

=CONVERSIONS=

Lesson 8

The Conversion of Cornelius

AIM: to teach my pupils the story behind the conversion of Cornelius, as told in Acts 10

POINT OF CONTACT: There are several ways that this story could be introduced. Cornelius was a soldier. A piece of soldier's equipment could be brought to the class and discussed as a point of contact. Also Peter was opposed to eating anything unclean. It might be interesting to start the lesson discussing unclean meat at this point; that is, meat that was unclean for the Jews to eat in the Old Testament days.

It also might be wise to review the conversions studied thus far. Why not write on one side of the chalkboard the names of the people converted, such as Zacchæus, the publican, the thief on the cross, etc. On the other side, write something pertaining to them, such as "saved on a cross," "saved at midnight," etc. Do not have the things pertaining to the convert beside his name. Jumble up the names and the facts, and have the class members know the story about each conversion.

I. THE SINNER (CORNELIUS).

1. He lived in Cæsarea. Cæsarea was a town north of Joppa on the seacoast. It was a busy town, a shipping town, an important place. We're told of many interesting things that happened in Cæsarea. Among them was Paul's trial before being sent to Rome.
2. Cornelius was a centurion. That means that he was not a Jew, but he was sent by the Romans to be in charge of a portion of the army. The fact that he was called a centurion simply means that he was over 100 men, and he was responsible for them. The word "centurion" comes from a portion of the word "century" which means 100.
3. He was devout. The word "devout" means he was "sincerely religious." Here was a man who was doing all he knew to do, yet he was not saved. Sincerity is not salvation. A person can be sincerely on the road to a certain place and end up in the wrong place.
4. He was one who feared God. See Acts 10:2. The word "feared" means that he respected and revered God. Still he was not saved, for he had never trusted the Lord Jesus Christ. There are some very devout people who respect and revere Deity, but have not been saved.
5. His family joined him in his religious fervor. Notice the words, "with all his house." He was sincere and devout. His family was convinced of this, and they followed his leadership religiously.
6. He was generous. Here was a man who gave alms. In other words, he helped the poor. He gave much alms. The word "much" means "multiple alms." He was a very generous giver, yet he was wealthy.
7. He "prayed to God always." This means, "He prayed about everything." In other words, when he had a decision to make, he prayed about it. When he took a trip, he prayed about it. If he had a need, he prayed about it. He prayed about everything. Here was a man who meant business about his religion, yet he had never heard the story of grace through the Lord Jesus Christ in spite of the fact that he was certainly a sincere and comparatively good man.

This man should be compared to the Pharisee of a previous lesson. The Pharisee was a hypocrite, a proud man, an arrogant man. Cornelius was humble, feared, and respected; yet he too needed to be born again.

8. He had loyal and faithful workers. Read Acts 10:7. He was the kind of man who inspired loyalty among those who worked for him, yet he needed to be born again.
9. He was courteous and respectful. See Acts 10:25. His respect and courtesy are evident in this verse. He knew manners. He was a man who believed in respect for authority, and he manifested courtesy and etiquette. Here is something that should be stressed. There is still a right and proper way to do things. Etiquette, manners, courtesy, etc. are still in order for today.

II. THE SOUL WINNER, Acts 10:17-22. (Teacher, read very carefully this story and relate it to your class. It is a beautiful and interesting story. From the story, glean all the truth that you can.) By all means, stress these three points:

1. There is someone that only you can win. This is a wonderfully blessed truth. There may be better soul winners than you, but no matter how great the soul winner, there is someone who will not be saved unless you win him. God gave Cornelius to Peter. Peter must win him. God has given some souls to every Christian. If we fail to win them, they will be lost forever.
2. We should win all types, races, and classes of people. Peter was a strict Jew. He had never eaten a bite of pork or a piece of catfish or anything else that was unclean. He did not associate with Gentiles. God was telling him that he should win all types of people. It matters not what stature in life or what race. It matters not the financial or educational background. Every man needs Christ. We should do our best to win all we can to Him.
3. If any man in the Bible would have been saved without help, it would have been Cornelius. The truth is, however, he, too, needed the human instrument that tells of the Saviour. It matters not how much Bible one knows. It matters not how devout one is. God has ordained it that men should win men to Christ. The Bible is needed. The power of the Holy Spirit is needed, but the human instrument is also needed. You will note in all of our conversion stories there has been a human instrument. Jesus won the thief and Nicodemus. Philip won the Ethiopian eunuch. Peter won Cornelius. God has planned it and ordained it so that the human instrument is a part of salvation.

III. THE SALVATION. People often ask Bible teachers and students what happens to the people who never hear the story of Jesus Christ. Do they go to Hell? The answer is, "Yes, they do." However, the Bible teaches that every man in the world has a little light, enough to know that there is a Divine Being. If he acts on the light which he has, God will give him more and more light, and as long as he continues acting on the light that he has, he must some day hear the story of Christ and have a chance to accept Him. Hence, a person who has never heard the Gospel, but does not act on what little light he does have, will go to Hell because he has not acted on the light given to him. If he acts on that light, God will give him help so he can be saved. John 1:9 says that Jesus is "...the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Psalm 19:1 reminds us "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." This means that even the stars speak to us that there is a God, and if a man who is a heathen never having heard the Gospel looks at the stars and does not see God in them, he will die and spend eternity without Christ. If he sees God in them and accepts the fact that there is a God, God will give him more light. As long as he keeps accepting the light that he has, God is bound to give him a chance to know the story of Christ.