

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7

PETER AND CLEAN VS. UNCLEAN (ACTS 10)

“Again, a voice came to him a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy!’” (Acts 10:15)

Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but holy is not, unless that eye belongs to the Lord. For a long time, the Church offered its versions of holiness to a watching world and, depending on the flavor of the fellowship, the road to holy living looks different to many.

It certainly did in the apostle Peter’s time. The story of the newborn church in Acts tells of a time when Jewish believers (those observing circumcision and kosher eating) had a set of rules to follow, while Gentiles, new to the story of God and the freedom found in Jesus, wanted to operate by another. Peter found himself caught in the conundrum when summoned to the home of an Italian centurion, Cornelius.

“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him,” Peter remarked (10:28). For Peter and other Jewish believers, to engage in any way with Cornelius would make him “unclean” — that is, Peter would render himself inaccessible to a “holy God” by coming into contact with a Gentile, an unholy person. Yet by the testimony of many, Cornelius was a “righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of Jews” (10:22). Therein lay the problem.

Peter was serious about observing the laws of God, so much so that he could have missed a great opportunity to share the Gospel. Instead, knowing his proclivity for keeping the law, God revealed to Peter in a prayerful vision that Peter’s version of holiness still fell short of God’s. “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy!” In other words, what God beholds as holy, you can too!

There is incredible freedom in recognizing that God’s standards are the only right standards for holiness. Peter, in his hunger, was worried about which food was holy, so God used a vision of all kinds of food to communicate a bigger message: I am the One who determines what is holy to me.

The best part of letting God decide — God chooses to love us all... Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, female (Galatians 3:28). Through Christ, God not only shows us the standard of holiness, but allows us to participate in the pursuit of that life together (Ephesians 2:13-22). In fact, through his death on the cross, Christ makes it possible for us, outsiders like Cornelius, to experience the joy of being counted as citizens of God’s household, corporately “growing into a holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:21).

Up on a rooftop, God redefined holy ground for Peter. Up on the cross, God redefined holy ground for all of us. God's heart is that we strive to keep it that way, and not cloud the way with our own version of holiness.