

Dr. Ron Armstrong • August 22, 2021

The Movement Begins: Lighting the Fuse in the Church

Acts 10:1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion... [2] He and all his family were devout and God-fearing... [3] One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" [4] ... "What is it, Lord?" he asked. ... "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. [5] Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter..."

[7] ... Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier ... [8] ... and sent them to Joppa.

[9] About noon the following day ... Peter went up on the roof to pray. [10] He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. [11] He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. [12] It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. [13] Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

[14] "Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

[15] ... "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." [16] This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

[19] While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. [20] ... Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." [21] Peter went down and said... "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

[22] ... "We have come from Cornelius the centurion... A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say."

[23] The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. [25] As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at

his feet in reverence. [26] But Peter made him get up. "Stand up... I am only a man myself." [27] Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. [28] He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. [29] So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

[30] Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour... Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me [31] and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. [32] Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter... [33] So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

Acts 11:1 The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. [2] So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him [3] and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

[4] Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened:

[18] When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

A. We judge things as horrible, unclean, or wrong when they are often just different.

1. God always intended that Gentiles would be brought into the kingdom. Isaiah 49:6.
2. In chapter 9 Saul/Paul is designated the apostle to the Gentiles. Why send Peter?
 - a. It would take someone of Peter's stature.
 - b. It was going to light a fuse in the church.
3. Up to now, it was just conflict between the Hellenists and the Hebraic Jews, but now God adds the "unclean."
4. As churches popped up, the size of the faction influenced the problems they had. That's still true.

B. Six lessons for dealing with disagreeing groups.

1. Leaders should get involved. If unattended, factions can sap the energy from an organization.
 - a. Allow some time, but if it comes to open conflict, you waited a little too long.
 - b. Facilitate community. Don't try to straighten people out. Help them reach out.
2. Search for the feelings. Factions often dress up their differences in moral language, but it is usually about feelings. (Early church? Fear.)
 - a. Acknowledge or name the feelings.
 - b. Even if you disagree with what they did, empathize with how they felt.
3. Don't fall in the fault trap; it slows progress.
 - a. It is rarely all one side's fault.
 - b. We almost always underestimate or minimize our role.
4. Help them see a common purpose. Talk about the higher good that can be done, like reaching the crowd around Cornelius.
5. Accept that you will not always be successful.
6. Check your own heart. Peter couldn't minister to them until he stopped judging them.