

**“DO I  
REALLY UNDERSTAND  
THE GOSPEL?”**

from the book  
of

**Acts**

The “Do I *really* understand the Gospel?” series was originally inspired by an interview with a popular Christian author which went like this:

Interviewer:

***“Could you perhaps tell me informally what you believe to be the Gospel?”***

Popular Christian author's reply:

***“I'm not sure”***

(Interview between Graham Bannister & author Jack Deere in March 1990 in Australia)

Well, I wasn't sure what the Gospel was either, so I began in the book of Acts to find out, and it went from there. It ended up in this condensed form of study, which I find useful any time I need a reminder of what the Gospel is really all about, too.

### **A few things to note before launching in:**

- 1) This is not a study of every scripture in the book of Acts. It progresses through the book in chapter order but selects only those scriptures that relate directly to the gospel message, to make the message as concise and clear as possible.
- 2) The comments in italics below the scriptures are an attempt to capture the meaning of each scripture and show how the gospel message develops and expands as the book progresses.
- 3) There are checkpoints and summaries in boxed form on most pages to maintain a flow and keep things simple.
- 4) The scriptures are all taken from the Revised English Bible translation, to add a slightly different flavour.

At one point, Christ's very own disciples didn't understand the Gospel either, but Jesus told them how & when they would understand it:

**John 14:26** - "the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything & remind you of all that I have told you"

**John 15:26** - "When the advocate has come, whom I shall send you from the Father - the Spirit of truth that issues from the Father - he will bear witness to me"

**John 16:13** - "when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth"

✓ *With the coming of the Spirit they would understand the Gospel, so what better place to start than the Book of Acts, when the Spirit's work began?*

In Acts 1, Jesus makes it clear right from the start what the Gospel is about:

**Acts 1:4** - "you must wait for the gift promised by the Father" =

✓ *the Gospel is about a PROMISE from the Father*

**Acts 1:5** - "you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit" =

✓ *the Gospel is about a BAPTISM with the Spirit*

**Acts 1:8** - "to bear witness for me (Jesus)" =

✓ *the Gospel is about a WITNESS for Jesus*

In Acts 2, the same 3 points appear:

**Acts 2:39** - "the promise is to you & your children & to all who are far away, to everyone whom the Lord our God may call"

✓ *there's a promise for those the Father calls - & what is that promise? -*

**Acts 2:33** - "exalted at God's right hand, (Jesus) received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, & all that you now see & hear flows from him"

✓ *the promise is the Holy Spirit - & what does the Holy Spirit do? -*

**Acts 2:36** - "let all Israel then accept as certain, that God has made this same Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord & Messiah"

✓ *the Holy Spirit witnesses to Jesus - which is exactly what Jesus himself said would happen in **Luke 24** -*

*Verse 49 - "I am sending on you the gift promised by my Father"*

*Verse 48 - "you are to be my witnesses to it all" - that -*

*Verse 46 - "scripture foretells the sufferings of the Messiah & his rising from the dead on the third day, & (47) declares that in his name repentance bringing the forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed..."*

### IN SUMMARY SO FAR

The Gospel message is very simple: <u>God the Father calls people to see &amp; hear what the Holy Spirit has to say about Jesus. So...</u>
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What exactly DOES the Holy Spirit say about Jesus?

**Acts 2:22** - “I am speaking of Jesus of Nazareth, singled out by God, & made known to you through miracles, portents & signs”

✓ *The Holy Spirit focuses all the attention on Jesus - because -*

**Acts 2:36** - “God has made this same Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord & Messiah”

✓ *The reason why Jesus has been singled out by God (& backed up by miracles) is because Jesus is both Lord & Messiah - but what does that mean? It means -*

**Acts 2:38** - “Repent & be baptized in the name of the Messiah, then your sins will be forgiven, & you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”

✓ *It's because Jesus is Lord & Messiah that we receive forgiveness for our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit - for what purpose though? It's to enable us to -*

**Acts 2:40** - “Save yourselves from this crooked age”

✓ *It is through forgiveness & the Holy Spirit, both provided for us by Jesus, that we are able to escape the clutches of our crippling evil world, which is why -*

