

The Truth Series

Part 2

Acts 10

By Gary Hoffman

Matthew 5:17-19 *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 **Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**”*

Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? *Is the law sin?* Certainly not! On the contrary, **I would not have known sin except through the law.** For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, *“You shall not covet.”*

2 Thessalonians 2:5-12 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. ⁷ **For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work;** only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. ⁹ **The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan,** with all power, signs, and lying wonders, ¹⁰ and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive **the love of the truth,** that they might be saved. ¹¹ And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, ¹² that they **all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**

Did God, through this vision to Peter nullify the food laws here? Is this the issue within the context or has our tradition become more authoritative than what is actually written in the Scriptures. One of the most powerful yet simple ways to narrow down the actual meaning of a verse is to understand the context of the particular section of scripture. This is sometimes very clear and sometimes takes extensive research into the history, culture and language. In this section of Scripture it is a combination of knowledge of history, but like Mark 7 it is predominantly an issue of context.

- *1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.*
 - Cornelius was “one who feared God” or literally “a God fearer”. A God fearer was a designation for a gentile who committed himself to following Yahweh, the God of Israel, but who was not circumcised, yet. Because the traditional ritual of becoming a proselyte (a gentile who became an Israelite through a circumcision ritual) was essential to being a member of Israel, a God fearer was still considered a gentile. He was to be treated as a gentile and all the man made rules for interaction with gentiles applied to the God fearer. This was contrary to what the Hebrew Scriptures taught. The Torah stated that anyone who joined themselves to Yahweh was a child of Yahweh See Isaiah 56.
- *3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!” 4 And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?” So he*

said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. 6 He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.” 7 And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually .8 So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa. 9 The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to **pray, about the sixth hour.** 10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, **he fell into a trance** 11 and saw heaven opened and an object **like** a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, “**Rise, Peter; kill and eat.**”

- Peter is in a trance, has a vision and is told to kill and eat animals. This is a vision. These were not real animals, but a vision. Visions were usually something with a deeper meaning than what was seen. Daniel and Joseph are two who had visions. In Josephs for instance the sickly wheat did not literally eat the healthy wheat. Same with the sickly and healthy cows. The dreams were metaphor for what God was telling Joseph.
- **14 But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.”**
 - Peter says no to the LORD? How can Peter say no here? He can if the voice is contradicting a clear mandate in the Torah. The only standard for obedience that Peter had and which we have to determine proper action is the written Word of Yahweh. Peter also confirms that even after 10 years as a follower of Jesus he still has never eaten anything common or unclean. Now, the LORD is either changing the food laws here or He is using this vision to make a very specific point. Also note that Peter here did not interpret any of Jesus’ words to nullify the food laws, for he was still maintaining them. Peter did not interpret Mark 7 as authorization to eat unclean meats.
- **15 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”** 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.
 - This happens three times and the vision ends. The question is: what did God cleanse and what did Peter call common or unclean? In context this in relation to Cornelius as we will see. This was the Gentile who submitted himself to Yahweh and His Torah. This was not a food issue. We will also see that the issue was not about what Peter was eating, but who Peter was **not** eating with. One important note here is the word usage of Peter for common and unclean are *koinoo* for common and *akathartos* for unclean. The LORD in His response clarifies the issue by only using the word *koinoo* for common. This is another verification that His intent and emphasis were not on food.
- **17 Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate.**
 - Peter was pondering (he was perplexed) this vision and wondering what it meant. It was not obvious. Was God telling Peter that He could now eat any animal and that he was now making

all animals ok to eat. Was the unchanging Creator, now rescinding what was recorded by Moses as His law? Was God telling Peter that he could go out and now eat all things?

- *18 And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. 19 **While Peter thought about the vision**, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are seeking you. 20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.”*
 - Peter was still thinking about the vision. He was seeking the meaning of the vision which he had seen. He was waiting for God to reveal the true meaning of the vision.

- *21 Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from **Cornelius**, and said, “Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?” 22 And they said, “**Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews**, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.” 23 Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him. 24 And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.*
 - We know that Cornelius is a Gentile God Fearer and a devout man, with a good reputation among all Jews 9:1-2. Remember, Cornelius was not a full convert to Judaism according to the traditions of the elders that Jesus has such a problem with in Mark 7. He was treated just like a gentile. As we will see, this means that a Jew could not fellowship and eat with him in his home, because he was considered common. Because of this view, which was in contradiction to the written law, the Jews even went to the extreme of building a middle wall of separation in the temple area. This wall kept the gentile god fearer and the proselyte from coming near the temple itself. This was in total contradiction to the torah of God, which allowed even the gentile to bring sin offerings to the LORD’s alter in the tabernacle. There was a big problem with the oral traditions and commands of men, as there is today.

- *25 As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.” 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. 28 Then he said to them, “**You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation.**”*
 - Peter acknowledges the traditional law. Note: this is not a command of Torah, but one added by the Jews. The Greek word here for unlawful is equal to disgusting, detestable or forbidden.

- *But God has shown me that **I should not call any man common or unclean.***
 - Peter explains his interpretation of the vision. His interpretation has nothing to do with the food laws of Leviticus, but with gentiles. No MAN is common or unclean. We cannot read into this anything more than what Peter determined this vision to mean. It was his vision. We must consider the implications of determining a meaning of this vision other than what Peter clearly stated. We are adding to the word of God, if we do. This would be like me telling you a deeper more significant meaning to Joseph’s dream and of Daniels interpretation of the

king's dream. It is ridiculous to think of. Yet because of tradition, we allow this to happen here. We simply cannot add more revelation to this vision than what Peter received.

*29 Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?" 30 So Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31 and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.' 33 So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God." 34 **Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. 36 The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ— He is Lord of all—**¹*

- Peter again clarifies His interpretation of the vision, that God shows no partiality between the Jew or the Gentile who fears God and works righteousness. The Messiah is LORD of all who fear God and work righteousness. He shows no partiality, they are one in the same. This is clearly an issue about the oneness of the Jew and the Gentile through faith in Jesus. The vision was NOT about food! The context and the conclusion of Peter make this very clear. His interpretation also, though in disagreement with hundreds of years of oral Jewish law, does not contradict the Torah. Again, we have missed the point of this incredibly important section of Scripture.

¹*The New King James Version*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982.