they emitted. Missionaries from the Friends Missionary Prayer Band began a work among this tribe. They not only visited their villages, they even lived in their homes beside them. By 1996 almost ½ of the Maltose people became Christians with a significant change in their lifestyle (NIV, 331). **Forbidden... but God**

### **Conclusion- Head, Hands, Heart**

Can you imagine what would happen if this message gets out? Acts 10:34 Peter began to speak: "Now I truly understand that God doesn't show favoritism, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36 He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.

**Dear friend, God will not show favoritism.** You will not go to heaven based upon who you are or what you did. We are all sinners in need of grace. Right now, if you will surrender to Jesus Christ you will be saved. Do you feel like your too much of a sinner? Our God doesn't show favoritism. If you don't know where you stand with the Lord, it's time to make it right today.

What would happen if this message gets out? Acts 10:34 Peter began to speak: "Now I truly understand that God doesn't show favoritism.

## **Conclusion**

**This is our legacy.**

Are you ready and willing to let Jesus Christ shake your life?



# Notes

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28 Peter said to them, “You know it’s **forbidden** for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner, but God has shown me that I must not call any person impure or unclean. 29 That’s why I came without any objection when I was sent for. So may I ask why you sent for me?”

## Forbidden/Unlawful

**88.143** **αθεμιτος**<sup>b</sup>, ον: pertaining to being bad and disgusting on the basis of not being allowed — ‘disgusting, bad.’<sup>10</sup> ποτοις, και αθεμιτοις ειδωλολατριας ‘drinking parties and disgusting worship of idols’ 1Pe 4:3.

**13.144** **αθεμιτος**<sup>a</sup>, ον: pertaining to what is not allowed — ‘not allowed, forbidden.

The idea of indecency shows the term’s emotive implication. Here it is open association with Gentiles that is prohibited because of fear that Gentiles are unclean (ECNT, 393).

This is a taboo. The concern is that a Jewish person would become unclean during the visit with a gentile who had contact with unclean food.

Two or three days previously, Peter would not have believed it possible that he could find himself in such company (Bruce, 209).

It was largely because of their lack of scruples in food matters that Gentiles were ritually unsafe people for a pious Jew to meet socially (Bruce, 210).

There was no formal law that strictly forbade Jews from associating with Gentiles, it was just that they had to be prepared to pay a price for doing so, the price being becoming ritually unclean (BW3, 353).

## I must not call

These terms in Acts 10:14 that describe Peter’s commitment, God reversed (ECNT, 394).

**Acts 10:30** Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this hour, at three in the afternoon, I was praying in my house. Just then a man in dazzling clothing stood before me **31** and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your acts of charity have been remembered in God’s sight. **32** Therefore send someone to Joppa and invite Simon here, who is also named Peter. He is lodging in Simon the tanner’s house by the sea.’ **33** So I immediately sent for you, and it was good of you to come. So now we are all in the presence of God to hear everything you have been commanded by the Lord.”

### **Cornelius**

Cornelius is a centurion, a commander of one of the six units of one hundred men without a cohort (ECNT, 384).

Cornelius was not converted from idolatry or a dissolute life, but when he came to understand the significance of Jesus and his ministry it changed his life dramatically (Peterson, 335).

### **Good/Kind**

The note about Peter’s kindness recognizes that Peter has deviated from normal Jewish practice

### **Lord**

They know God is responsible for their being together. God is a witness to what is taking place (ECNT, 395).

**Acts 10:34** Peter began to speak: “Now I truly understand that God doesn’t show favoritism,

### **Opened His Mouth**

This phrase is sometimes used to introduce a weighty utterance (NIV, 334).

The first words that Peter spoke were words of the weightiest import, sweeping away the racial and religious prejudices of centuries (Bruce, 211).

### **Favoritism**

This word is only found in Christian works and appears only here in the NT and in James 2:9.

This word is constructed on a Hebrew idiom meaning to life a face (NAC, 260).

88.239 προσωπολημπτης, ου *m*: (derivative of προσωπολημπτεω ‘to show favoritism,’ 88.238) one who unjustly treats one person better than another — ‘one who shows favoritism, a respecter of persons.’ Καταλαμβανομαι οτι ουκ εστιν προσωπολημπτης ο θεος ‘I realize that God does not show favoritism (in dealing with people)’ Ac 10:34.

The point is that he makes no distinction in how he reacts to people. All have the same potential access to God. In every nation, those who fear him and perform righteousness are acceptable to him.

**35** but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. **36** He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.

### **Every nation**

The phrase every nation is placed forward in the Greek sentence for emphasis (ECNT, 396).

### **Fear/ Right**

### **Acceptable**

It appears to refer to a person being in an acceptable state of repentance to hear and receive the message of salvation and release of sins (BW3, 356).

### **Peace**

The effect is that Cornelius enters into the peace of God and can now serve God in a way that honors Him (ECNT, 396).

## **Illustrations**

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The Maltose people are a mountain tribe in India that has had such a high mortality rate that they were expected to become extinct by 2025. They almost never bathed since they have no access to water. Consequently, the rest of society rejects them, and people will not go near them because of the smell they emit. Missionaries from the Friends Missionary Prayer Band began a work among

this tribe. They not only visited their villages, they even lived in their homes beside them. By 1996 almost ½ of the Maltose people became Christians with a significant change in their lifestyle (NIV, 331).

One day in the early part of the 1900's a chief in Malaysia was repairing one of his wooden idols when he told his wife, "this is foolish. Here we are worshiping these wooden objects, but our hands are greater than they are" So for twenty-five years they went into their prayer room every day and prayed to the unknown God. One day a Christian missionary came along and introduced the chief and his wife to the Bible and to Christ. When they heard the good news they rejoices and said, "This is the one true God we have been seeking all these years." (NIV, 342).

Ancient societies and religion were not known for their care for the sick and dying. Christians who often risked their lives to care even for non-Christians represented a radical difference in the values taught by the Bible than anything else known at that time. Rodney Stark, author of [The Rise of Christianity](#), argues that some of the marked growth of the church in the early centuries can be attributed to care and compassion Christians showed for the sick. He tracks increased conversion rates during three plagues: the Antonine plague (2nd c.), the Cyprian plague (3rd c.), and the Justinian plague (6th c.). Christians demonstrated their love for God and biblical values, and they offered a very attractive witness.

# Application

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If God showed favoritism you and I would never be his.

Comparison is the thief of joy.

## Hospitality

When non-Christians see Christians at close quarters through either the giving or receiving of hospitality, they can observe things about Christians that they would not be able to see in any other way, and their false concepts will be corrected (NIV, 330).

## **Criticism**

When styles of music we are unfamiliar with are presented in church, many protest. Handel's Messiah was not received warmly in England due to its creativity.

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, broke new ground for the church by going out to the poor, the alcoholics, and others considered untouchable in society. Respected and devout leaders of the church criticized him (NIV, 344). Someone else even added that in his own studies he learned that the number of William Booth's name added up to 666.