In Acts 3, a crippled man is completely healed when he's told “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” to “get up & walk” (Acts 3:6):

**Acts 3:16** - “The name of Jesus, by awakening faith, has given strength to this man whom you see & know, & this faith has made him completely well as you can all see”

✓ *A cripple is miraculously healed. Why? Because he has faith in the name of Jesus, the clear message being -*

**Acts 3:19-20** - “Repent therefore, & turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out. Then the Lord may grant YOU a time of recovery & send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus”

✓ *The healing of the cripple proves & demonstrates that we too can be healed from the crippling effect of our sin. But that's why God sent Jesus -*

**Acts 3:26** - “When God raised up his servant, he sent him to you first, to bring you blessing by turning every one of you from your wicked ways” -

✓ *God sent Jesus to heal us from sin just as totally as the cripple was healed from his disease -*

**Acts 4:10b** - “through him this man stands here before you fit & well”

✓ *The spotlight is on Jesus as the source of healing, the message being -*

**Acts 4:12** - “There is no salvation through anyone else; in all the world no other name has been granted to mankind by which we can be saved”

✓ *It's through Jesus & Jesus alone that we are saved from the crippling effects of sin, just as it was through Jesus & Jesus alone that the cripple was healed -*

By healing the crippled man, the Holy Spirit puts the spotlight on Jesus & why he was sent by God. It's because we've been crippled too, by sin, but Jesus was sent by the Father to wipe out our sins through his gift of forgiveness & to heal us from the effect of our sins through his gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit then begins a time of recovery, by turning us away from our wicked ways.

**CHECKPOINT No.1** - Do I really understand the Gospel? = YES I DO if:

- 1) I can see what our problem is as humans. We've been crippled by sin, but -
- 2) I can also see what the solution is. Through Jesus our sins are forgiven. It is also through Jesus that the Holy Spirit is given to us to enable us to recover from - & turn away from - the crippling effects of this world.

Even under threat in Acts 5, the spotlight stays locked on Jesus:

**Acts 5:31-32** - "God exalted him (Jesus) at his right hand as leader & Saviour, to grant Israel repentance & forgiveness of sins, & we are witnesses to all this, as is the Holy Spirit who is given by God to those obedient to him"

✓ *Whether "Lord & Messiah" or "Leader & Saviour," the Gospel highlights Jesus & the gifts we receive from him, as the only means by which our sin can be dealt with, & -*

In Acts 7, Stephen locks the spotlight on Jesus in the OLD Testament as well:

**Acts 7:35,37** - "This Moses...was commissioned as Ruler & Liberator by God himself. It was he who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you from among yourselves a prophet like me'"

✓ *In the Old Testament, the Spirit compares Moses to Jesus, meaning Jesus would come as a "Ruler & Liberator," too. The titles "Ruler & Liberator," "Lord & Messiah" and "Leader & Saviour" all mean the same thing, & they all focus our attention on who Jesus was & why he came, & -*

To take the spotlight off Jesus was described by Stephen this way:

**Acts 7:51-52** - "How stubborn you are, heathen still at heart & deaf to the truth. You always resist the Holy Spirit. You are just like your fathers...They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, & now you have betrayed him & murdered him"

✓ *"Truth" to the Holy Spirit has always been the message about Jesus, the "Righteous One." To ignore that truth is to "resist the Holy Spirit" directly.*

In Acts 8, the Ethiopian eunuch learnt this truth about Jesus from the Old Testament too:

**Acts 8:29-30,34-35** - “The Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go & meet the carriage.’ When Philip ran up he heard him reading from the prophet Isaiah & asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ ‘Please tell me,’ said the eunuch to Philip, ‘who it is that the prophet is speaking about here: himself or someone else?’ Then Philip began, & starting from this passage, he told him the good news of Jesus”

✓ *Old Testament or New Testament, the message from the Holy Spirit is exactly the same, it's the good news of Jesus as the promised Messiah who would deal with our sin, & -*

In Acts 9, the Holy Spirit inspires the same understanding in Saul (Paul):

