

# Religion Kills – Grace Saves

## Acts 10:43 – 11:18

Here is one definition of religion:

*Religion is a system of beliefs or a code of moral conduct that judges (qualifies or disqualifies) a person based on their adherence and obedience to certain codes, rules, laws, traditions, or the performance of required acts.*

*What God had begun, in order to reveal Himself to man, man Morpheus to give himself control over other men.*

*That's why true Christianity is about relationship and not religion. What we find, time and again is that Religion Kills, while Grace is what offers and gives Life.*

Thus far in chapter 10 of Acts we have learned how God had been moving in the heart of a Gentile by the name of Cornelius (he was a Roman Centurion stationed in Caesarea Maritima or Caesarea by the Sea).

We saw how he was undoubtedly **a man of influence, social stature, and wealth**, but we also find that he is **a righteous man** who sought to honor the God of the Jews through prayers and the giving of alms (supporting those in financial stress).

But, he himself hadn't become a Jew. Yet still, **God had taken note of his prayers and the attitude of his heart.**

So God sent an angel, instructing Cornelius to send for Peter, in order that the Apostle could share with him the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So, Peter and some other Christian Jews from Joppa came to his house in Caesarea, and Peter began **sharing the truth, hope, and salvation found through faith in Jesus Christ** to Cornelius, his household, and some invited friends and relatives who were present.

We read in verse 43 of chapter 10 that Peter zeroed in on the way of salvation, as he shared:

Acts 10

<sup>43</sup> *"To Him (speaking of Jesus) all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission (the forgiveness or pardon) of sins."*

Then something **amazing happened**... something neither Peter nor any of the other Believing Jews who were with him could have anticipated... Look what it says in verse 44 –

Acts 10

<sup>44</sup> *While Peter was **still speaking these words**, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.* <sup>45</sup> *And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.* <sup>46</sup> *For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.*

Peter was in full stride, right in the middle of his message. He hadn't even come to the point of offering an invitation for them to come to faith in Christ. It was as though that **last, thin barrier** to their belief had just been penetrated and suddenly their faith was directed to the Savior and the Holy Spirit of God fell upon them with great power.

God wasn't waiting on a man.

**There was no way they would have expected or anticipated this** – *"Gentiles coming to faith in Jesus and being filled with the Holy Spirit just like us, are you kidding me?"*

**They were all astonished!!**

Honestly, I feel that was probably an understatement by Luke.

You need to understand, First of all, having all three of these events happen at the same time: people coming to a saving faith in Christ and suddenly being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, wasn't something that happened on a regular basis. We do see some instances within the New Testament, but it doesn't seem to be the norm.

**Let me take you on a little side journey this morning.**

In Acts 2, we **did see** the coming of the Holy Spirit to some who were already Believers. On the Day of Pentecost, when those who were followers of Jesus were in the Upper Room praying. And as they prayed ...

Act 2

<sup>2</sup> ...suddenly there came **a sound from heaven**, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were **all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

But even here, as we read of the *sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind*, you need to understand, **that never happens again** that we read of in Acts.

Even the *divided tongues, as of fire* that is **a singular occurrence**.

The closest we reread the account in the Scripture is with those Believers who were already filled with or baptized in the Spirit at Pentecost, when **they're filled once again**, sometime later during a powerful time of prayer –

Act 4

<sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, **the place where they were assembled together was shaken**; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

But, even there it **doesn't say they spoke in tongues**, but that *they spoke the word of God with boldness*. This speaks of their witness to the world around them.

Even when the Spirit moved in the lives of the Samaritans in Acts 8, it was still different. Through the ministry of Philip, many of the Samaritans had received the Lord Jesus, so Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and –

Acts 8

<sup>15</sup> ...prayed for them that they **might receive the Holy Spirit**. <sup>16</sup> For as yet **He had fallen upon none of them**. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then they (Peter and John) laid hands on them, and they (the Samaritans) *received the Holy Spirit*.

So, in this instance as the Apostles laid their hands on the Samaritans and **the Holy Spirit fell upon them**. It doesn't say specifically what the outward manifestation was,

but there had to be something because it was apparent to those who saw it happen. We just don't know for certain what it was.

