

Acts: A Call To Action

Dynamic action pervades the Acts of the Apostles! The Book of Acts is an urgent call for every follower of Jesus to get busy in actions on His behalf. Even the name of the book refers to the actions the apostles took upon their empowerment by the Holy Spirit to do the work for which the Lord had trained and commissioned them. Anyone who reads Acts and misses the urgency of acting on behalf of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has missed the major thrust of the book!

ACTION PROMISED

Jesus gave some charges to His apostles. (See Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:44–47.) He also gave them some promises about the coming of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 16:7–14). Then He ascended to glory (Acts 1:9–11). Just as Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit came to the twelve apostles, empowering them to do the work of apostleship (Acts 2:1–4). These men immediately went into action, preaching the gospel truth of the resurrected Jesus in the various languages of the people gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover and Pentecost feasts. Perceiving that the men were uneducated, yet hearing them speak fluently in many languages, the multitude was amazed. A great beginning of conversion to Christ happened on this occasion. This was made possible because the apostles took action, carrying out the will of Jesus (Acts 2:4, 14, 40, 42).

ACTION PICTURED

When God energized grace to mankind through the actions of the apostles, men responded eagerly (Acts 4:33; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 2:10, 11). Converts to the gospel became immediate and zealous workers, even in the face of severe persecutions; for each Christian recognized that he or she had a responsibility to teach the gospel (Acts 8:4). Congregations sprang into existence because of these energetic actions by the converts, along with those of the apostles.

Acts is our source of the history of this period, and it should be recognized as a call for everyone to be obedient to the offer of grace. It is our single record of how grace was offered and accepted during the first thirty years of the church of the Lord. This is a book of history—the history of how Christians went into action for Christ, the history of what the apostles taught people to do to accept God’s offer of grace. It is a history of the burning desire of Christians to evangelize the entire world.

The basic design of the book is to show how the work for which Jesus died was accomplished. Otherwise, why were the sermons recorded? Why were numerous conversion incidents recorded in detail? Why did Luke, the author, follow so closely the evangelistic work of the apostles?

Acts was designed to show how one initiates a relationship with Christ. Acts demonstrates the revelation from God. It records God’s final

offer of pardon from sins and the hope of heaven for those who obey His will. It reveals the actions that will please the God of heaven in every generation.

Even in the face of severe threats and persecutions, the apostles “kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). They realized that the church has one major assignment: to preach and teach the good news of salvation to the lost. No other reason is given for the inception and existence of the church.

The apostles were living and breathing “preaching machines.” They threw themselves upon altars of sacrifice for Jesus and spent their lives doing just what Jesus had trained them to do, empowered them to do, and expected them to do. If members of the church could read Acts correctly, understand the basic thrust of the book, use the stories of conversion accurately, and see the implications that God depends upon them to continue His great work, then they would realize that inaction on the part of Christians today is spiritually criminal.

ACTION PROPOSED

Throughout the book one finds clear examples of the series of actions that led to salvation then—the same series of actions that leads to salvation now. (1) Those who knew the truth, the apostles, taught it to others; (2) the ones presented with the gospel accepted it as truth and believed it; (3) the believers repented of their sins; (4) the penitent believers voiced their faith in Jesus as the Christ; (5) the confessing, penitent believers were baptized into Christ; and (6) the baptized believers accepted their responsibility to teach the gospel to others.

Christians are to be employed in soul-winning, but fervor for such action is not found in many congregations today. The highest unemployment rate is among church members who do no work for the Lord. Congregations of the church comprise the world’s worst welfare state; most members are spiritually dependent, refusing to take initiative in teaching the truth to their acquaintances. It costs no money to share the gospel with a neighbor or friend, yet Christians fail to invest in others’ souls.

Too many inactive actors are on the stage of Christianity today. Elders: What if the congrega-

tion where you serve were the only one in the world today, like the congregation in Jerusalem in Acts 2? How much of the world would hear about Christ if the local congregation continued its present course of action in evangelism? What if every person in the congregation were a soul-winner like yourself? How many souls would be won to Christ this year?

Preachers: If a dozen members of the congregation duplicated your soul-winning record, would there be several baptisms into Christ in the next six months?

Deacons: If you listed all of the special responsibilities you fulfilled this year for the local congregation, how many souls could be counted as having accepted the gospel directly or indirectly as a result your actions?