**Acts 9:20,22** - “Without delay he proclaimed Jesus publicly, declaring him to be the Son of God...Saul went from strength to strength with his cogent proofs that Jesus was the Messiah”

✓ *So, that's Peter, Stephen, Philip & Saul all locking the spotlight on Jesus. Central to their message was preaching & proving Jesus was truly the promised Messiah, who would save us from our sin, & -*

### **The gospel didn't change one bit for the GENTILES, either:**

In Acts 10, Peter rounded off his preaching to the Gentile Cornelius with this:

**Acts 10:42-43** - “He commanded us to proclaim him to the people, & affirm that he is the One designated by God as judge of the living & the dead. It is to him that all the prophets testify, declaring that everyone who trusts in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name”

✓ *The Gospel message was exactly the same to the Gentiles - that they too would receive the gift of forgiveness of sins through Jesus, & -*

In Acts 11, the Gentiles received the other gift from Jesus too:

**Acts 11:17-18** - “God gave them no less a gift than he gave us when we came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.....‘This means,’ they said, ‘that God has granted life-giving repentance to the Gentiles also’”

✓ *Forgiveness of sins & the healing power of the Holy Spirit in “life-giving repentance,” the same two gifts Peter talked about in Acts 3:19 that Jesus was giving to the Jews -*

The Gospel never changes in the book of Acts, it's the same for Jew or Gentile, & the same in Old or New Testament language - Jesus was sent by God to wipe out our sins with forgiveness & life-giving repentance.

**CHECKPOINT No.2** - Do I really understand the Gospel? = YES I DO if:

- 1) I see the message about Jesus never changes from Old Testament to New Testament, & -
- 2) I see it's always & only through his gifts of forgiveness & life-giving repentance, that my sins can be dealt with.

In Acts 13, Paul confirms that message yet again:

**Acts 13:38-39** - “it is through him that forgiveness of sins is now being proclaimed to you. It is through him that everyone who has faith is acquitted of everything for which there was no acquittal under the law of Moses” - & -

In Acts 16, the Holy Spirit illustrates that message yet again:

**Acts 16:25-31** - “About midnight Paul & Silas, at their prayers, were singing praises to God...when suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken; the doors burst open & all the prisoners found their fetters unfastened. The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open &, assuming that the prisoners had escaped, drew his sword intending to kill himself. But Paul shouted, ‘Do yourself no harm, we are all here.’ The jailer called for lights, rushed in, & threw himself down before Paul & Silas, trembling with fear. He then escorted them out & said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They answered, ‘put your trust in the Lord Jesus, & you will be saved, you & your household’” - so -

If someone was to ask me, then:

- “Is there any way out of this mess I'm in?” or -
- “Is there any hope in this life at all?” or -
- “How can I ever make up for all the wrong I've done?” or -
- “Is it possible to be healed from the crippling effect of my sins?” or -
- “Is it possible to rise above the evil influences of this world?” =

The answer to all those questions has been supplied in what happened to that jailer. The man felt helpless & hopeless too, enough to want to kill himself, but his life was saved to illustrate, yet again, why Jesus came.

The Holy Spirit connects the name of Jesus to the jailer being rescued from his awful predicament & his life being saved, because it perfectly illustrates the Gospel message yet again, that, through Jesus, there's a way out of the awful predicament our sins have put us in.

**CHECKPOINT No.3** - Do I really understand the Gospel? = YES I DO if:

- 1) I can see I am utterly helpless in my sin, but -
- 2) I can also see Jesus was sent by God to rescue me from my helplessness.

