

# The House of Shammai and the House of Hillel

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By Joseph F. Dumond

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## News Letter 5847-018

**14th day of the 4th month 5847 years after the creation of Adam**  
**The 4th Month in the Second year of the third Sabbatical Cycle**  
**The Third Sabbatical Cycle of the 119th Jubilee Cycle**  
**The Sabbatical Cycle of Earthquakes Famines, and Pestilences**

**July 16, 2011**

Shabbat Shalom Brethren,

After writing the invitation to come to this page in the email I sent you; I had a thought. Don't we have an awesome El. Name any religion, that commands us to take 10% of our income and to spend it on ourselves once a year, no three times a year. But in the fall to take all this money you have saved and to spend it on whatever you want. No other religion does this. But Our mighty Yehovah has commanded that we do this every year. Look forward to seeing you in Jerusalem this year.

ARE YOU BEING BEREAN and Eating Meat or are you still suckling on spoon fed milk puree?

This week's News Letter seems to run on two themes. One is the house of Shammai versus the House of Hillel and this has so much more meaning to me right now than to you because of all that is going on behind the scenes.

The other theme is the fact that far too many people think they are eating meat from the scriptures when in fact they are still only eating curdled milk. They have stayed in the same place so long, the milk has turn sour and the lumps they chew on they think is meat when in fact it is just curdled milk. Only looking at a few selected scriptures from the New testament and never reading the whole bible to learn all the great things contained therein.

Be Berian Brethren in all things. Prove it with the scriptures and know for sure the truth. Do not just assume anything at all.

In my Search I found this bit of information online this week.

**[http://www.letgodbettrue.com/proverbs/10\\_08.htm](http://www.letgodbettrue.com/proverbs/10_08.htm)**

Proverbs 10:8

The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall.

Wise men love to be taught. They appreciate instruction. They want to be told what to do. They will listen and do what they are commanded. They are docile and obedient. But fools do not

like to be governed. They would rather talk. They want you to hear their opinions. They pour out nonsense without letup. They complain and object. They babble.

Noble men are thankful for someone to teach them wisdom and truth. Luke described the Bereans as noble for their receptive hearing of Paul (Acts 17:11). Israel under Nehemiah was eager and thankful to hear the Word of God taught to them, even though it raised a commandment they had not kept in 1000 years (Neh 8:1-18). Consider their spirit!

[Take Special Note of what this man just said. Nehemiah 8:1-18 tells of the reading of the entire law at Sukkot. This was only done during a Sabbatical year. This is a commandment of Deut 31:10-13. This Sabbatical year was the 49th Year in the Jubilee cycle. It was 456 B.C., which means that 455 B.C. was a Jubilee year. In the last Sabbatical year in 2009 three other men and I did this very thing at the water gate in Jerusalem. We read the entire law out loud.]

But many fools would rather prattle and chatter about their own ideas, opinions, and experiences. A prating fool is one who talks too much, without value or profit. They use many words, maybe even eloquent or sophisticated words, but to no real or lasting value. Get away from such persons! They are going to fall, and they will take down those near them. They know nothing but that they love the sound of their own voice and words.

Measure your wisdom right now! Do you love to be taught, or would you rather teach? Do you love to listen, or would you rather talk? Are others improved and made better by your speech, or do you just fill the air with noise? Does your correspondence change lives, or is it merely a lot of bluffing hot air? Do others ask your opinion, or do you give it without others asking? Are you wise, or a prating fool? Others know. Do you know?

A prating fool may be a good typist, so you get long, profitless emails, rather than cauliflower ear from the telephone! Either way it is the prattle of a fool – lots of words saying nothing. The source is the same – a heart in love with itself, rather than a heart humbly craving to learn. Lord, save us from being, or hearing, self-loving men!

Reader, are you quick to speak? Or are you quick to hear? Do you expect others to believe and obey you? Are you quicker to believe and obey them? Here we have an important test of our character and soul. Are we wise in the sense of this proverb? If you like to talk, you are in trouble. If you value your opinions, you are in trouble.

Of course, every man thinks his own opinions are better than all others. But wisdom knows this delusion of the human mind is from hell, motivated by the devil, and from a deceitful and desperately wicked human heart (Jer 17:9). The dumbest man on earth, the one without hope of recovery, is the one conceited about his own ideas (26:12; 29:20)!

