

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Series: Next!

(studies in the book of Acts)

Applied Theology

(Acts 10:1--11:18)

Study #14

Introduction: Bible study methods, 101...

I'll never forget sitting in the home of good friends talking with a small group of people about life and God. We were all listening to a very sincere woman tell the rest of us how much she wanted to understand the Bible. The problem was, it seemed to her (and here, she held out her hands as if holding Webster's Unabridged Dictionary), "*It's just so big.*"

Yep. It's big, all right. And the size of the Bible can present a daunting challenge to anyone who wants to crack it.

But, while large, the Bible is not insurmountably difficult to understand. You devour it the way you devour an elephant - one bite at a time. And if you, the Bible student, will remember the three steps of Bible study, the Book will become yours faster than you would ever dream.

The three steps? Observation. Interpretation. Application. When studying the Bible, we first OBSERVE what is in the text. Then, we INTERPRET what we observe. And then we APPLY what we have interpreted.

Or, as someone once said, we ask -

- What does it say?
- What does it mean?
- So what?

When it comes to Bible study, all three steps are critical. If we skip any of the three, we'll either miss crucial details God wants us to know, or we'll come up with wacky interpretations, or we'll stop short of allowing God's Word to have its life-changing effect on us.

Well, this morning we are going to explore an episode in the life of the early church that brings into play all three steps of Bible study.

We'll observe God doing something really wonderful. We'll interpret what He does so that it makes sense. And then we'll join the church in Jerusalem in an exercise in advanced, applied theology.¹

We'll begin by setting the context for the story.

Background: Two miracles and an oddity

The last paragraph of Acts 9 describes two miraculous scenes.

First, the apostle Peter healed a man named Aeneas, who had been bed-ridden for eight years in the city of Lydda.

Then, Peter traveled to Joppa and raised a little girl named Tabitha from the dead. That's two miracles. And those miracles were followed by an oddity.

At the invitation of the believers there in Joppa, Peter settled down and stayed for a few days in the home of a man named Simon, who was, by profession, a tanner.

It is very interesting that Peter would stay in Simon's home.

Those who made their living tanning hides and working with leather were, according to Old Testament standards, habitually unclean because they were always around dead animals.

¹ You can tell the importance Luke attached to this incident by the space he devoted to it. He had very limited space for writing and yet had to choose from an almost limitless supply of stories. He chose to take up fully 6% of his book with this one incident, far more than any other one incident - including Pentecost.

Not every orthodox Jew (and Peter had always been a perfectly orthodox Jew) would have been willing to stay with a tanner. Yet that is exactly what Peter did.

If it seems to you that Peter, a growing Christian, is becoming more open to think and re-think old traditions, I think you're right. That growing openness is about to come in real handy.

Theology: Gentile Salvation

Two Visions (10:1-16)

Cornelius' vision from God (10:1-8)

Meet Cornelius! (10:1-2)

We begin our adventure today in the city of Caesarea, a city of Samaria.² Caesarea was one of the most beautiful cities in Palestine.

Located on the Mediterranean coast, it was named "Caesarea" in honor of Caesar Augustus. The city boasted magnificent buildings, a great harbor, and a very diverse population.

In this city lived a Roman centurion named Cornelius.

Centurions were the backbone of the Roman army. They were commanders of roughly a hundred men (although the number could vary). They carried the responsibilities of a captain to our way of thinking, but were non-commissioned officers.

Centurions understood loyalty and were famous for their courage. Virtually every time a centurion is mentioned in the New Testament, he is described in positive terms, as an honorable man.³

And Luke tells us more about this centurion, this Cornelius.

² Not the same city as Caesarea Philippi, which was farther inland and located near the Sea of Galilee on the slopes of Mount Hermon. Jesus spent some time there.

³ The historian Polybius wrote, "Centurions are not required to be bold and adventurous so much as good leaders, of steady and prudent mind, not prone to take the offensive or start fighting wantonly, but able when overwhelmed and hard-pressed to stand fast and die at their post."

[Acts 10:1] Now⁴ there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,⁵ [2] a devout man and one who feared God⁶ with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

Cornelius was a non-Jew, a Gentile, through and through. But he admired the Jews, helped the Jews, and had a fear and reverence for the God of the Jews.

He was not a child of God - but then his story isn't over. In fact, the best part of his story is just about to commence.

Cornelius' vision (vv. 3-6)

Cornelius was a man of prayer, and he prayed at the times set aside by Jewish tradition - mid-morning and mid-afternoon. One day, during afternoon prayer, out of the blue, an angel appeared to him.