Members of congregations: Would you be willing to take a “love-and-concern temperature” of yourself in regard to your spiritual thermometer? Were you concerned enough about lost souls in the last year to be involved in teaching the gospel to any of them? Were you just one of the bench-sitters, the passive members, one of the spectators in an audience? Did you receive the benefits of fellowship with your brethren without doing anything for the benefit of the Lord?

Congregations: Have you “filled Jerusalem” (your own community, city, county, state, or area) with the teaching of Christ (Acts 5:28)? Acts records that the early Christians did so. If you are not spreading the Word, why not?

Many congregations draw comfort for themselves in “holding fast to the Word,” being “bastions of the faith.” Would these congregations ever consider the message of Acts and be “bastions of evangelism” for Jesus?

Too many people are fooled into thinking that “church work” consists of simply meeting for worship services and classes. Many men and women believe their church work is done if they help teach a class or if they are involved some way in helping in the worship assemblies. Such activity, though surely good and proper, is not accomplishing the major mission of the church. The church is not designed simply to meet together and worship; the church is designed to provoke (stimulate) love and good works (Hebrews 10:24, 25). The church is to accomplish what is meant by being the “pillar and support of

the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Too many congregations are "*pillows* of the truth"; that is, they are asleep on the job. They ought to be major "*pillars* of strength" for spreading the gospel throughout the world.

If a person bought a watch that did not keep time well, what would happen? Normally, that person would see whether or not the watch could be repaired to do what it was purchased to do—keep time. If the watch never kept time well in spite of repeated repairs, it would have to be discarded.

What, then, does one suppose God will do with congregations who do not evangelize? Will He be any better pleased with us than we would be with a faulty timepiece? If a church does not impact its own community, God may have to discard it on the judgment day. One should remember that congregations were held responsible as groups—for example, the seven congregations in Asia to whom the Lord addressed Himself in Revelation 1 through 3.

What other major mission does God have for any congregation? It is time to take our spiritual temperatures in regard to our impact upon our own local communities and what we are doing to help evangelize the rest of the world.

It is time to pause and consider just how many members in any congregation it takes to baptize one soul into Christ. Over the last five decades, churches have usually averaged about a 10 percent ratio; that is, in any given year one could expect a church to baptize a number equal to 10 percent of its membership. (For example, a congregation in the U.S. having 300 members would usually see about 30 baptisms in a year.) However, many children are usually coming of age to be baptized in the congregations, so a 10 percent growth rate does not necessarily mean that people in the community are leaving error and sin and coming to obedience to Christ. Teaching the children in the families that belong to the church is surely commendable, but such a low percentage rate tells a sorry tale of slothful evangelism. These churches may be burying their talents, afraid to step out and be bold for the Lord.

Most congregations in the U.S. would be shocked if they listed accurately the results of their evangelism as to teaching and baptizing

"outsiders" from the local communities. Therefore, even churches today that report having over one hundred baptisms during the year might be embarrassed if they checked to see how many of that number were their own children. If they were even keeping up with the 10 percent ratio, think of how many baptisms that would be!

CONCLUSION

Acts is God's call to action. It records how the apostles responded in the first century, but it is also a timeless call to action for each disciple.

God needs people of daring and imagination. He needs people of commitment, constancy, and courage. The Lord needs disciples who are not distracted by the world. Jesus needs those whose priorities are spiritual. He needs people whose minds are centered on heaven.

Acts stands as a bright beacon, a shining memorial to the energy, action, diligence, perseverance, and courage of Christians in the first century. This book shows what Jesus would be doing if He had remained on earth—just what He did while He was on earth, bringing hope and salvation to any and all who would listen. Being "exalted to the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33), Jesus now expects His followers to accomplish His will. He is trusting the church in every century to be the evangelizing soul-winners who are needed to spread His gospel, the good news of grace, to every person in every century.

Acts records the results of the Great Commission that Christ gave to His disciples prior to His ascension (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:44–47). Therefore, when people of any generation read the book, it is easy for them to determine what Jesus wants done. It is not hard to know *what to do*: go, teach, and preach. It is not hard to know *where to go*: all nations. It is not hard to know *what to preach*: the gospel of repentance and remission of sins. It is not hard to know *whom to contact*: every creature. It is not hard to know *what to help believers to do*: be baptized into Christ. It is not hard to know *what to help the baptized converts to do*: observe all things Jesus has commanded.

Let us heed the clear message of Acts: It is a call to action for each person who belongs to Christ. ♦