There was also the time of the Holy Spirit's move when, by the laying on of hands of the Apostle Paul as he spoke with some men from Ephesus in Acts 19 –

Acts 19

*<sup>5</sup> When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid hands on them, **the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.***

This time these guys **DID speak with tongues and prophesied**. And their filling or baptism of the Holy Spirit **came AFTER they were baptized with water**.

I'm sharing all of this with you because I just want you to understand that **in reference to the filling of the Holy Spirit in a Believer's life, there is not a set pattern of how, when, or even the resulting manifestation.**

- Sometimes the Holy Spirit came following baptism,
- While at other times His presence came before baptism.
- Sometimes, by the laying on of hands,
- Sometimes during specific times of prayer,
- And other times during the preaching of the Word, as we saw with Cornelius.

There were still some who came to faith in Christ and were baptized, yet we **don't hear anything about the filling of the Spirit**. The situation of the Ethiopian Eunuch was such a case. He received Christ and was baptized, but nothing is said of him being "*filled with the Spirit*" –

Acts 8

*<sup>38</sup> So (the Eunuch) commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. <sup>39</sup> Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.*

We know he was saved. And we know the Holy Spirit came into his life, because without the Spirit in our lives we are not born again. But in this case, Luke doesn't mention it – other than *the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away*.

So, after following that **Rabbit Trail**, lets get back to Acts 10 were we read that God was doing a **POWERFUL THING**, which would have **PHYSICAL EVIDENCE** of His **SUPERNATURAL WORK** and I don't want to lessen that – look again at verses 44-46

Acts 10

*<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking these words, **the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.** <sup>45</sup> And those of the circumcision who believed **were astonished**, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. <sup>46</sup> For **they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God...***

Those that came with Peter were **astonished** (*literally, “beside themselves”. we would use the term today, “They were blown away!”*). There was no escaping the fact that there was **some similarity** between what had just happened and what had taken place on the Day of Pentecost – there was *this instantaneous, visible, and even audible manifestation* that couldn't be denied. Some even call what happened at the house of Cornelius, **“the Pentecost of the Gentile World”**.

The **same powerful work** of God through **the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit** which God had filled the Jewish Believers with on Pentecost, was now **very evident in the lives of these Gentiles**. Truly beyond the comprehension of the Jewish Believers.

**“To the Jew first, then also to the Gentile...”**

*Then Peter answered, <sup>47</sup> “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” <sup>48</sup> And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. **Then they asked him to stay a few days.***

God had done a work none of them had anticipated – there were **new babies in the Kingdom of Heaven** and God was doing it in a way **they couldn't have imagined...**

**Gentiles are coming to Jesus**

**Without becoming Jews first...**

**Inconceivable!**

But as these babies in Christ are delivered into Kingdom, someone has to nourish them and direct them in the truth, so Cornelius and the others *asked him (Peter) to stay a few days.*

Can you imagine the richness of the Bible studies that took place over those days?

Could we even begin to conceive the depth of the prayer meetings, as these new Believers began to pray for other family members, friends, and neighbors?

**There's nothing more exciting than a new Believer**, filled with the Holy Spirit, and growing in "*...the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18).

Peter was able to stay for a few days, ministering to them and encouraging them to continue in the faith. But, he needed to return to Jerusalem and I'm sure the reception he received wasn't what he had completely expected. Look what it says at the beginning chapter 11.

Acts 11

*<sup>1</sup> Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. <sup>2</sup> And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision came up to him saying, "Tell us about the great move of God among the Gentiles..."*

**NOT!!**

No, they actually complained or *contended with him, <sup>3</sup> saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"*

**Wow!**

**Isn't that just exactly what religion does to you?**

It makes you care **more about rules and regulations** than you do about people. They had *heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. But for them, that wasn't the important part.* No, the important part in their lives was that Peter had **stepped over the line.**

So, Peter had to **explain** the entire event all for them... he began to recount all of the events, from his time on the roof of the house of Simon the Tanner, all the way through the opening of the Gentiles hearts to the hope of the Gospel. This should be familiar to all of you who have been with us the last couple of weeks, but let's read what Peter shares with the Church leaders in Jerusalem.