[3] 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!" [4] And fixing his gaze upon him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he (the angel) said to him (Cornelius), "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. [5] Now dispatch some men to Joppa, and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; [6] he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea."

In this vision, God did not save Cornelius. The angel didn't even tell him how to be saved. He simply told him to go and fetch a man he had never met, Simon Peter.

⁴ It is impossible to date this event with precision. Perhaps 7-8 years after the Day of Pentecost.

⁵ The Italian Cohort, to which Cornelius was attached, was originally located in Rome, but auxiliary units (like Cornelius' in Caesarea) were kept up to strength after their formation by local recruitment.

⁶ God-fearer - attended the synagogue and to some degree honored Jewish law and custom, but not proselytized (i.e. - not circumcised). Luke so often makes references to God-fearing Gentiles that we are left to wonder if he himself was a God-fearing Gentile at the time he first heard the Gospel.

Well, Cornelius was a man who knew what it was to issue commands. He also knew how to take them. So...

Cornelius salutes smartly and obeys his orders (vv. 7-8)

[7] When the angel who was speaking to him had departed, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants, [8] and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

With the delegation from Cornelius on their way, Luke shifts our attention to the city of Joppa, where Peter was staying.

*Peter's vision from God (10:9-16)*⁷

Peter, at prayer (vv. 9-10)

Joppa was a coastal town, located about thirty miles south of the coastal city of Caesarea, in other words, about a two days journey.

If Cornelius received his vision on the first day, then his servants would have left for Joppa on the second day and would have arrived at Joppa on the third day.

In the middle of this third day, Peter was praying. The flat roof of a house provided good privacy, so Jews often retreated to the roof for prayer.

Peter had climbed the outside staircase to the roof and was alone, praying. It was lunchtime. So, in addition to being prayerful, Peter was likely also hungry.

Those in the house were preparing food. The aroma of the cooking was making its way to Peter. He was ready and anxious for food.

At this exact time Peter *[10] fell into a (God-induced) trance.*⁸ While he was in the trance, God gave Peter a vision.

⁷ Peter fulfilled the word of Jesus that he would be the one who held the keys to the Kingdom. (Matthew 16) Peter unlocked the door to the Gentile world for Christ.

⁸ Consciousness was at least partially suspended, but we don't know all that might be implied by this message that Peter was in a "trance."

Peter's vision (vv. 11-16)

[10:11] and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, [12] and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.

The animals described here are what are termed "unclean" animals in the Old Testament. In Leviticus, God had laid out very specific dietary laws. There were animals that were not to be eaten by the Jews, but which Gentiles ate routinely - pork and shellfish, for example.

While watching the vision in the trance, Peter heard a voice. *[13]...* (the voice of God? the voice of an angel?), ***"Get up, Peter, kill and eat!"***

Instinctively, Peter knew that this was all wrong. This command violated the Mosaic Law.

I suspect that Peter thought that God was testing him. And after having failed one test rather spectacularly (remember the three denials before the servant girl in the courtyard on the night of Jesus' trials), he likely wanted to make sure that he passed THIS test.

So, he said, ***"NO!"*** He actually refused the command of God.

[14] But Peter said, "By no means,⁹ Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean."

The response from heaven was immediate. *[15]... "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy."*

This response was not at all what Peter was expecting! But the vision and the message repeated two more times.

⁹ This would be the third time in Peter's life that we know he refused God's command. In all three cases he disobeyed because he was trying to do the right thing - not a great idea. In Matthew 16:23, He tried to tell Jesus that He would never die, to which Jesus responded, ***"Get behind Me, Satan!"*** Then, in John 13:8, Peter told Jesus that he didn't want Him, the Master, washing His feet, to which Jesus replied, ***"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."***

There was a total of three lowerings of the sheet, three commands to “*kill and eat*” and three instructions to no longer consider unclean what God has cleansed.¹⁰

The whole experience was odd and it left Peter scratching his head and wondering what in the world THAT was all about.

While he was scratching his head, he looked to the north and saw three men coming from the direction of Caesarea. That’s right - God timed His gift of Peter’s vision to coincide with the arrival of the men from Cornelius.

Two Meetings (10:17-29)

At Simon’s home (10:17-23)

Cornelius’ messengers arrive at Simon’s home in Joppa (10:17-18)

[17] Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon’s house, appeared at the gate; [18] and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there.

Peter heard these men asking their question. And the Holy Spirit spoke to him.

The Holy Spirit spoke to Peter (10:19-20)

[19] While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit¹¹ said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. [20] But get up, go downstairs, and accompany them without misgivings; for I have sent them Myself.”

