

“And they continued steadfastly in the Apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Acts 2:42

Acts

The Church is God’s idea and God’s personal property. The Church is neither a building, a business, or a burden, but a living body. It is not an organization as much as an organism. It is not an inanimate object but a living growing and going thing. It is not just a collection of facts but a community that acts in a way consistent with its nature. The themes of Authority, Integrity, Liberty, Activity, Community, Captivity, and Fidelity describe this community of faith and what constitutes a New Testament Church.

1. *“and they” this speaks to community.*

2. *“continued” this speaks to fidelity.*

3. *“steadfastly” this speaks to captivity.*

4. *“doctrine” this speaks to authority.*

5. *“fellowship” this speaks to activity.*

6. *“breaking of bread” this speaks to liberty.*

7. *“prayers” this speaks to integrity.*

These themes lend themselves to a seven week study of Acts and the church. The acts of the early believers offer us an example of a church in action. The study includes a text and commentary for each theme as well as individual outlines for each chapter for greater study. The important thing is not just to know the “facts,” but to do something with the Truth we possess. We must be doers of the Word and not just hearers. We must do something, we must Act. The three principles of Bible Study are 1) what does it say? 2) What does it mean? 3) What am I going to do about it?

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine, in fellowship, and the breaking of bread , and in prayers.” Acts 2:42

*“And they...” who are “they?” They: that is the community called the church. “Continued.” This is the link between their generation and ours. “Continued” will be the link between our generation and the next. “Continued” speaks of faithfulness and fidelity. “Steadfastly.” Actually there is really only one word for “continuing steadfastly” but what the disciples did deserves two. The idea is to persevere and persevere they did in the face of great “hostility.” Jails, prejudice, and hatred could not could not incarcerate the first century saint sent on a mission. The word “doctrine,” may be translated “teaching,” but it was more. It was the secret and the source of the believers faith, hope and love. It was the reason for their boldness as it was their “authority.” The word “fellowship” is the Greek word *koininia* and describes the activity of grace in the family of God. The church was a functioning body working together for the glory of God and the good of the whole.*

Another element of the New Testament church is described in the words “breaking of bread.” The word there is not *graphos*, or *logos*, but *artou* (loaf). It speaks of the feast instituted by our Lord called the Lord’s Supper. A family sits at one table. A living Lord left a table not a tomb to be the focal point of gathering. Eating is something celebratory not something somber. Christ asked that we “remember” Him, and we do. Lastly, the church gathered to pray. No other one thing gives the church more power, wisdom, or courage than this mysterious method of communication with God called prayer. These are the Acts of the Apostles.

Act One

Authority (Acts 1-4)

1:1 “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.”

Read: Chapters 1-4 of Acts.

Theme: Authority

Notice the boldness of the early believers. Notice how timid and frightened disciples were changed and transformed by what happened, first by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and second, to them in the upper room.

The closing words of the Gospel of Matthew are of a risen Savior. “*All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth*” (28:18). Christ then endows His followers with authority and with power that equips them for God’s new endeavor: the church. The energy of the church and the enthusiasm of the saints are derived from the reality of the resurrection and the reliability of God’s word. To teach the word is only half of our ministry and mandate. We are also, by God’s grace, and by His authority to “do” them.

2:42 “*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*”

1. This book begins by speaking about all that Jesus began to _____ and _____.

Why are both important in the life and ministry of each believer and the church?

What is another word for “what we do?” How does this tie in with the “great commission” given in Matt. 28?

2. While we live by faith, how important in these early days of the church were the “many infallible proofs,” and why? What was the greatest infallible proof?

3. What did the believers do (or not do) in verse 4 that prepared them for verse 5 and following? How can we apply the principle to our own spiritual life?

4. What was the promise and what was the power described in verse 8?

5. When the church “spoke in tongues,” what they said was more important than how they said it. The tongues may have been different, but the word was the same. In what way was this so, and why is this important?

6. Notice the simplicity and the completeness of the activities of the the early church ministry as seen in Acts 2:42. How important are each of these?

