

# Weekly Encouragement

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Incorporated non-profit in New Jersey, USA

## Not Offended (Part 2 of 2)

By Rev. Peter Eng



The Apostle Peter has a strange vision. He sees all types of unclean animals and a voice telling him to kill and eat them. That is impossible! He is a devout Jew and does not eat unclean animals. "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean," the voice replies ([Acts 10:15](#)). And this happens three times as a confirmation. At that time, three men from the Roman centurion Cornelius arrive at the house and ask for Peter. "The Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them'" ([Acts 10:19-20](#)).

What objection can Peter have? Three Gentiles are looking for him. He has just heard three times that he is not to call unclean what God has made clean. The Holy Spirit says they are not unclean, and to go with them.

This leads to the Gentile conversion of Cornelius. At his conversion, the Spirit of God comes on him and affirms that conversion. This represents a paradigm shift. The Jews have always insisted Gentiles must be circumcised to be admitted into the Kingdom of God. Those who believe but are not circumcised are called "God-fearers." They are not full members of the community. Now, the Holy Spirit sanctifies Cornelius before any talk of circumcision. God has indicated he accepts Cornelius as a full member of the Christian community.

The first church council meets to address this question. "Some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses'" ([Acts 15:5](#)). The debate is about conditions for table fellowship: under what circumstances can Gentile believers eat with Jewish believers at Holy Communion (which used to be a full meal).

As the people look at the work of the Holy Spirit among Gentiles without circumcision, it becomes apparent that God has not made circumcision a condition for table fellowship. James the half-brother of Jesus then sums up the debate with these words: "*It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.*" ([Acts 15:19](#)). The only conditions for table fellowship for Gentiles are for them to abstain from food polluted

by idols, from sexual immorality, from strangled meat, and from blood.

John the Baptist has to change his view of Jesus' mission. When the disciples witness Jesus' death and resurrection, they understand his mission and are not offended by it. But they are still unsure about how this should be done. One group says Gentiles need to be circumcised. Another group says there is no need for circumcision. The more encompassing position turns out to be the correct.

Paul said, *"Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished"* ([Gal 5:11](#)). The cross of Jesus is enough for our citizenship in the Kingdom of God. The sufficiency of the cross of Christ strikes at the assumption that circumcision is required.

There is an offense of the cross. There is something about the cross that can result in people falling away. The cross strikes at our persistent human tendency to want to contribute to our own salvation. It is hard for many to accept that we can do nothing towards our salvation. The sufficiency of the cross becomes an offense.

Some Pharisees believe Jesus to be the Messiah. They are willing to change their view of the mission of Messiah. But they cannot accept that God's grace extends to Gentiles without circumcision.

The believing Pharisees are the purists. They think of the need to limit the Kingdom of God to keep it pure. But they have a false equation that limiting conditions create purity. Limiting the Kingdom of God does not make it pure; it makes the Kingdom small, narrow, and legalistic. The community of God is holy because of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

There is a blessing for all who would accept the offense of the Messiah and the offense

of the cross. Today, there are 2 billion professing Christians. If all of them were to pile into the land of Israel, we will be on top of each other. Isn't this much more than what John could have ever dreamed?

God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" ([Eph 3:20](#)). If we do not take undue liberties, but let go of our self-limiting anxieties, the Holy Spirit can work wonders through us.

God's largeness must not be an offense to us. Instead, let's play offense!

**Note: The ESV is used unless indicated otherwise.**

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- [Not Offended \(Part 1 of 2\)](#)

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**Rev. Peter Eng** is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.