¹⁰ Many have seen an interesting parallel between the three-fold vision and Peter’s three-fold denials and Jesus’ three-fold commission to Peter to “*tend My sheep*” (John 21). Peter seemed to do everything in threes. Nothing significant here, just interesting ☺

¹¹ The Holy Spirit takes the credit for having directed these three men to Peter. No wonder many have called the book of Acts, “*The acts of the Holy Spirit*”!

The Holy Spirit is incredibly active in this whole scene. And He isn’t finished, not by a long shot.

We watch Peter descend from the roof. He took the first step and spoke to the travelers.

Cornelius’ messengers meet Peter (10:21-23)

[21] Peter went down to the men and said, “Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?”

And they eagerly told Peter their mission.

[22] They said, “Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews (Obviously, these men are proud of Cornelius.), was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you.”

Wow - what an invitation for a preacher! “*Would you please come and bring a message to us?*”

Peter was confused after the vision of the sheet and the animals. Now, with the arrival of the men from Cornelius, he is intrigued.

[23] So he invited them in and gave them lodging.

That’s quite a mix in one home. Peter, a Jew, a few unclean Gentiles, and his friend, Simon, the ceremonially unclean Jewish tanner.

After one brief night’s lodging, the crew hit the road to travel north to Caesarea where Cornelius lived.

At Cornelius’ home (10:23b-29)

Peter’s arrival at a packed house (10:23b-24)

[23b]...And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. [24a] On the following day he entered Caesarea.

We are now four days into this drama. At dawn of the fourth day, Peter, the three men from Cornelius and a delegation from the church left Joppa to travel to Caesarea.

They arrived at Cornelius' home on the fifth day, to find themselves at a packed house, because Cornelius *[24]...had called together his relatives and close friends.*¹²

He's a good man. He wanted his friends and family to hear whatever it was this Simon Peter fellow had to say.

The opening scene is fascinating.

An introduction to remember (10:25-29)

IN THE HOME OF A GENTILE (V. 25A)

[25a] When Peter entered...

That is remarkable!

Peter, a Jew ENTERED the home of a Gentile. Not that there was anything in Old Testament Scripture that would have prevented him from entering the house of a Gentile. But first century rules and expectations and taboos sure would have!

Among other things, interaction with Gentiles was considered risky business because their handling of food was not "kosher."

And if a Jew came in contact with non-kosher items, he would be rendered ceremonially unclean. But here is Peter, walking right through the front door - essentially thumbing his nose at centuries of tradition.

And why did he feel so free to walk through that door? It was because he "got" the message of the vision of the sheet!

Now, of course the vision of the sheet dealt explicitly with clean and unclean animals. There are now no more unclean animals.

¹² Cornelius had certainly been confident (hopeful?) that Peter would come to him.

But Peter applied the vision of the sheet to people. The message is that God no longer divided people into clean or unclean categories and no longer considered certain classes of people, by definition, unclean.

PROSTRATE ON THE FLOOR (V. 25B)

Then, as Peter walked across the threshold, *[25b]... Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him.*¹³

Fascinating. A soldier in the army of the occupying nation falls down in reverence at the feet of a citizen of the subordinate nation.

This speaks volumes about how spiritually hungry Cornelius was for Peter's message.

And Peter's response to Cornelius was, well, interesting...

PETER'S ADDRESS (VV. 26-29)

[26] But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man." [27] As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled.

Peter surveys the scene. The preacher in him is getting excited - there are people here! To talk to!! Yes!!!

And he gave an introduction to his speech guaranteed to whet the appetite of any audience.

[28] 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. [29a] That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for."

I'm guessing that you and I would be pretty offended if Peter gave this little speech to us. But he was sure telling it just like it was!

¹³ Worshiped - perhaps too strong. Surely, though, intense honor was intended.

The Jews believed that they were a privileged nation, God's chosen people (a correct observation and interpretation of Scripture). Because of this, there was a tendency for them to avoid contact with Gentiles (an incorrect application!).

Yet in the rooftop vision God had convinced Peter that he should consider no man unclean. He could hang with anybody.

This new understanding gave Peter a freedom he had never known before, freedom to walk right in to a Gentile's home, freedom to speak with a Gentile, freedom to preach to a Gentile!¹⁴

Peter turned the floor over to Cornelius with a question, *[29b] "So I ask for what reason you have sent for me."*

And Cornelius told Peter about the vision God had given him.

Two Messages (vv. 30-43)

Cornelius speaks (10:30-33)

His vision from God (vv. 30-32)

[30] 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, [31] and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. [32] 'Therefore send 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.'

And then, having related the vision, he assured Peter that everybody was waiting with bated breath to hear what he had to say.

