

Why Send For Peter?

An angel appeared unto a man named Cornelius. This devout, God-fearing, alms-giving man was praying to God -- as was his custom -- when an angel of God appeared to him in a vision. (You can read it for yourself -- Acts 10)

According to popular conceptions this could mean hallucinations, latter-day revelations, or special divine appointment. An even greater number would say this proved that Cornelius was saved from his sins -- had experienced a "work of grace." I have heard of people "voted into the church" on far less evidence. But the angel was none of these things to Cornelius.

The angel told Cornelius to send for Peter, who shall "tell thee what thou oughtest to do;" or "tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." (See Acts 11:13-f.)

Prayers, alms, and devoutness notwithstanding, this man still needed to be saved. Christianity is far more than good citizenship, moral uprightness, or even respect for God. A Christian has all of this, and more; but these things are found among many who have not yet become followers of Jesus Christ and hence have neither salvation from past sins nor hope for Heaven.

But why send for Peter? Could not the angel tell Cornelius all he needed to know? Or the Holy Spirit -- did not this miraculous out-pouring do all that should be done for him?

When Peter began to speak (11:15) the Holy Spirit was indeed poured out upon these Gentiles --- a marvelous thing for Peter and those Jews with him to behold. Until recently they had thought the gospel was for Jews only. (See 10:9-16, 25-29; 11:1-4) It took this demonstration of divine acceptance (as subjects of the gospel) to convince the Jews that the gospel was for all nations (10:44-f.11:15-f).

But now that they were proven proper subjects of the gospel, there remained the task of preaching: to them, and urging those who would to obey. People must be taught of God; so they may hear, learn and come. (Jn. 6:45) We draw nigh to God through the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:17-21)

What the angel or Holy Spirit could do was hedged about by divine regulations. God had placed His truth in "earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7) that its divine origin might be the more apparent. It was not His will then or now that heavenly messengers deliver the story of salvation to the world. It was "once for all" delivered to inspired men, and through them to the written form in which we now find it. (Jude 3, Eph. 3:1-f. 2 Pet. 1:14-f.)

Peter did exactly what God intended he should do. He preached the good news of Christ to Cornelius and his household, and baptized those who gladly received the word. Note, He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." (Acts 10:48)

Cornelius was not saved -- was not a Christian -- until he heard, believed and obeyed the gospel of Christ.

- by Robert Turner

Your Heart's Desire

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Romans 10:1).

Stop and consider the apostle's affection and concern for people. Paul's desire was genuine: he wanted lost souls to be saved.

Christians need to have the same attitude today. The "heart's desire" is a strong feeling of sympathy and compassion. This cannot be created without proper cultivation.

Consider our loved ones who need to be saved. Generating interest in seeing them obey the gospel should not be a hard task. The question is, Are we as concerned for their souls as Paul was for all Israel? Paul expressed what his desire was; have we?

Next time opportunity knocks, go up to your loved one and say something like, "I want you to know that my desire and prayer to God is that you might be saved. Will you obey?"

People have told me that they long for the day when a certain one will be baptized. The truth is, the best thing that can help that to come about is to express it openly to the individual.

Jesus, when seeing the sinful state of the people, cried out, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have

gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37).

Our Lord illustrates perfectly that a meaningful spiritual concern comes when seeing the true state of the lost. Many opportunities to express our heartfelt desires are missed because we close our eyes to the sinful state people are in. We may love someone, but if they are not a Christian, they must be viewed as being in bondage to sin.

When we see the end of their way, which is everlasting destruction, then efforts are put forth. It may be hard to see that the Lord would damn one who loves you so much, but remember, it's not their love for you that will get them into heaven; it's their love for the Lord.

Go ahead; say something today while today still is.

-by Chuck Bartlett

How Does The Lord "'Open" Hearts?

In Acts 16 we read: 'And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lyda, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us. whose heart the Lord open that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us." (vs. 13-15). How did the Lord open her heart? Does He do the same thing to people today? Does this imply the necessity of a direct action of the Holy Spirit? Is it possible to know and obey the will of God without miraculous divine intervention in our lives?

Look carefully at this immediate context. Notice that they "spake unto the women" (vs. 13), and Lydia "heard us" (vs. 14), and she "attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (vs. 14). It seems clear that the means by which Lydia's heart was opened was by the Word of God. There is nothing mysterious here. Rather, it is a demonstration of the power of the gospel (Rom. 1:16), and an example of God's plan for "preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

Whatever the Lord did, and however the heart of Lydia was opened, it was the same thing that occurred in every other case of conversion in the book of Acts. Remember, God is "no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34,35). On Pentecost they "heard" and were "pricked in their heart" (2:37). On that day many "gladly received his word and were baptized" (2:41). Other examples abound in the book of Acts that directly link the teaching of the word with a heartfelt, obedient response (4:4, 8:12, 13:12, 13:48, 15:7, 16:32-33, 17:32-34, 18:8, 19:5).

The Lord "opens" hearts today in exactly the same way He always has -- through the preaching of the Word.

- by Greg Gwin