Wisdom despises our own ideas (30:1-3; I Cor 3:18-20). Wisdom cuts words in half (17:27-28; Eccl 5:2). Wisdom speaks slowly (29:20; Jas 1:19). Wisdom wants to be taught by God's teachers – parents and pastors (1:8; 4:1-4; Mal 2:7). Wisdom only speaks when it has something valuable, right, and certain to say. Otherwise, silence is golden!

It is impossible to teach a prating fool. Before you finish a sentence or paragraph, they want to give you twenty or thirty paragraphs of their own. While you are speaking, they are antsy, preoccupied with their thoughts, and chafing to be able to speak again. These miserable wretches cannot say they are sorry or wrong, for they presume infallibility. It never registers that others do not want their opinions, for they also presume popularity.

Prating fools are as obvious as a loud siren! Listen for chatter! Look for quick opinions on every subject. You found him! You found her! Some have an answer for everything; some talk over everyone else; some do not believe in silence, ever! They are prating fools, and it is a holy privilege of wise men to ridicule and avoid them (III John 1:9-10).

Can we discover more about this enemy of sanity? They like the word, "But." Listen for it. No matter what you say, they counter it by saying, "But." They must get their two cents into the conversation. But after five minutes of mindless ramblings, you realize they were always bankrupt, without two cents; and you should avoid them in the future.

If there is no reflection on what you have said, but rather an immediate verbal response of their own, without much acknowledgement or submission to what you have said, you have found a prating fool! Make sure you are not one, and don't waste any time with one.

Let's forget the prating fools! They are going to fall, under the heavy blows of the Most High! Are you wise in heart? Dear reader, this is the question. Are you wise in heart?

Wise hearts are also very obvious. They love to receive the commandments of God and those He has put in positions of authority. Do you obey and honor your parents? Do you receive and obey their commandments? Do you love to hear preaching, so you can learn something else you should be doing to please God and men? Are you wise in heart?

## The House of Shammai and the House of Hillel

About a month ago I was involved in a discussion on FB. I go there to find those Christians who are willing to learn and seek the truth. In one of the discussions a fella from Australia started to expound on the subject.

I found the way he explained things very edifying and especially as he showed the differences between the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel. These are the two schools of thought that dominated the Jewish circles in Messiah's day. Knowing this now, I see it is still dominant in many circles even to this day.

By Rodney Baker

This article was born out of an extended "conversation" on Facebook during which a number of "New Testament" scriptures were quoted in order to justify non-observance of "The Law" by non-Jewish believers. As is often the case, these scriptures were quoted out of context, as if they were written yesterday (or, at least, in our time and culture). When selected "numbered

sound bites” are taken out of context and quoted this way, they can be used to support almost any doctrine one might choose to espouse.

Quoting scripture gives the teacher seeming authority and credibility; many of us simply accept uncritically what is taught in this fashion and never bother to go check out for themselves what is being said. After all, it is much easier to go to the “drive-through” at my local McChurch and get fast-food than it is to dig for the vegetables, pick the fruit, cook the meat and prepare a good, nutritious meal for myself. Or to sit in the pew and be spoon- or bottle-fed (milk, vanilla custard, maybe some fruit puree if I’m lucky). This is why some of us never reach any sort of spiritual maturity and, like little children, they’re gullible and easily led into error, because we never bother to check out for ourselves what the person behind the pulpit (or lectern) is teaching.

Well, I for one don’t want to be like that anymore. I can’t live on fast-food, baby formula or vanilla custard and fruit puree. I need bread, meat and vegetables. Good, solid food that I have to chew. Enough of the food metaphors – all this talking about food is making me hungry. How do we get to the meat of the Word?

Act 17:10 ESV – The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11 – Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

I would like to mention three technical terms that Bible scholars use that are pretty important to understand, because they go directly to the process of understanding and getting the most out of the scriptures:

- a) Exegesis – literally “out of the text”. This means to determine what the text says – the literal, black-and-white reading of the text.
- b) Eisegesis – literally “into the text”. This is what we do when we read the meaning into the text, in other words when we decide what the doctrine is and then read or interpret the text in such a way as to support the doctrine, rather than developing the doctrine from the text.
- c) Hermeneutics – this is how we interpret the text after we have done the exegesis i.e. how does what the text says apply to us today? How does the text influence or inform our doctrine?

Some claim to be doing exegesis when in reality they’re really doing eisegesis or hermeneutics i.e. reading the meaning into the text and/or using the text out of context to support a predefined or predetermined doctrine rather than understanding first what the text actually says.

