

The Book of Acts: The Gospel of the Holy Spirit

Chapter 10

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Welcome back!!

ALLOW ME TO OPEN FIRST WITH PRAYER:

-AMEN

We are SO glad you are here. Let me tell you why:

- The Study of God's Word is the MOST IMPORTANT study of your lifetime. I am a student of the Bible and will be forever more. Particularly, the Book of ACTS is an institution itself; where the earliest church was formed, shaped, struggled, recovered, re-strengthened and thrived. Many a scholar calls this book, "The Gospel of the Holy Spirit, which is an apt title indeed.
 - To be sure, let me tell you a few disclosures as we begin together.
1. I do not profess in any way to having all the answers. My job here is not to be the answer – but to point to the ONE who holds ALL the answers. So, if a question arises which I can't confidently answer, I can research and find out.
 2. Let's all be careful to allow Scripture to speak ON ITS OWN TERMS. This means we don't try and make scripture fit our ideals, we fully allow scripture to speak into our lives. This requires what is called, "exegesis" – a means to extract the words of Scripture without bias, through a proven method that includes Authorship (All scripture is Inspired by God), CONTEXT (Say a word about context – "Context is EVERYTHING").
 3. You may not agree with what is written, you may not like what is written, it will often convict your life, BUT BY NO MEANS ARE WE PERMITTED TO ALTER SCRIPTURE TO SAY WHAT WE WANT IT TO SAY. EVER.
 4. I will be using the NRSV version. The reason being is two-fold:

First, the RSV is known by most all scholars as being the closest to the original language. The NRSV just adds inclusive language to the mix. You do not need to go out and purchase an NRSV (unless you want) Some of the wording will be different, but I have found the essence of the ideas and theology are not compromised.

5. I will on occasion refer to the original language of the Bible. The NT was written in Koine Greek. The only reason I do this is to clarify (exegetically) a passage. The OT was, of course, written in Hebrew and I will also do that sparingly.
6. You would be wise to bring a clean sheet of paper with you each week. Entitle it: "Things I want to ask God when I get to heaven"

For those who are joining us for the first time, we are doing an in-depth study of the Book of Acts - all 28 chapters. Currently, we took a pause for the summer having completed the first 9 chapters. (I created a document/schedule outlining the dates and chapters from here)

By way of quick overview, I think it necessary to recap some of what the first 9 chapters has taught us.

So let's quickly review:

Chapter 1: The promise & power of the Holy Spirit: Jesus commissions the Disciples to be His witnesses "In Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Chapter 2: Pentecost and the Birth of the Church: The Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples, Peter preaches to the crowd, roughly 3000 people respond to the Gospel.

Chapter 3: Healing and Apostolic Witness: Peter publicly heals a lame man and proclaims Jesus as the source of salvation.

Chapter 4: Peter and John face opposition: They are arrested yet boldly proclaim Jesus Christ; believers pray for greater boldness.

Chapter 5: Holiness, integrity & Obedience: Ananias and Sapphira suffer the consequences of sin within the church.

Chapter 6: Servanthood and Church growth: Internal conflicts arise. The church appoints 7 servants.

Chapter 7: Faithfulness & the Martyring of Stephen: Stephen gives a powerful defense of the faith and becomes the first Martyr.

Chapter 8: The Gospels travels beyond Jerusalem: Persecution scares many of the believers away; Philip takes the Gospel to Samaria and to the Ethiopian Eunuch.

Chapter 9: The Conversion of Saul: Saul encounters the risen Christ and is converted to one of Christ's chosen.

And that brings us current to chapter 10. What is significant about this chapter? Glad you asked.

Chapter 10 marks the decisive turning point to the expansion of the Gospel from exclusively to the Jews, now to all Gentiles as well. Salvation by Christ is hereby available to ALL people without distinction! God confirms this by giving the Holy Spirit to believing Gentiles.

The question becomes, "Will the church recognize that God's salvation is for the Gentiles as well?" This makes chapter 10 the major theological bridge between the Jewish-centered beginnings of the church and the world-wide mission of the Gospel!

I. Chapter overview

- A. Cornelius' Vision: Verses 10:1-8
- B. Peter's Vision: Verses 10:9-23a
- C. Peter travels to Caesarea: Verses 10:23b - 33
- D. Peter preaches: 10:34-43
- E. Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit: 10:44-48

II. Cornelius

Who is Cornelius? He is introduced here as Centurion – meaning he was a commander over 100 Roman soldiers, specifically from the Italian Regiment. We know he was a Gentile; meaning he was not a follower of Jewish faith or laws. He was, in fact, completely outside of the Jewish community. Here is what I find significant with Cornelius: He has not heard the complete Gospel, but God is already preparing his heart. In verse 2, he is described as "a devout man, who feared God with all his household"

This is precisely what John Wesley would call the Prevenient Grace of God. That grace that comes before – the grace that "woos" us into relationship with God.

Look what happens in verse 3-4: “One afternoon at about 3:00, he had a vision of an angel of God coming in and saying, “Cornelius”. He stared at him in terror and said, “What is it Lord?” He answered, “your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.” He was described as devout and here you have a description of what, exactly, devout means. Verse 2b – “He gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God”.

Now, let's break this down even a bit further. The angel tells him the alms (money to the poor and needy) and his use of constant prayer to God are a memorial to Him. But God does not leave that alone. He tells him to send for Simon Peter. Why? Because just going through the motion of giving and praying is incomplete – Cornelius STILL needs the Gospel.

