

# Gamma

## Acts 10-11

### Study 10 Cornelius is converted

#### Case 1

**Tom Tham is a very good and moral person. He worships God in his own way. He takes elements of the Bahai faith and combines with Christianity and practices his own version of faith. He is a very kind person and always helps out in the street feeding at the FBC on Saturdays. He even attends church on occasion when friends invite him. He seems satisfied that he is pleasing God**

**One day whilst he was attending bible study on Acts 10 he brought up Peter's words on Acts 10 :34 So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him**

**(Acts 10:34-35 ESV)**

**He then says I am acceptable to God why do I have to come to Jesus. I have my own version of faith. God accepts my sincerity why can't you guys. Why do you still keep calling me a sinner...its insulting you know!**

**Q 1. How can you use the story of Cornelius to share with Tom that he still needs salvation?**

First, Cornelius respected God. Even if you don't know this background information, we can see infer from the text that Cornelius, a) prayed to the one God of Israel (v.2 – "*prayed to God regularly*"), b) obeyed the general moral law of God (though not all the OT ceremonial regulations) (v.22 – "*righteous*"; v.35 – "*do what is right*"), and c) was kind to the poor (v.2 – "*gave generously to those in need*"). In sum, he both respected and prayed to God in general, and lived a moral life in general. He was by no means a Christian, having heard nothing yet about Jesus Christ. He was also not a Jew, though from the Jews he has probably learned things about God that he accepted and honored. Rather he was the classic "good non- Christian" who honored God in a general way and lived

and exemplary, just and generous life.

Second, God respected Cornelius! Two statements are very strong, even startling. First, v.4 – “*your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering — [mnemosymos] — before God.*” The Greek word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to the burnt offering (cf. Lev.2:2), which was not a sacrifice for sin, but an offering of gratitude to God. Second, in v.35, Peter says (referring to Cornelius) “*[God] accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right*”. This means that Cornelius “lived up to the light that he had” — i.e. what he did know about God he honored. All he knew was that God was great and worthy of obedience and respect and gratitude. So he gave it. And God in turn shows Cornelius a certain regard.

The nature of this “regard” is extremely interesting, and we must adopt a very carefully balanced approach here. Some read the word “*accept*” as meaning that people like Cornelius are saved — accepted in the full sense of being “justified” (Rom.3:21ff). But that not only contradicts the rest of the Bible, but the rest of Acts (see 4:12) and even the rest of this story — for if Cornelius is saved, why does Peter need to come to him and preach the gospel to him? On the other hand, many Christians seem to regard all non-Christians as equally despicable. Here, however we see God showing some kind of regard and respect for a man who does not have enough spiritual knowledge to be saved, but who is honoring all the spiritual knowledge he has. Therefore, Cornelius is a “seeker” (cf. I Cor. 14:24, where “*one who does not understand*” means “a seeker after more knowledge; an inquirer”).

Third, nevertheless Cornelius was not saved. Cornelius, despite all his goodness and desire for God, did not have “*life*”. 11:18 tells us that only after hearing the gospel were he granted life — i.e. eternal life. Before, he was a “nice” person, not a “new” person. In order to get life, he needed to do two things. First, he had to repent (11:18). Obviously, if he scrupulously obeyed God’s law, then he would have repented for sins often before. So what is this repentance that he was now, for the first time granted? He repented not just of his sins but of his best deeds — he repented of “working” for his salvation (Rom.4:5). Second, he had to believe in Jesus Christ, his person and work (Acts 15:7). Only then was he “*saved*” (11:14), have his sins

forgiven (10:43) and receive the Holy Spirit (10:45).

**Conclusion** Some might say that anyone who has this kind of heart goodness and desire for God is always a “pre-Christian” — someone who God is preparing and who inevitably will become a Christian. That is very possible — but this passage does not say that. What it does say is that, a) first, no matter how good and wonderful a person is, he or she cannot be forgiven and fully accepted without the gospel and the new birth. We cannot expect people to be saved without the preached word of Christ. If Cornelius needed to be saved — everyone does! But it also teaches us that b) second, we must show great respect for non-Christians who obviously are capable of a great deal of moral and spiritual wisdom. Some theologians would say that we should realize that God gives a lot of “common grace” — that he gives a lot of moral sense and wisdom and virtue to people apart from faith in Jesus Christ. And we should recognize such people. God obviously prefers righteousness to unrighteousness and sincerity to insincerity in everyone. But we should not on the other hand forget that we need “special grace”, the revelation of Jesus Christ, if we are to become members of God’s family. So this passage should not influence us to stop evangelizing the nations, but it should bring us to do so with a great deal of civility and respect and honor for those like Cornelius.