There are three major factors that we must take into account when doing exegesis – context, context and context. We must consider the linguistic and cultural context, the temporal context

and the social and geo-political context in which the original texts were written and read. How would the original (and intended) audience have understood what we're reading?

Newsflash – none of the scriptures that we read were written in English. They were written originally in Hebrew (the majority of the “Old Testament”, the Gospel of Matthew, most likely the Gospels of Mark, Luke and John, Acts, Hebrews and Revelation – although no Hebrew versions of these gospels survive, the thought patterns, phraseology and idioms are most definitely Hebrew and the audiences were Hebrew-speaking audiences), Aramaic (Daniel) or Greek (probably Paul's letters and possibly other “New Testament” books). All of the authors of the collection of documents that form the canons of both Judaism and Christianity were Hebrews (although only in the case of the “New Testament” can it be said that they were all “Jewish”). The thought patterns, expressions and idioms are all Hebrew in nature and all throughout the gospels and apostolic writings there are references to the Hebrew scriptures (known in their entirety as the “TaNaKh” – the Torah, comprised of the first five books of Moses, the Nevi'im – the prophets – and the Ketuvim, the other writings).

If we read the scriptures as if they are “yesterday's news” and as if they are written to our culture and our time, we are assured that we will bring meanings and interpretations to the text that were never intended by the original authors. On the other hand, when we begin trying to understand the scriptures as they would have been understood by the original audience, we sometimes find a very different picture than what the “church” has been teaching for the last 1700-odd years.

Paul's letters are a case in point. Paul was not writing a “theological treatise” in each of his letters – they were just that. Letters! Letters to specific congregations addressing specific issues that were affecting those specific congregations at those specific places and times in history. His writing and teaching patterns were based in rabbinic tradition (as you'd expect from a pharisee who had studied under Gamaliel, still to this day one of the most respected of the ancient rabbis of Judaism) and he was often giving either haggadah (relating events, interpreting or giving opinions) or halakkah (rabbinic rulings, literally “walking” or how to walk) about questions of community life and the proper application (or interpretation) of scripture. What scripture? The only scripture that they had – that which formed the foundation of their faith and practice – the Tanakh (or, more specifically, the Torah).

[In the Jewish community of faith, the main difference between haggadah (or aggadah) and halakhah is that haggadah is non-binding and represents a man's opinion, whereas a halakhic ruling is considered to be binding on the community.]

Now, let's have a look at some of the common passages that were the subject of the debate and see what happens when we attempt to understand them in their original context.

The first one is the well-known passage in Acts 15.

[Act 15:1-33 ESV] – [1] But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” [2] And

after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

To understand what is going on here, we need some background regarding the Pharisees. In the second temple period there were two great schools of learning among the Pharisees – Bet Shammai (the House of Shammai) and Bet Hillel (the House of Hillel). Shammai and Hillel were contemporaries who both led the Sanhedrin. Shammai was very strict in regards to interpretation and application of the Torah – Hillel was more liberal and flexible. Shammai had an intense dislike for gentiles and taught that gentiles had no place in the kingdom of God unless they became full converts to Judaism and kept all of the commandments of Moses, including circumcision. Hillel taught rather that the kingdom of God was for all people, and that gentiles could become part of the kingdom if they only kept the “7 Noachide Laws”.

Paul was a student of Gamliel, who was the grandson of Hillel. Yeshua also leaned towards the teaching of Hillel on many things (where Hillel was in agreement with Torah) but also agreed with Shammai on some points (such as divorce). He did not fit exactly into either school. All the disciples and apostles would have been very aware of the differences and disagreements between the two schools and would also have been very aware of where Yeshua stood in regards to the two groups.

Acts 15 is describing a dispute between Pharisees of Bet Shammai and those of Bet Hillel. Paul, being of the House of Hillel, has no problem in going to non-Jewish believers and teaching them about Yeshua, bringing them into fellowship in the Jewish community of faith in the various cities to which he traveled (Galatia being the first). Pharisees of the school of Shammai objected strongly to this and came to Galatia to try to enforce their view, probably in the hope of driving the gentiles away (because, in their view, they had no place being in the community of faith in the first place).

...[4] When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. [5] But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” [6] The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

The “party of the Pharisees” does not refer to all Pharisees – by the nature of the objection we know that these Pharisees who objected to the proselyting of the gentiles were of the school of Shammai, since the school of Hillel had no problem with the gentiles coming to faith without requiring circumcision. Now Peter, who on another occasion (which brought him into conflict with Paul) seems to have been leaning towards the teachings of Shammai, stands up to defend the gentiles.