In Acts 17, Paul confirms the Gospel message from the Old Testament:

**Acts 17:2-3** - “For the next 3 sabbaths, Paul argued with them, quoting texts of scripture which he expounded & applied to show that the Messiah had to suffer & rise from the dead. ‘And this Jesus,’ he said, ‘whom I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah’”

✓ *The only “scripture” they had back then was the Old Testament, but it too contained all that was needed to prove who Jesus was & why he had come, & -*

Jesus being raised from the dead proved it was all true:

**Acts 17:30-31** - “God has overlooked the age of ignorance, but now he commands men & women everywhere to repent, because he has fixed the day on which he will have the world judged, & justly judged, by a Man whom he has designated; of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead”

✓ *All those scriptures in the Old Testament about Jesus really came alive when Jesus came alive from the dead as well! And especially those scriptures about Jesus coming as “Lord, Ruler & Judge,” because that meant God’s Kingdom had arrived in their lifetime! No wonder then -*

In Acts 19, Paul speaks boldly about the Kingdom of God:

**Acts 19:8** - “During the next 3 months he attended the synagogue & with persuasive argument spoke boldly about the Kingdom of God”

✓ *Paul could speak “boldly” about God’s Rule or Kingdom, because Jesus had been raised from the dead by God to be its Ruler & Lord. That means Jesus has all the power he needs right now to make every promise God made to us come true -*

Jesus being raised from the dead gives power to the Gospel message. Every promise God made in the OT about Jesus, is now certain. God's Kingdom now rules, with Jesus at the helm as Ruler & Lord, with all the power he needs to make every promise God made to us come true.

**CHECKPOINT No.4** - Do I really understand the Gospel? = YES I DO if:

- 1) I see the raising of Jesus from the dead giving power & certainty to all those promises God made through Jesus in his Word, & -
- 2) I see Jesus at the helm of the Kingdom of God right now, with all the power he needs to make those promises come true.

In Acts 20, Paul boils down his message:

**Acts 20:21** - “with Jews & Gentiles alike I insisted on repentance before God & faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”

✓ *Paul “insisted” because the Kingdom & rule of God had arrived. When that truth dawns, that God's Kingdom now rules, it turns hearts toward God in humble repentance, but trust toward Jesus as well, because, as Lord & Ruler of that Kingdom, Jesus has the power now to fulfill in us personally all that was promised through him.*

Paul, then, lived for one thing & one thing alone:

**Acts 20:24,32** - “For myself, I set no store by life; all I want is to finish the race, & complete the task which the Lord Jesus assigned to me, that of bearing my testimony to the gospel of God's grace...And now I commend you to God & to the word of his grace, which has power to build you up & give you your heritage among all those whom God has made his own”

✓ *Paul lived to see others respond to the Gospel because he knew there was power in that message of God's incredible grace, to transform a human life both now & for eternity, so -*

To those who really understood the Gospel, he said:

**Acts 20:35** - “it is our duty to help the weak in this way, by hard work, & that we should keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus, who himself said, ‘happiness lies more in giving than receiving’”

✓ *To really understand the Gospel can bring enormous personal happiness, which is exactly what it's designed to do, but there's even greater joy in store when helping others really understand it -*

There is power in the Gospel message of God's incredible grace. It turns hearts toward God in humble repentance & trust toward Jesus to fulfill all that God promised through him. It transforms human lives both now & for eternity. It brings enormous happiness to all those who receive it & even more to those who give it, too.

**CHECKPOINT No.5** - Do I really understand the Gospel? = YES I DO if:

- 1) I have personally experienced the power of the Gospel message in turning my own heart toward God in humble repentance & in turning my trust to Jesus to transform my life both now & for eternity, & -
- 2) I know the happiness it gives me, so much so, there is nothing more important in my life than seeing others, in the same predicament I was in, receive the Gospel, too.

In Acts 22, the message is so simple:

**Acts 22:16** - “Be baptised at once & wash away your sins, calling on his name”

✓ *The Gospel is all about Jesus washing away our sins, perfectly illustrated by the ceremony of a water baptism. Why is all this so important though? -*

In Acts 23, Paul knows what's really at stake here:

**Acts 23:6** - “the issue in this trial is our hope of the resurrection of the dead”

**Acts 24:15-16** - “I hold the hope, that there is to be a resurrection of good & wicked alike. Accordingly, I train myself to keep at all times a clear conscience before God & man”

✓ *What's really at stake is the life that both good & wicked people receive after death. This is why it's so important after our sins are forgiven to live a good life with a clear conscience toward both God & our fellow humans, the very point Paul told Felix, the Roman Governor of Judea, in -*

**Acts 24:24-25** - “Some days later Felix....sent for Paul. He let him talk to him about faith in Christ Jesus, but when the discourse turned to questions of morals, self-control & the coming Judgement, Felix became alarmed & exclaimed, ‘Enough for now!’”