Acts 11

<sup>4</sup> *But Peter explained it to them **in order... from the beginning**, saying: <sup>5</sup> "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. <sup>6</sup> When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup> And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'*

<sup>8</sup> *"But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.'<sup>9</sup> But the voice answered me again from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.'<sup>10</sup> "Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. <sup>11</sup> At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea.*

<sup>12</sup> *"Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. <sup>13</sup> And he told us how **he had seen an angel** standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, <sup>14</sup> who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.'*

<sup>15</sup> *"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, **as upon us at the beginning**. <sup>16</sup> Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'*

<sup>17</sup> *"If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"*

For you and me, this is now three times that we've heard these events told. The first was when it happened to each man – the Angel at Cornelius' house and the sheet with unclean animals on the rooftop. Secondly, as each man relays the event to the other – Cornelius telling Peter about the visitation, and Peter telling Cornelius about the vision. Then now as Peter tells it once again to the Church leadership in Jerusalem.

Peter wanted them to know all the facts. He wanted them to know this **wasn't just some half-cocked idea of his... neither was it a half-way commitment to something or someone trying to pull the wool over their eyes.** These people had a heart for the things of God and when the Gospel was explained to them, **they opened up and God moved in.**

One of the things we've been looking at as we've been studying Acts 10 and now chapter 11 is this whole idea of prejudice, and in particular religious prejudice.

**Peter wasn't changing the Word of God to fit man,  
but he was bypassing the rules of man to see men saved.**

I fear that all too often **the Church can actually be the hindrance to people coming to Christ.** We come with programs or liturgies, often making God seem so far away and having plenty of rules and regulations.

Without focusing on the **grace of God that offers forgiveness, we speak about the wrath of God which will punish all the wicked.**

And yes, He will punish the wicked. But as true as that future punishment is, we need to remember the words of Paul, when he told the Corinthian Church, ***"And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11)."***

God changes people from the inside out **through the work of His Spirit, not by the religious rules of the day.**

Our God is in the business of changing lives.

By changing them from the inside out He can take the vilest sinner and make him clean...

- Not to man's standards – so he can keep more rules and regulations...
- Oh no, our God cleanses to the uttermost, washing each of us in the precious blood of Christ.

The offer of God is so caring, so loving, and so direct:

Isaiah 1

<sup>18</sup> *"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool."*

Yes, in the **depths of our sin, there needs to be CONFESSION and REPENTANCE**, but with that repentance we **turn in full faith to receive the very promise of God**.

Isaiah 55

<sup>1</sup> *"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. <sup>2</sup> Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?"*

*Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. <sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you-*

**This wasn't a promise just to the Jews**, this message was for all those who thirst...

All those who have a desire to have their **sin washed clean and be able to stand in right relationship with God Almighty**.

Cornelius and his household had heard the message and their lives changed. **But it wasn't a religious change, it was a heart and soul change**.

They didn't change to become like the Jews, they changed **to be transformed into the image of Christ**.

As Peter stood before these Jewish Believers in Jerusalem, those who were standing in judgment against him and his interaction with the Gentiles, he asked...

Acts 11

<sup>17</sup> *"If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"*

It seemed as those who were there that day **began to understand**. They finally got the picture and they responded to Peter...

Acts 11

<sup>18</sup> *When they heard these things they **became silent**; and they **glorified God**, saying, **"Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."***

For the time being, we find that this is an awesome time for the Church. There seems to be this united willingness to embrace what the Lord was doing among the Gentiles. As Peter had explained, **he made it very clear that this was a total work of God – a work to bring the Gentiles to saving faith in Jesus Christ**, just as these Jewish Believers had experienced also.

But this isn't the end of the battle. We will find that this begins to bring about **a greater persecution from those Jews who were still under the Law**. We are going to see quickly in Chapter 12, Herod arrested and *killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also.*

Then we will find in chapter 15 that there is still an issue among the Church, as some of the Believing Jews (*those still bound up in the Law*), still arguing as to rather of not Gentiles could be saved without becoming a Jew first. The events of chapter 10 and 11 should have settled that, but let's face it **some sheep are slower learners than the rest, aren't we?**

The enemy will do all he can – both inside and outside the Church walls to bring destruction and to force the stop of the message of salvation.

**I think Satan loves religion**, (those efforts of man to make himself righteous by his own acts). He will let man work all day and all night trying to be righteous.

But, he will do **everything within his abilities to hinder someone** from experiencing the **grace of God through simple faith in the completed works of Christ**.

Religion Kills... But only in Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone, will you find LIFE – eternal life in Christ!

I'm not sure where you are in