Here is a theological insight #1: **God often prepares people before we know we are ready!**

This is especially personal for me. When I was 16 years old and on tour with a group, we were in Colorado Springs and I had a very powerful conversion experience. Little did I know that years later, God had been preparing for me to take up the mantle of ministry. I would HAVE NEVER imagined this.

Peter's vision : Acts 10:9-16

Peter goes to the roof of Simon the tanner's house to pray. He became hungry. And while praying, falls into a trance. He sees heaven opened and a great vision of a large sheet coming down – lowered to the ground by its four corners.

This circumstance often reminds me as if God was spreading a picnic blanket on the ground!

Then, Peter hears something that tests him profoundly, **“Get up Peter; kill and eat.”** Why is this profound? Because the laws of Moses had been set long ago regarding which animals were “clean” (odd statement, I know of NO animal that is clean) but “clean” in the eyes of God and acceptable to digest in their daily diet. Peter is being asked to defy the very tradition he has walked with his whole life. And so, he responds, **“By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.”**

Aside: sigh...Don't you ever wonder if God doesn't completely tire of people who decide they know what's best or what they are able to do?

Think Moses being instructed by God Almighty to return to Egypt and confront Pharaoh. This reminds me of my own walk of faith – maybe yours as well, where we can not fathom the leading we are getting from God to do exactly as He says and to walk in the assurance of faith. God gave me the leading to become a pastor...UNTHINKABLE!!! For you, maybe it's the act of tithing to the church – how can I? I'm on a "fixed" income!!! Maybe you are being lead to help in children's ministry. No thank you! I've raised my family and paid my dues. You fill in the blank. So as God is dealing with an obstinate Peter, reflect deeply on how he also might be dealing with YOU!

So how God responds to Peter puts this whole epic into perspective, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane". BOOOM! Mic drop!!

God is essentially declaring that, once again, He is God. Why do we presume that we can surpass the intellect, the guidance of God? If you are honest, to varying degrees we do everyday. Let's reflect a bit, what would happen if we stopped preventing God's leading from fulfilling our lives the way He desires?

Here's theological insight #2 to consider:

The gospel destroys human categories of spiritual superiority!

Peter, like most of us, had always divided the world as he knew it into categories:

- Clean and Unclean/Profane
- Jews vs. Gentiles
- Acceptable and Unacceptable

We do too:

- Blue collar vs. White collar
- Ivey league Universities vs. Community colleges
- Black / White
- Hispanic, Asian, Indian, Native American
- Duke vs. Carolina
- Protestant vs. Catholic

Scripture identifies a key ideal here, let's not miss it!!

“Do not call unclean what I have made clean” gives us a key understanding of the Gospel: human ethnic and ceremonial boundaries cannot be used to determine who may receive God’s grace!!

Now remember, Peter is on the way to preach to Cornelius. But before God can change Cornelius’ life, God changes Peter’s perspective!! Peter needed transformation of his heart before he could participate in God’s mission!

Imagine looking through a stained-glass window. The window determines how you see everything outside. The glass, as beautiful as it may be, is distorted. See – Peter had a theological “window” shaped by centuries of Jewish cultural boundaries. God doesn’t give Peter new information. God changes the window through which Peter sees people.

Theological idea #3: **Sometimes, God has to change the messenger before the messenger can change the mission.**

Divine Appointments: Acts 10:17-23

While Peter is still grappling with the vision he’d received, the men sent by Cornelius arrive at the front gate. And the Spirit said to Peter, “Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up and go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.”

Peter obeys the Spirit and went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?”

READ: Acts 10:22-33

Notice this timing. It is nothing short of remarkable. Cornelius is praying. Peter is praying and God is speaking to them both, and brings them together.

We should note that God can orchestrate divine appointments.

Illustration : Our Divine appointment with David and Diane.

Would any of you here think that was incidental? **Here is a theological insight #3: When God is preparing a person to hear the Gospel, he can also prepare a believer to deliver it.**

Peter's Sermon : Acts 10: 34-43

READ: vs. 34-36

"I truly understand that God shows no partiality." 10:34

The Greek concept here communicates the idea that God does not judge people according to external distinctions or favoritism.

Then Peter says, "Rather, in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him." 10:35

READ vs. 38-43

Peter's sermon is an excellent theological outline of the Gospel message:

- Jesus came
- Jesus was anointed by the Spirit
- Jesus did good and liberated the oppressed
- Jesus was crucified
- Jesus was raised
- Jesus is Lord and Judge
- Everyone who believes receives forgiveness.

Theological Insight #4: The Answer to human division is not merely better social relationships. The answer is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Acts 10 is not ultimately about Peter becoming more tolerant; its about Christ extending salvation to all people.

The Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles Acts 10:44-48

READ: vs. 44-48

Theological Insight #5: The Holy Spirit is God's evidence that Gentiles belong to God's people.

Closing materials & prayer.

REVIEW

#1: God often prepares people before we know we are ready!

#2: The gospel destroys human categories of spiritual superiority!

#3: When God is preparing a person to hear the Gospel, he can also prepare a believer to deliver it.

#4: The Answer to human division is not merely better social relationships. The answer is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

#5: The Holy Spirit is God's evidence that Gentiles belong to God's people.

If time permits: Questions??

