

## STUDIES IN ACTS 3

### *The Divine Selection Process*

#### *Acts 10*

Peter's concept of Jesus consisted of a series of revelations of his Lord, each successive one more profound the last. When Jesus first met him, Peter was captivated by Christ's personality. Then, after following his Lord for a time, and listening to His teachings and seeing His ministry, Peter made his great confession at Caesarea Philippi. Finally, thanks to the resurrection of Christ, Peter came into a full apprehension of the truth concerning his Lord; as he said himself in one of his letters, he was born again into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was through the resurrection and all the glory that followed it that Peter discovered that Jesus was not only Messiah—the savior of the Jews—but that He was the Savior of all mankind.

In this chapter of Acts, we read of a time when Peter came to an even deeper understanding of God through the ministry of Jesus Christ. This is the first part of his declaration"

*I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism.*

It was in Cornelius' house—a Gentile—that Peter made this discovery. And while it is an important statement, and while it gives us hope, Peter's declaration is also one of a stern warning.

The second part of Peter's discovery goes like this:

*But accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.*

God does not show favoritism; the first declaration does away with any prejudices and barriers. But the second sets up a severe test. God will accept a Gentile like Cornelius because He does not show favoritism. Yet God does favor toward a certain type of character; for one who does not fear Him and do what is right is not acceptable to God. So, Peter's revelation had both a positive side and a negative side.

On the one hand, according to the text, all the petty barriers man has erected are being swept away by the move of God. But, at the same time, we see God setting up another barrier. While the standards by which men judge other men are done away with, God puts a new standard in place.

#### 1. Divine Selection: God is No Respector of Persons

We hear this all the time preached from pulpits, and it's true! Things that impress men do not impress God. God is not interested in man because he has wealth. It is equally true that a man in sorrow and poverty does not move God more than the prosperous man. God does not love one more than the other. The "good" person is not loved more by God than the one who robs banks. Nor does the sinner attract God's attention more than the moral one. The status of the privileged, the destitution of the despised made to appeal to Him. God has no favorites among men. The fact is, **God is interested in every man because he is a man.**

He is no respecter of persons; God does not love one nation more than another. This was the lesson that Peter had to learn; and it was a surprising thing to Peter. Peter believed that God

loved Israel and no other nation. Today, we are tempted to think that God loves US, the civilized western world more than pagan middle-eastern world. Why do we think this way? It's because **we** are respecter of persons, **we** show favoritism. We believe that certain kinds of people are worthy of our attention while others are not. Note James 2.

## 2. Divine Selection: God's Standard

If we don't read verse 35, we might be tempted to think that Peter is saying that God receives into fellowship any kind of person, regardless of what they are in themselves. But, this is not what Peter is saying. God selects. God elects. He accepts some, and rejects others. There is a condition of life that He respects even though He is no respecter of persons. And there is a condition of life for which He has no respect.

Here is the condition that He respects, selects and elects:

*(Those) who fear him and do what is right.*

These are simple words, yet frightening. Let's look at what it means to "fear" God.

- ◇ 1 Sam 12:14
- ◇ Job 28:28
- ◇ Psalm 19:9
- ◇ Proverbs 8:13
- ◇ Proverbs 16:6

So, the "fear of the Lord" is a condition of the inner man that works its way into the way a man lives his life in the world. The condition of the inner man is that of hating evil, and the result in the outer life is that of departing evil. To fear the Lord is to have a pure heart. To fear the Lord is to be pure in conduct. As a result of this inward purity of heart, a man stays away from evil, and does good.

Now, with that as God's "gold standard," how many of us would be acceptable to Him this day? God does not show favoritism; so no accident of birth or environment or temperament can exclude us from God's attention or prevent us from being received; but a flaming sword is before us and only He accepts those who fear Him and do right. How many of us dare approach Him?

## 3. Divine Selection: How God Makes It Possible

Considering the text here, we are brought face to face with the complete unfitness of all people and their consequent rejection. These are Divine rules; a Divine standard. We cannot plead ignorance or weakness or foolhardiness or youthful indiscretions of the past. If God can receive into fellowship with Himself, and hold in respect the impure, the vulgar, the sinner, the He must be the Author of eternal disorder and a liar! However, it is because God is love, and God is just, and God is holy that He has established these everlasting guidelines of life. He cannot admit into His heaven the man in whose heart sin reigns. God cannot admit you into heaven while evil is in your heart and sin is permitted, condoned, excused, persisted in.

That one thing in your life, in my life, permitted to remain, which we know to sinful; the evil that we do not hate, but love; the impure thing that we will not depart from, but give room to within our hearts; these are the things that shut us out from God.

So, there is no comfort here, in these verses. For in the sight of heaven—if these verses are true—then I am lost; I am excluded from the presence of God.

But am I really lost? Let Peter finish.

*You know the message God sent the people of Israel, telling them the good news of peace through Jesus Christ.*

Jesus is the message—the Word—of the Gospel. Read John 1:1ff. Jesus is the Word of God. The Word revealed a tremendous distance between God and man, and the Word revealed the necessity for reconciliation between God and man.

Let's see what Peter had to say about the Word. He was the perfect Man. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, and went around doing good. He was crucified. He was raised from the dead. He is appointed to judge. The purpose? **To grant unto man remission of sins.** That is the gospel.

Now, let's see what it means in light of what Peter has said in our text. God is no respecter of persons, but He does accept the man who fears Him and works righteousness. Now, in Jesus, see the Type, the Pattern, the Revelation. He showed us how to live. He went around doing good. He feared God and hated evil; He fled from evil and worked righteousness. Notice that in the Person of Jesus that Peter talked about is the fulfillment of the Divine guidelines suggested by our text. He loved all, whether they were rich or poor. He healed all kinds of diseases. He taught people how to live and love God. He never sinned. He worked righteousness. So, in Jesus then, we see how we are to live and we see the kind of character God demands of us. Again, that's not very comforting.

But what else did Jesus do? He allowed them to crucify Him. But more than that, for God raised Jesus from the dead. In the light of the resurrection, the Cross makes all the sense in the world, for we see our salvation in the triumph of His rising. For in the Cross is the fulfillment of the Gospel: man has been brought to a place of peace with God. The risen One is demonstration of the fact that the Cross is infinitely more than we can understand. It is a transaction with God; and of God; and God's final act is the resurrection, and in the words of Peter, the risen One is made:

*Judge of the living and the dead.*

Your judge, then, is the One with the nail-scarred hands. He is the one with pierced side. Your judge is the One who bears the scars of YOUR punishment. Your judge is the One who has loosed you from your sins.

#### 4. Conclusion

So now, this is where your life begins. Your old life—your old character that was unacceptable to God is gone, by way of the Cross. Your new life began at the resurrection. Through Jesus Christ He has provided all that you lack. Note Romans 8:9—11.

You can be all God demands through Jesus Christ the Lord. He will give you first of all, in the deepest part of your life, the fear of God that will make you hate evil. In hating evil you will persevere in righteousness. The battle is not over, but Christ is there gaining possession of all of you day by day as you grow in Him—or rather—let Him grow in you.

