

What does it look like when we know the truth but have not yet learned to live it? Acts 10 puts that question right in front of us through one of the most pivotal moments in the early church. Peter, a man who walked and talked with Jesus himself, who had heard the gospel from the source, suddenly finds himself face to face with a situation his upbringing and tradition told him was off-limits. A Roman centurion named Cornelius, a Gentile, a man outside the covenant community, has been praying and giving generously, and God has heard him. Through a remarkable sequence of visions and a direct word from the Holy Spirit, Peter and Cornelius are drawn together in a divine appointment neither of them arranged. The spiritual lesson here cuts deep: knowing the Word of God and living it are two very different things. God used hunger, vision, and the voice of the Spirit to move Peter past his comfort zone and into a moment that would change the trajectory of the entire church. The sheet full of animals, the voice saying to rise and eat, the three-fold repetition, all of it was pointing not just to food but to people. God was declaring that He alone decides what is clean and what is unclean, and no human tradition has the authority to overrule that declaration. As we sit with this passage, we are invited to ask ourselves honestly: where are we holding back from what God is clearly calling us to do, simply because we have never done it that way before?

Title: Knowing It Is Not Living It: The Gospel Without Borders

Sermon Summary: Drawing from Acts 10, this sermon explores the transformative journey of Peter and Cornelius as the Holy Spirit orchestrates a divine appointment that breaks cultural, religious, and personal barriers. The central tension of the message is the gap between knowing the Word of God and actually living it out. Peter, despite having walked with Jesus and heard His teachings firsthand, still struggled to obey when God called him to step outside his comfort zone and Jewish tradition by entering a Gentile's home. Through this story, the sermon challenges believers to move beyond head knowledge into active, Spirit-led obedience. The gospel is for everyone, God alone determines what is clean and unclean, and the Holy Spirit empowers believers not merely to understand the truth but to experience and live it in ways that can transform their communities.

Key Points:

- The Holy Spirit arranges divine appointments, and believers must be ready, willing, and obedient to act on them without hesitation
- God recognizes and honors those who are holy, God-fearing, and faithful in prayer, just as He honored Cornelius
- God alone determines what is clean and unclean, and no person is beyond the reach of His grace or outside the scope of the gospel
- Human traditions and religious customs can become barriers to obedience, and believers must measure all traditions against the Word of God
- Humility is essential for those whom God uses, because every good thing comes from the Father and not from human effort or ability
- The preaching of the gospel, not human technique or method, is what the Holy Spirit uses to bring people to salvation

- The "whosoever" of John 3:16 is not merely a doctrine to be known but a reality to be lived and demonstrated to the world
- The Holy Spirit moves according to His own sovereign will and is not confined to human formulas or expected sequences
- Believers are called to invite the ongoing presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit into every area of their lives

Stories:

- The pastor recounts his own youthful ambitions, including trying to be better than Willie Mays as a baseball player, drag racing and losing money every Sunday, and aspiring to farm large portions of northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, all as illustrations of the human desire to be recognized
- A story is told of a new pastor who moved the grand piano to the other side of the sanctuary and was subsequently fired, only for the piano to remain in that new position ten years later, illustrating how deeply entrenched tradition resists change until it is introduced gradually
- The pastor shares a personal encounter with a man named Alex, a highly intelligent actuary in his eighties whom he met at the Grand Geneva, to whom he said he could not convert him but could only tell him about Jesus who could, prompting Alex to respond positively to that approach
- The sermon references the previous week's message about Ananias, who was sent by God to Saul despite knowing Saul had been persecuting Christians, as a parallel example of obedience to a difficult divine assignment
- The accounts of Peter healing Aeneas, a man paralyzed for eight years, and raising Tabitha from the dead in Acts 9 are referenced to illustrate Peter's spiritual authority and the importance of remaining humble despite being used powerfully by God

Scripture References from the Sermon

- Acts 10:1-48 — the primary text of the sermon, covering Cornelius's vision, Peter's vision, their meeting, Peter's preaching, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles
- Joel 2:28-29 — the promise that God would pour out His Spirit on all people, with sons and daughters prophesying, young men seeing visions, and old men dreaming dreams
- Matthew 15:11 — Jesus teaching that what enters a person's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of the mouth does
- Colossians 2:16 — the instruction not to let anyone judge believers regarding food, drink, religious festivals, new moon celebrations, or Sabbath days
- Romans 14:17 — the kingdom of God described as not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit
- John 3:16 — God's love for the world expressed through the gift of His Son, so that whoever believes in Him receives eternal life
- Psalm 19:14 — the prayer that the words of one's mouth and the meditation of one's heart would be pleasing to God
- Acts 9:32-43 — the healing of Aeneas and the raising of Tabitha/Dorcas, referenced when discussing Peter's humility despite performing miracles

- Acts 9:10-17 — the account of Ananias being called by God to minister to Saul, referenced as a parallel example of obedience under uncertainty
- Romans 8:14 — those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God
- James 1:17 — every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights
- Galatians 2:11-14 — Paul confronting Peter for his hypocrisy in eating separately from Gentiles when Jewish believers were present
- Proverbs 3:5-6 — trusting God with all your heart and acknowledging Him so He directs your paths, relevant to following divine appointments
- Isaiah 55:11 — God's word will not return to Him empty but will accomplish what He intends, directly supporting the sermon's point about speaking the gospel
- Acts 2:17-18 — the Pentecost fulfillment of Joel's prophecy about the Spirit being poured out
- Luke 14:23 — the compulsion to go out and bring people in, regardless of social boundaries, supporting the theme of reaching the Gentiles

The pastor opens by asking, 'Have you ever known something and not done it?' -- in what areas of your faith life is there a gap between what you know to be true and how you actually live, and what is keeping that gap open?

Cornelius was recognized by God because he was devout, God-fearing, generous to the poor, and consistent in prayer -- which of these qualities do you find most challenging to cultivate, and why?

The Holy Spirit arranged a divine appointment between two very different men in Peter and Cornelius -- can you think of a time when God orchestrated an unexpected encounter in your life, and how did you respond to it?

Peter had walked with Jesus, heard his teachings firsthand, and yet still hesitated to go to a Gentile's house -- what does this reveal about the difference between intellectual knowledge of God's word and the kind of trust that moves us to act on it?

God told Peter not to call anything impure that He had made clean, and the vision ultimately pointed to people, not food -- are there people in your life whom you have written off as beyond reach, and how might God be challenging that assumption?

The pastor draws a distinction between the traditions and customs of men and the actual word of God -- how do you personally discern which practices in your faith community are rooted in Scripture and which may simply be human tradition?

When Cornelius fell at Peter's feet in reverence, Peter immediately lifted him up and said he was only a man -- how does Peter's humility in the face of significant spiritual success challenge the way our culture, and even church culture, tends to celebrate and elevate leaders?

Peter preached the gospel simply and directly, without a formal altar call or structured response, and the Holy Spirit fell on everyone who heard -- what does this tell us about our tendency to rely on methods and formulas rather than trusting the power of God's word to accomplish its purpose?

The pastor points out that the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit before they were baptized in water, meaning God did not follow the expected order -- how does this moment invite you to loosen your grip on the way you think God is supposed to work and remain open to His sovereignty?

At the end of the chapter, Cornelius asks Peter to stay, and Peter remains to answer questions and fellowship -- what would it look like for you to genuinely invite the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit to dwell in your daily life, not just visit it on Sundays?