**Q 2.**After your explanations Tom is more willing to listen now , how should you draw him into gospel ?

**1. Determine the amount of knowledge and the amount of feeling.**

A.If he has a lot feeling and not enough on knowledge, your course of action is fairly simple. He may be ripe for conversion. Present the truths of the gospel in a balanced, full way. You may be bold to press for a commitment. If he will not, discover at what point he has trouble. Review the outline briefly, asking, "Do you understand and agree that first,\_\_\_\_\_, and second,\_\_\_\_\_..."

B.If he has a lot of knowledge and short on feeling, you may need to elaborate the gospel presentation with vivid illustrations and pointed applications.. Show him that Christianity is not an academic matter, not a matter of weaving a web of intricate thought-forms. Say, as Whitefield, *"It is one thing to assent with your mouth, and another thing to believe from the heart. If you have really done that, a truth affects you mind, will, and emotions. Have you ever been saddened by your sins? Have you cried out to God that you need a savior? Has the mercy of God in Christ seemed precious to you?"* [Caution: Keep in mind the words of Thomas Watson — *"But wouldst thou know when thou hast been humbled enough for sin? When thou are willing to let go thy sins. The gold has lain long enough in the furnace when the dross is purged out; so, when the love of sin is purged out, a soul is humbled enough, what needs more? If a needle has let out the abscess, what needs a lance? Be no more cruel to thyself than God would have thee."* – from A Body of Divinity, p. 451

**2.Impress on Tom the need to come to God on gospel terms immediately.**

God owns you. Every day you rule your own life you become more and more guilty.

The concern you have now is the gracious influence of the spirit of God. If you decide to come to God at your own convenience, you are mocking God. He is too great for you to snap your fingers when you are ready. Who is King around here? You are in great danger of losing the openness of heart you have now. Do you think you can repent any time you wish? No! Repentance is a gift from God, which he is offering you now. You must take it or risk becoming too hard to care. Then you will be lost forever. Don't delay. Even a passing conversation with a friend can drive away your convictions. Act now.

### **3. Beware of a spirit of self-righteousness.**

When a man is first awakened to his need, he usually sets out on a furious effort to please God through his efforts (church attendance, prayer, obeying the law). Warn him of this.

Say, "Don't stop striving to please God, but do it in the spirit of the new covenant, not the covenant of works. There is no actual saving value in your strivings, only gratitude value (saying "thank you" for a full salvation). Until you accept this and fall down helpless at the feet of Christ's mercy and are willing to accept the free gift of eternal life, you cannot be saved."

Warn him that he can assent to justification by faith in the abstract and still try to catch God's eye with his efforts, so he must examine his heart.

### **4. Beware of making comfort your ultimate end instead of giving God his due.**

• if you see yourself as a sufferer looking for relief primarily, you will never find peace. God is no sugar daddy to be used by you to secure your own happiness. Say to him: "Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after — what? Blessedness? No! Righteousness! Happy are they, which don't seek happiness, but rather to give God his due. Happiness never comes to those who seek it directly. You are a sinner, in need of pardon. Give God what you owe: repentance, faith, and obedience. Your troubles will take care of themselves. Until you have grasped this in your heart, you'll not have peace."

**Q3. After discussing the issue with you Tom comes back after a week and says, “ I just can’t believe” What will be your response?**

What you are describing is simply the settled distaste every natural heart has to God. Don't make an excuse for it. In yourself, you are unable to believe, but the Holy Spirit has already come to your aid. If you see what you have to do and wish that you could do it, then that is evidence of the Holy Spirit's work. (You give yourself too much credit! You couldn't see all these things unless the Spirit was already at work! Don't despair.) Now, as long as this divine aid is offered to you, you must act. Don't wait for some kind of psychological sense of certainty; faith is acting on what you know to be true. Paul says: "We walk by faith, not by sight". See? He doesn't pit faith against reason; he pits faith against feelings and appearances. Do you see what you must do? Then repent, trust, and obey Christ. How can you stand on this plea of inability? That is an abstract question, and it is a sinful refusal.

**Q4. He comes back after another week and says, “ I have tried all that you have said but it just doesn’t work” What is your response?**

You need to evaluate: Either he hasn't 'tried' properly, or he has a false understanding of what 'worked' means. What do you mean by 'worked'? Did you expect a certain feeling? Did you expect your problems to go away? Faith is acting on what you know to be true, despite how things feel or appear ("We walk by faith, not by sight".) Imagine that a doctor tells you, "You are dying because of all the fat and starch you are eating; if you stop eating steak and potatoes, your body will begin to strengthen". The first time someone beside you eats a big steak dinner, won't it smell great? It doesn't smell dangerous and deadly. Now if you exercise faith, you follow what you know to be true (this food is poison to me), or you can follow your appetites, senses, and feelings. What if you exercise faith? Will it immediately feel wonderful? NO! Your stomach will growl and you will feel unsatisfied. It is only as you practice faith over time that the healing and health (that is, the good feeling and visible

effects) will come. So it is with saving faith. You may not at first experience anything remarkable. Nor will all your problems be solved. But your standing with God is changed, and eventually, the effects will flow out into your whole life. Phil. 2:12-14 tells us that the strength and life of God comes as you obey him. He works as we work.

