

GROWING — Empowered to Grow III

For the last two weeks, we have been looking at how God has empowered the church to grow and carry forth the ministry of Jesus Christ. We looked at:

- The Father sent the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower those who follow him.
- While the OT law guided those who followed it, it simultaneously condemned them. We need resurrection life where there was death and release from shame.

This week, we'll look at the growth of the church occurred through the empowering presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

God's word is a powerful force that is living and active and is crucial if we want to grow.

The Spirit is Who Births the Church

Take some time to pause and consider the questions highlighted in **blue**.

What do you see about God and his character and work in the earth?

If the HS empowers the church for growth, how does he do it?

Acts 10:1 - 23

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he

gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. 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!"

Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Peter's Vision

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

"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The New International Version. (2011). (Ac 10:1–23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

What do you see about God's character and work in the earth?

- With Cornelius, God sees individuals, i.e., knowing Cornelius' name.
- God wants to help us know him and how to be right with him.
- We don't get to decide if we're good with God. He is the one who decides people's standing.
- Good works gets God's attention; he tells Cornelius to send for Peter.
- God shows up and prepares Peter simultaneously for the call.
- God wants humans to be the primary mediators the knowledge of Jesus. God didn't try to "save" Cornelius, but brought both parties together and prepared so that together, they would experience the communion of God with all of humanity (especially between Jews and non-Jews in this passage).

God shows us how to see and what he sees and we get to align our views with God's views. Peter needed to align his views with God's.



If Jesus is the King of the World, and if we are allegiant to this King, then our perceptions, opinions, and views surrender to the King's views.

A Cultural Extension

Under regular Jewish custom, this dinner with Cornelius should never take place. This is an example of a view that needed to surrender to the King of the World.

What is he discovering about God and what is he doing with this discovery?

Acts 10:23 - 33

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' 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."

Peter acknowledged that these Gentiles (non-Jews) who weren't even present at Pentecost (Acts 2) and weren't even invited to that party; they missed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

But it doesn't matter. He brought the Holy Spirit and brought the party to them. 🎉

No catch. No circumcision. The Holy Spirit continued to birthed the Gentile church.

Acts 10:44 - 48

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

The New International Version. (2011). (Ac 10:23–48). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Peter can just show up without having to worry about the "uncleanness" of the Gentiles.

Peter uses language repeatedly to describe this event: "What happened to us happened to them! The same thing at Pentecost happened to the Gentiles!"



It can happen to anyone, in our house, right now. It can happen to you.

Acts 11

The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, "*You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.*"

The New International Version. (2011). (Ac 11:1–3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Luke doesn't hold back in his recollection of the story: he described how the believers criticized Peter for eating with the Gentiles.

Notes about Luke: He was a physician. Physicians at that time typically came from the slave population.

It is very grieving to see in today's world believers full of the Spirit of God perpetrating racism prejudice, and classism, but we see from this passage that the same problems that plague us today haven't changed.

The Holy Spirit didn't discriminate who he empowers. He laid down a precedent: Do not call anything unclean that God will call clean. He will empower whoever he chooses. Ethnicity, class, status, and gender do not hold the Holy Spirit back.



The only hindrance to Holy Spirit empowerment is where we stand with King Jesus: Do we surrender to him and confess our sin and repent?

Whether it's the first time or the 77th time, we must continue to surrender to Jesus Christ.

Acts 10:34 - 35

Then Peter began to speak: *"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."*

The New International Version. (2011). (Ac 10:34–35). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



If you're like Cornelius or Luke, who missed the invite or aren't the "right" ethnicity, you need to understand that God still sees you, hears you, and will empower you if you turn to surrender to him. Surrender, not status is the prerequisite.

I hope this is good news for you. I hope you can see how the Holy Spirit doesn't choose between status, class, gender, or ethnicity.

What do you think would happen if we allowed the Holy Spirit to empower us so we could extend that same view of building bridges of reconciliation between the world and the King of the World?

We may need to surrender or prejudice and errant ways of thinking for this to happen.

Are you like the believers in Acts 11?

How do godly, Jesus-loving, Spirit-filled people get it so wrong sometimes?

Surrender

Acts 11:18

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, *"So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."*

The New International Version. (2011). (Ac 11:18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Those believers were humble enough to change their errant thinking and praise God and surrender to the way of King Jesus over their own.

So the invitation to you is the same: Surrender your errant thinking to King Jesus and praise the King, allowing the Spirit to empower you.

We have God's word, God's Spirit, and his People.

Growth is an ongoing process of surrendering to God, his Spirit, and his community to grow up.

You can pray and repent for your sin, surrendering, saying, "not my ways God, but yours."

You can surrender your thinking to his thinking, and surrendering to his word.

You can ask the Holy Spirit to empower to you and ask him to align your errant views with his views and values.

You can develop a life of prayer; Cornelius and Peter were praying, and those sessions of prayer were what incited this amazing story.



You can grow in the Spirit, grow in community, and grow in God's word.