[7] And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. [8] And God, who knows the heart, bore

witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, [9] and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. [10] Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? [11] But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” [12] And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

Now it is James’ turn. James (Ya’akov, the brother of Yeshua) speaks first of the “tabernacle of David”. Some have debated exactly what this refers to, and it is often used in the context of worship, but in this context I believe that Ya’akov is referring to the event spoken of by the prophets that Messiah would do, namely the regathering of the exiles of Israel from out of the nations and the reunification of Israel and Judah.

[13] After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. [14] Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. [15] And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, [16] “After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, [17] that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things [18] known from of old.’

In that context, then, Ya’akov makes what amounts to a halakhic ruling that specifies what will be the minimum requirements for non-Jewish believers coming to faith and coming into fellowship in the Jewish community. Some (especially Jewish) sources suggest that Ya’akov is speaking here of the “Noachide Laws” but I respectfully disagree. I don’t see any justification in Scripture for suggesting that God had a separate set of laws for the nations apart from those given to Israel. Let’s look at how Ya’akov said the new believers should be instructed;

[19] Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, [20] but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. [21] For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

These four instructions are taken directly from the portions known as the “Heart of the Torah”. They’re found in the book of Leviticus from chapters 11 through 19. These chapters give God’s definition of what is holy, and what is not. James’ next comment is telling; “...For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

In other words, the gentiles who are coming to faith in Messiah need to observe those minimum requirements (all of which had to do with pagan worship rituals which they were expected to leave behind) in order to be accepted into the community of faith and into the synagogues. Once they had become part of the community, they would then be instructed in

the rest of the Torah and the application to their lives, which is a lifelong process of learning and practice (as it is for all of us).

It is important to note that no evangelizing/proselytizing took place in the synagogues – you did not become a part of the worship in the synagogue unless you had already put away your pagan lifestyle and joined yourself to YHVH.

The rest of Acts 15 describes the letter and its method of delivery to the community in Galatia. Nothing in Acts 15 in any way says that the gentiles coming to faith in YHVH and Messiah Yeshua need not keep Torah. All the instructions contained therein come directly from the book of Leviticus. The expectation appears to be that the new believers would come into the community of faith and continue to learn about the instructions for living given by Moses as they fellowship with their fellow believers.

Now let's go back and have a look at another commonly misunderstood (but related) passage in Acts 10.

Act 10:1-8 ESV – [1] At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, [2] a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. [3] About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” [4] And he stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. [5] And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. [6] He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.” [7] When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, [8] and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

First, Cornelius. Verse 2 says he was a “devout man who feared God”. The Hebrew idiom is a “god-fearer” or a “righteous stranger”. What does this mean? The Hebrew term is *ger toshav*. This refers to a non-Jew who has renounced idolatry and follows the God of Israel, without having undergone circumcision (which means that they cannot take part in the Passover). Cornelius is described as one who gave alms to the people and prayed continuously to God. Judaism teaches that there are three prime obligations of a righteous person: prayer (three times per day for an observant Jew, at the times of the morning, noon and evening sacrifices if they were still being offered in the temple), the study of Torah and the giving of alms. Cornelius fulfilled all these requirements.

Remember, though, the difference of opinion between Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai? Rabbi Shammai taught that gentiles could not enter the kingdom of God unless they were circumcised and fully converted to Judaism, including living by all of the commandments of Torah and all the instruction of the rabbis. In fact, Shammai wrote a list of 18 edicts detailing what was necessary for a gentile to enter the kingdom of God.

Hillel, in contrast, taught that a *ger toshav* need only renounce idolatry and live according to the “7 Noachide Laws” in order to be accepted. Under Shammai's system, Cornelius was



wasting his time unless he converted fully (impossible for a Roman centurion if he wished to maintain his employment, and probably his life). According to Hillel, however, he fulfilled all of the necessary requirements for acceptance into the kingdom of God (and the community of faith).

With that, lets continue reading...

Act 10:9-16 ESV – [9] The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. [10] And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance [11] and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. [12] In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. [13] And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” [14] But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” [15] And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” [16] This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Warning – the following paragraph contains controversial statements that may challenge some fondly-held paradigms.

This vision has absolutely nothing to do with food (and I’m going to prove it to you). If that isn’t controversial enough, God never told Peter to eat unclean things.