¹⁴ Even though at one point later on he failed in living up to this principle (see Galatians 2), Peter embraced the principle here, recognizing that the wall that had separated Jew and Gentile for centuries - the highest wall between humans that has ever existed - had been knocked down by Jesus.

His invitation to Peter (v. 33)

[33] "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."

With that, Cornelius sat down and waited for Peter to speak.

And speak Peter did! He at last understood that he was being asked to share the Gospel with these folks. And he - lovingly! - let 'em have it!

Peter speaks (10:34-43)

No partiality with God (10:34-35)

[34] 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.'"

"I see it all now more clearly than I ever have before this very minute. God's promise to Abraham had been that He would bless ALL the nations of the earth - but that is a detail I and my people have forgotten of late. I see now that God doesn't play favorites."

These words are revolutionary. They sweep away centuries of prejudice.

There are examples of Gentile salvation in the Old Testament, but it was unheard of to make no distinction between Jew and Gentile!

And Peter proceeded to preach Jesus to these non-Jews who had gathered in Cornelius' home.

No one like Jesus (10:36-41)¹⁵

[36] "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)--

¹⁵ This sermon probably represents the most common form in which the Gospel was presented in the first century. There is a focus on John's baptism, Jesus' Galilean ministry, His Judean ministry, His crucifixion and His resurrection.

[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 Spirit¹⁶ and with power, and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him. [39a] We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem.”

I don't believe that Peter only preached for the 1-2 minutes it takes to read these words. I think that Luke is just hitting the highlights. These are the Cliff notes.

But you'll notice that he mentioned Jesus' baptism, the peace that He spread wherever He went, His Galilean ministry, His ministry of loving good works, His destruction of the work of the devil - *“I saw it all with my own eyes!”*

And then he moved to describe the end of Jesus' life - and beyond.

[39b]...“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 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.”

In the unabridged version of this sermon - which I'm sure we'll get to TiVo in Heaven - I'll bet that Peter told the tale graphically, with enthusiasm, with details.

And now Peter's rounding third base. He's heading for home. He has introduced his listeners to Jesus and explained the Gospel facts. Now, he evangelizes.

Salvation in no one else!! (10:42-43)

[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.

¹⁶ See Isaiah 61:1-2 for the Messiah being anointed by the Holy Spirit.

[43] Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

You can just sense Peter getting really revved up here. He is hitting his stride and is about to give an invitation, call people to a decision, ask for a show of hands with every head bowed, lead in the sinner's prayer - when a most unusual thing happens.

The Holy Spirit declined to wait for Peter's altar call.

Two Pentecosts! (10:44-48)

Welcome to Jesus, Gentiles! (10:44-46a)

[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 (from Joppa) were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also.¹⁷ [46] For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God.¹⁸”

As Peter was evangelizing, as Peter was assuring them that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins, these Gentiles placed their trust in Him and the Holy Spirit “fell” on them.

The Holy Spirit knows faith when He sees it. He didn't need to see a raised hand. He saved and sealed and indwelt those who believed - just like that!

Minus the sound of a mighty, rushing wind and the appearance of tongues as of fire resting on each one of them, this is a replay of the Day of Pentecost - and Peter saw it exactly for what it was.

That's why, when he saw the evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence, he moved to baptize the world's newest Christians in water!

¹⁷ This testifies to the acceptability of Gentiles on the basis of faith alone (which anticipated the decision of the Jerusalem Council, chapter 15).

¹⁸ The descent of the Spirit was proof positive that the Lord had accepted these people as they had accepted Him. The speaking with tongues was undeniable evidence to Peter and his companions that the Spirit had been poured out.

Welcome to the water, Gentiles! (10:46b-48)

[46b] 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?” [48a] And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Carrying out the Great Commission of Matthew 28, these new converts immediately confessed their faith to others in the city of Caesarea through baptism.

Welcome to Cornelius’ home, Peter! (10:48b)

Then, these new Christians approached Peter - Jewish apostle, Simon Peter - and made a request. Kind of silly, actually. **[48b]...Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.**

Imagine that! Gentiles, presuming to ask a full-blooded Jew to stay in their home overnight. Preposterous!

Preposterous - except that Peter said, “YES!” The barriers were down and Peter agreed to stay with Cornelius for a few days.

Now, you tell me, what did Peter eat while he was staying with them? What do you think? Anything and everything that they ate! He enjoyed bologna and cheese sandwiches, pork rinds, baked ham, and bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches, oysters on the half shell.

And why was he so free to enjoy these foods? Because he had observed the vision of the sheet, interpreted the message of the vision, and fully applied the message.¹⁹

Well, after a few days, Peter decided to leave Caesarea and head back to Jerusalem. And back in Jerusalem we get to see just how challenging application can be.