How have you been trying? Perhaps you have been striving in a spirit of self-righteousness (see above). Perhaps you have been striving in a spirit of bargaining with God, instead of approaching him as a sovereign king (see above). ("I'll do this and that if God will do this and that". Instead say, "I owe God everything, and he owes me nothing; I'll gladly do whatever he bids me WITHOUT CONDITIONS". If you have put conditions on your seeking him, he will not meet you.) [Bottom line.] I'm sorry you have been frustrated in your seeking God, and I cannot know your heart or God's heart enough to tell you why you haven't felt that you've connected with him. But I do know this. You haven't got the option of giving up. His disciples said to Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You [alone] have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). What is your alternative? You have none. If you keep seeking, Jesus says that no one who comes to him will he cast out (John 6:37). On the other hand, if you stop seeking him, you will certainly perish.

**Q 5. He comes back for the final week and says I want to believe but I am too depressed and feel I am too bad to accept Jesus. How can you help him out in this final mile to faith?**

Look how far Jesus came to save sinners! Are you worse than Paul? (I Tim. 1:15) Jesus loves to save sinners; he delights to do it. (Luke 15:7; Is. 53:11; Zeph.3:16-17). The Bible says God is "mighty to save"; are you saying that He is not strong enough to deal with your sins? Are you mightier than God? [Again, remember that this complaint is often a subtle form of self-righteousness. The man thinks he is unworthy. Then he is assuming his worthiness is the necessary basis for coming to Christ.]

## Discussion Issues

1. What did you find most interesting/helpful?
2. What questions did this raise?
3. Is there anything here you wish you knew when you were a young Christian?

## ENCOURAGEMENT PROJECT

Read and mark “!” - for something that helped you “?” -for something that raised a question

### Introduction

Acts 11:19ff shows the importance of the ministry of encouragement. vv.22-24 virtually glows as we read it. Clearly, Barnabus’ ministry of encouragement was enormously powerful in the history of the church. We tend to underestimate the importance of this work. Barnabus’ ministry is “sandwiched” between the ministry of evangelism and of training/discipleship. It is a crying need of new Christians in particular, and it is like the “oil” in the church’s “engine” — it is a vital spiritual lubricant. Without it, we burn up and burn out.

### Definition

The very name “Barnabus” means “son of consolation”. Encouragement is not the same as discipling and teaching. It is not the same as evangelism. It is affirming, confirming, supporting, coaching, consoling, cheering. It doesn’t seem to take as much knowledge or skill as evangelism or discipling *per se*, but here we see the power. Without encouragement, we will never do the work of evangelism and discipling that we need to do.

The very Greek word translated “encouragement” is “*para-kaleo*” which literally means “to call alongside”. It means to come near, to identify closely, to motivate and build confidence and create endurance



in another person. To encourage is not to say, “get going” or “do what I have done” but “let’s get going”. An encourager is good at putting him or herself in another’s shoes. It is often used as a synonym for “counseling” in the New Testament.

In some of these passages *parakaleo* is translated “exhort”, but it is always exhorting with a strong proportion of comfort and affirmation.) Encouragers are patient (I Thess.5:4) gentle, affectionate (I Thess.2:7-11), positive and non- argumentative (II Tim.2:24-26), and is more effective when using the Bible skillfully (Rom.15:4; II Tim.4:1-4).

### **Place**

Encouragement is especially important for newer believers, which we see both here and in Acts 14:21-22, where again we see that encouragement is something done for young converts after they have heard the good news.

Encouragement is also something necessary for those going through difficult times (II Cor.1:-9; Acts 14:22-23).

Sometimes even people who are being disobedient respond better to encouragement (II Thess.3:11-13; Heb.3:13) than to warning.

### **Responsibility**

So often our problems are aggravated because we do not have encouragers in our lives. Sometimes we don’t get encouragement because we are too proud to seek it or let people know we need it. Other times we are afraid that if we share our weakness we will get warning instead of encouragement. We have to be willing, however to meet and make ourselves vulnerable to others (James 5:16; Heb.10:24-25), in order to receive encouragement from God through other brothers and sisters.

It is also our duty to look around us and notice who needs encouragement. On the one hand, all Christians are to encourage each other (Heb.3:13; 10:24-25), and therefore we must always be on the look out. But some people have a gift of this — it is listed as a spiritual gift in Romans 12:8. One sign that you are good at this is that people tend to want to open up to you about their problems. Consider ways that you could make better use of this gift. The church needs more

Barnabuses!

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

**Think of other marks and characteristics of an encourager.**

**Is the ministry of encouragement something you particularly need right now?**

**Is it something that you could give to someone in need right now?**