Let’s take this step by step. Firstly, Peter is going up to the housetop (the roof) to pray, at about the sixth hour of the day. Like all good, observant Jews, Peter prayed the Amidah – the standing prayers – 3 times per day – at the third hour (about 9am), the sixth hour (noon) and the ninth hour (about 3pm, the time when Cornelius had the vision the day before). While praying, he had a vision of a sheet with all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. I want you to carefully note that – all kinds of animals. That means that there were both clean and unclean animals all mixed together in the sheet. This is extremely important! We have to understand that clean animals are for food, and unclean animals are not food! This means that when the voice spoke to Peter and said, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat!”, Peter would never have understood this to mean that he was being instructed to eat what was not food!

An eraser is not food. An alkaline battery is not food. Put an eraser and an alkaline battery on a plate along with a biscuit and some cake, give it to someone and tell them to “eat up”. Would we expect them to attempt to eat the eraser and the battery? Of course not, because they’re not food. Neither are the unclean animals. The only things that “the voice from heaven” could have been referring to when Peter was told to “kill and eat” were the clean animals, because they were the only food in the sheet.

If that is the case, why then did Peter say, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”? What is that about? Note that Peter uses two words to describe what he has “never eaten” – common – koinos – and unclean – akathartos. What is the difference between these two words?

Let's say that I have a flock of sheep, for instance. Sheep (along with goat and cattle) are kathartos – clean – animals. I choose the best of my flock and set it aside to take it to the temple for a sacrifice. Somehow, though, the sheep gets mixed up with some pigs and ends up in a pig pen. Oops. It is no longer acceptable as a sacrifice – it has become defiled – common – koinos. I can still slaughter it and use it for food, but I can no longer present it as a sacrifice at the temple. Akathartos, on the other hand, is the opposite of kathartos. It means unclean by definition – not food. Peter is saying, "I have never eaten anything that has become defiled through association with what is unclean, or what is unclean in itself." By the way, a clean animal that dies of natural causes or accidental death (e.g. road kill) is also akathartos – unclean.

What does this have to do with Cornelius? Let's keep reading.

Act 10:17-27 ESV – [17] Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate [18] and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. [19] And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. [20] Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." [21] And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" [22] And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." [23] So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. [24] And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. [25] When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. [26] But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." [27] And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered.

Peter is perplexed by the vision. He has no idea what it means at first. Then the Spirit says to him, "There are three men downstairs – go with them." Note that at this state Peter does not know who the men are or that they are from Cornelius. The next day though, Peter heads off with the men to go to Caesarea. The next verse tells us something very interesting about Peter.

Act 10:28-29 ESV – [28] And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. [29] So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."

What?! Unlawful according to whom? Where is it written in Torah that a Jew cannot associate with or visit anyone of another nation? Wasn't Israel supposed to be a light unto the world? Weren't they supposed to be priests to the whole world and teach them about God? Where did Peter get the idea that he couldn't even associate with a non-Jew? Perhaps, from Rabbi

Shammai? It seems that, unlike Paul (who was, remember, a disciple of Rabban Gamliel of Bet Hillel), Peter leant rather towards the teachings of Bet Shammai.

Now, remember that I said Peter's vision had nothing to do with food? What does Peter say next? "God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean." Did you get that? "God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean."

Remember, Cornelius (according to the teachings of Bet Hillel), was a god-fearer, a righteous sojourner, a ger toshav who was doing all that was required to be accepted into the kingdom of God. He needed to learn about Messiah – that is why Peter was sent there. Why Peter and not Paul? I think that God needed to teach Peter something about the kingdom as much as Cornelius. What does being koinos or akathartos have to do with Cornelius? Remember, Cornelius was a Roman centurion, that is, a commander of a band of 100 soldiers (known as the "Italian Band"). He was associating daily with pagan gentiles. In other words, in Peter's eyes even if he was considered a "righteous sojourner" he was becoming koinos by his association with those who were akathartos. Remember what we said about the clean animals in the sheet? God then told Peter, "What God has made clean, do not call common." In other words, God had seen Cornelius' heart attitude and desire to worship Him and God had made him kathartos – clean. "Saved by grace, through faith, not of works, lest any man should boast." "Man looks on the outside, but God looks on the heart." Peter himself interpreted the vision for us, and he finally understood (when messengers delivered the invitation from Cornelius) that it was about people not food. The story continues...