✓ *Felix resisted the move away from sin in his life that the Gospel both demanded & made possible. Faith in Christ would have transformed Felix's life, which is exactly what he needed, because -*

What's really at stake is the life that both good people & bad receive when resurrected. Sin is the deciding factor. The Gospel, however, promises a way of dealing with that sin, which properly understood, results in our sins being forgiven & our lives being transformed, where it's possible to live with a completely clear conscience toward both God & people.

**CHECKPOINT No.6** - Do I really understand the Gospel? = YES I DO if:

- 1) I understand what's really at stake here, it's what happens to my life after I die.
- 2) I know that turning away from sin is the deciding factor, in, first of all, having my sins forgiven and washed away but, secondly, in living a life free of sin toward God & my fellow humans from now on.

In Acts 26, Paul summarises what Jesus told him to do:

**Acts 26:18-20,22-23** - “You are to open their eyes & turn them from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God, so that they may obtain forgiveness of sins & a place among those whom God has made his own through faith in me. So, King Agrippa, I did not disobey the heavenly vision..... calling on them to repent & turn to God, & to prove their repentance by their deeds.....I assert nothing beyond what was foretold by the prophets & by Moses: that the Messiah would suffer & that, as the first to rise from the dead, he would announce the dawn both to the Jewish people & to the Gentiles”

*✓ This is what the Gospel is designed to do - it opens up our eyes to the predicament our sin has put us in, so that we turn in self-despairing trust to Jesus, our only solution, & begin a life of turning away from sin instead, & -*

In Acts 28, the last chapter in Acts, Paul is still at it:

**Acts 28:23,30-31** - “From dawn to dusk he put his case to them; he spoke urgently of the Kingdom of God & sought to convince them about Jesus by appealing to the law of Moses & the prophets...He stayed there two full years...he proclaimed the Kingdom of God & taught the facts about the Lord Jesus Christ”

*✓ Nothing has changed! From Acts 1 to Acts 28, every reference to the Gospel focuses on Jesus being the only solution to our predicament. True to the prophecies in the Law & the Prophets, Jesus now rules with the Kingdom of God, with all the power he needs to deal with our sin, because -*

**\*Jesus is the only means by which our sins can be dealt with\***

**The conclusion being (next page) ....**

## **Putting all this together from the book of Acts:**

“I truly understand the Gospel” when:  
(thanks to the Father's calling & the help of the Holy Spirit) -

### **1) I see my problem:**

\* It's sin, & the awful predicament that my sins & the influence of this world have put me in. At stake is the life I am raised to at God's Judgement Day.

### **2) I see my solution:**

\* It's Jesus. He is the only means by which I can be rescued from my predicament. He was sent by God as my Lord & Messiah, Leader & Saviour, and Ruler & Liberator, to wipe out my sin. He does so by his gifts of forgiveness & the healing power of the Holy Spirit bringing me life-giving repentance.

\* It's Jesus being raised from the dead that gives power to this message, because all that was promised through him in God's Word is certain - forgiveness, repentance, hope & justice. He is now at the helm of the Kingdom of God, with all the power he needs to make every promise God made, come true.

### **3) I see my direction in life:**

\* It's the marvellous experience of my heart turning completely to God & my trust turning completely to Jesus, enabling me to move away from sin, do good deeds & live with a good conscience toward both God & people.

\* It's the joy of seeing other people being transformed by God's incredible message of grace as they too understand the Gospel & it gradually dawns on them what's at stake, what their problem is, what their solution is, & what direction their lives can now take to be truly happy, as well.

*Such is the power of the Gospel, according to the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts.*

*(Illustrations also supplied by the Holy Spirit - in the healing of the crippled man & the saving of the jailer's life - to help make the Gospel clear).*