¹⁹ The words of Jesus preview to the cleansing of all foods. Mark 7:18-19 - **“And He said to them, ‘Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?’ (Thus He declared all foods clean.)”**

Biography: Gentile Acceptance (11:1-18)

Calling Peter on the Carpet (11:1-3)

News travels fast about Gentile salvation (v. 1)

[11:1] Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

The shockwaves from the earthquake of what happened in Caesarea were felt in congregations throughout Israel, but most especially in the mother church, the First Church of Jerusalem.

Gentiles saved! Gentiles believing in Jesus as their Messiah! Wonderful. There was probably great rejoicing over Gentile salvation.

But, the news of what Peter had done AFTER their conversion - eating in a Gentile home - had also reached Jerusalem.

So, whatever joy there may have been at the salvation of Gentiles was overshadowed by awkward misgivings about the violation of kosher.

News travels fast about Peter’s behavior (vv. 2-3)

[2] And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised²⁰ took issue with him, [3] saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”²¹

While he was in Caesarea, he had stayed in a home that didn’t keep kosher. He ate non-kosher food.

And the “circumcised” Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were unhappy with him. Not because he EVANGELIZED Gentiles, and not because he BAPTIZED Gentiles. They were unhappy because he SOCIALIZED with Gentiles.

²⁰ Those who were circumcised = those who were especially careful about ceremonial and otherwise cleanliness/purity, probably doesn’t refer to all the Jews in the church at Jerusalem, even though all the men in the church were circumcised.

²¹ Nothing is said in chapter 10 about Peter eating with Gentiles, but it is implied.

The good folks in the Jerusalem church believed that GOD might treat Jews and Gentiles the same. They just had a really hard time believing that God would expect THEM to treat Gentiles and Jews the same!

Well, evidently, Peter had anticipated their objections and was prepared to meet them. His response to their objections was to let them travel the same journey he had. He let them observe and interpret - and then he called them to apply.

First, he told them of the vision he had received from God while on Simon's rooftop in Joppa.

Pulling the Rug Out from Under Peter's Critics (11:4-17)

A VISION... (11:4-10)

[4] But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying, [5] "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me, [6] and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air. [7] "I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' [8] "But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' [9] "But a voice from heaven answered a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.' [10] This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky."

Then, he told them of the arrival of the visitors from Cornelius.

...followed by VISITORS... (11:11-12)

[10] "This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky. [11] "And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea. [12] "The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house.

Then, he told them what happened when he preached the Gospel in Cornelius' home.

...followed by THE EVENT... (11:13-16)

[13] "And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; [14] and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' [15] "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning.

[16] "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

Finally, after relating all that God had done, Peter posed this question to his Jewish brothers:

...followed by THE QUESTION (11:17)

[17] "Therefore, if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

Peter is arguing here that he did the right thing in baptizing the Gentiles. He defends accepting them into the church. After all, they received the Holy Spirit, just as the apostles had received the Holy Spirit.

But he is also arguing that he did the right thing in hangin' with the Gentiles. He says that he would have been **STANDING IN GOD'S WAY** if he had not eaten with them, hung with them, befriended them.

He would not have fully applied God's truth if he had not fully accepted them and loved them. A full application of the truth of the Gospel requires that we love.

And with this explanation from Peter and his companions (the six witnesses), the church in Jerusalem "got it."

Standing on Truth AND its Applications (11:18)

[18] When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

Conclusion:

Observation. Interpretation. Application.

Peter observed what happened in Cornelius' house. He watched as all of those who had gathered received the Holy Spirit.

Then, Peter interpreted what he observed. God saves Gentiles who believe in Jesus, just as surely as He saves Jews who believe in Jesus!

Then, Peter applied. He baptized them.

But the application didn't end there. He went on to love them and accept them and befriend them. He sat down at mealtime and enjoyed table fellowship with them. Peter understood that the message of the vision of the sheet wasn't fully applied until love was applied.

Today, we have observed the wonderful story of the conversion of Cornelius and his guests. We've even interpreted it. We understand what it means. That God accepts anyone who believes in Jesus.

Now we apply. And the application of the story of Cornelius is love.

Those whom God accepts, we accept. Regardless of the difference between us, it makes no difference. Church is the one community where people can know with certainty they will be accepted, loved, and embraced.

Jesus said that when those outside see how we love each other, they will know that we are His followers and they will know that the Father sent Him.

Love is that powerful. And advanced applied theology always ends in love. It did in the first century, and it does in 2010, too.