Act 10:30-35 ESV – [30] And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing [31] and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. [32] Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' [33] So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

Cornelius gives testimony before Peter and all the others present about his own vision and how he was instructed to call Peter to come and teach. His heart is open and ready to hear Peter's message, as are those of all the others present. What is Peter's response to this testimony?

[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.

That is a long way from "It is not lawful for a Jew to associate with you". It is an even longer way from "God told Peter that the dietary laws of the Old Testament had been done away with, so he could go and eat with the gentiles". I want you to take special note of the last part of Peter's response: "...in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." What did Solomon write, 1500 or so years prior?

Ecc 12:13 ESV – [13] The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Fear God, do what is right. Fear God, keep his commandments. Sounds like what Cornelius was doing. Peter goes on to teach them about Messiah Yeshua...

Act 10:36-43 ESV – [36] As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), [37] you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: [38] how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. [39] And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, [40] but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, [41] not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. [42] And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. [43] To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Of course, about now you'd expect the altar call. You'd almost expect to read that, “Peter paused and asked everyone to close their eyes, and with every head bowed and every eye closed, asked anyone who recognized that they were sinners in need of salvation to raise their hands....” What? It's not there? That's not what happened? Peter, what were you thinking?

Act 10:44-48 ESV – [44] While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. [45] And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. [46] For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, [47] “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” [48] And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Now, just in case we didn't get it all the first time, Luke tells us in the very next chapter what happened when Peter next went up to Jerusalem.

Act 11:1-3 ESV – [1] Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. [2] So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, [3] “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

Who was criticizing Peter? The “circumcision party”. Who were they? The ones who said that gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved. Who were they? The disciples of Bet Shammai. Now Peter recounts the vision again, and again he interprets it for us...

Act 11:4-18 ESV – [4] But Peter began and explained it to them in order: [5] “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending,

being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. [6] Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. [7] And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' [8] But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' [9] But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' [10] This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. [11] And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. [12] And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. [13] And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; [14] he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' [15] As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. [16] And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' [17] If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" [18] When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

These disciples of Bet Shammai, who presumably were also followers and believers in Yeshua as Messiah, recognized from Peter's account that repentant gentiles also have a place in the olam haba – the world to come – through "repentance that leads to life".

When put back into its proper temporal, historical and cultural context, it becomes very clear and obvious. Nothing in Acts 10 or 11 supports the idea that the dietary laws (or in fact any of the instructions given through Moses) were changed, abrogated or abolished. It is an account of God dealing with Peter and others of the persuasion that gentiles were outside of the covenant and unable to be saved without undergoing full conversion to Judaism. No-one was ever justified by keeping the Torah – ever.

From the very beginning of creation, justification and salvation has always been by grace, through faith. We learned this from Adam, from Abraham and in the book of Acts, from Cornelius. Cornelius was justified not by his righteous deeds, but by his heart attitude. By his belief in the promises of God. His righteous acts were the fruit of what was in his heart – a love for and desire to live for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His heart attitude enabled him to receive the message of Yeshua and His sacrifice on our behalf. He was not justified by his deeds, but because of his obedience he received the blessing from God.

I love this statement from Monte Judah that he teaches from the life of Abraham, and we see the parallels in Cornelius. This is the doctrine of salvation by faith in summary form:

- Faith is counted as righteousness
- Righteousness has kissed (is intimately associated with) justice
- Justice demands sacrifice
- Through sacrifice we receive salvation.

The sacrifice that brings salvation is, of course, that of Yeshua. You'll notice that nowhere in that list is the word "obedience". Isn't that important though? Absolutely. We also learn from Abraham (and Cornelius) that obedience brings blessing – disobedience brings curses (meaning the natural consequences of disobedience to God's instructions.)

I was asked a question recently – "Do those consequences still apply to us as Christians, after the cross?"

I answered that by pointing out that there is a big difference between the removal of guilt and removal from the consequences of our actions. Yeshua paid the price for us (the death penalty that we all deserve for breaking God's law) and took our guilt upon himself. We are therefore legally declared, "Not Guilty" when we stand before the judge of the ages. That does not mean, however, that we will not have to live with the consequences of the choices that we (or our ancestors) have made. Think on that for a while. That is why we can say, "Obedience brings blessing".

We have God's own testimony regarding Abraham ("...because you have done this, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son, now will I bless you"). We also have this promise in Deuteronomy 30:

Deu 30:16 ESV – [16] If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

Cornelius received salvation because of his faith (believing and acting on the promises of God) and received the blessing (God's favour on his life) because of his obedience. The same applies to us today.