7. Notice the place and importance of prayer in the life of the early church.

8. The authorities question the disciples “authority” to speak and teach. What was the response of the believers? (4:7; 20). What should our attitude or relationship be to the world’s “authorities?”

3:6 “*Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I to thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.*”

4:7 “*By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?*”

Act - Worship First *Make it a point to begin each day and each week with worship. Bow before the Living Word. Place yourself at God’s disposal and never say “no” to God. Make it a practice to be filled with God’s Word by memorizing it and meditating upon it and “expect to receive something” in and by His name.*

Act Two

Integrity (Acts 5-8)

5:11 *“And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.”*

6:3 *“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom whom we may appoint over this business.”*

7:60 *“And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”*

8:4 *“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.”*

Read: Chapters 5-8 of Acts.

Theme: Integrity

Notice that the integrity of God’s word inculcates as well as motivates the early church. Nothing is more important than integrity. In government, business, marriage, and medicine, the highest standards of truth and integrity must be maintained. With God, the “bottom line” must be a straight line. The end does not justify the means, the means validate the ends.

Evil cannot stop the church, but it can stumble her. If the church compromises in the area of integrity it, like Samson, shall lose its strength. Satan tempted the Savior in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry. He tempted the early believers in a very subtle manner and then, as it often does now, it involved money. Think about sin and what the Lord Jesus came to save us from. Power is important, but no less is purity. There is a proportional relationship between power and purity. When Jesus was touched by the woman who had an issue of blood in Luke 8:46, it says that “*virtue*” came out of Him. His virtue was His power.

1. What did Ananias and Sapphira do that lead to their down fall? How does this sin compare to other infractions and what does it say about the importance of honesty and integrity? They _____ to the Holy Spirit. How serious is that?
2. If this could be considered as the first example of “church discipline” what results might we expect when discipline is maintained? (5:11,14).
3. What is the relationship of “obedience” and “integrity?” (5:29)
4. Satan tried to use money to corrupt the church. Next “murmuring” exposed a failure in “ministry.” Why was it important to address this problem quickly? How did the apostles respond? (Acts 6). What should we look for in our leadership?
5. In what way did the integrity of Stephen shine in chapter seven? What principle can we apply to our own ministry and message?
6. What did Philip use to reach the Ethiopian Eunuch? How was he faithful to his ministry and calling?

Act - Be Holy *Allow God to search your heart and to reveal any sin or selfish motive that would prevent God’s blessing or acceptance of your gifts. Confess and forsake any impure, evil or unholy thing that may stumble another. Pray for purity for only the “pure in heart shall see God.”*

Act Three

Liberty (Acts 9-12)

9:5 “Who art thou, Lord?”

Read: Chapters 9-12 of Acts.

Theme: Liberty

10:15 “And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.”

Notice Saul wanted to “bind” the Christians and arrest the new movement. He was “*breathing out threatings*.” He himself was “arrested” by a living Savior on the Damascus. Everything turns on the answer to Saul’s question, “Who art thou, Lord?” He discovered that Christ was alive and well. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is faith’s evidence that each believer is a soul set free.

11:18 “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then that God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

Salvation is a great liberation. It is “V” day and victory. Believers are free from the penalty and bondage of sin. These chapters speak of the liberty of the spirit, mind, and soul. How we use our liberty and freedom in Christ is in itself a witness to “power” and “purity” of the new life (authority, integrity). We are free to say “yes” to God, and free to say “no” to sin. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.

12:7b “and his chains fell off from his hands.”

1. In what way was Saul in bondage? Salvation does not mean we are free from pain. Notice what is said of Saul in 9:16. He must _____.
2. How was Saul’s experience similar or dis-similar to our own salvation experience?
3. In what way was Peter “set free,” and why was this important in reaching a world that lived beyond the governance of Israel?
4. In what way are we free according to Acts 10:34? In what ways are people often bound by traditions or prejudice? How does prejudice limit our vision and ministry?
5. What was the instrument employed again and again to open doors of freedom? (Acts 11:1)
6. How was grace demonstrated by Barnabas?
7. In what way was Peter “free” before he was “free?”

Act - Help Someone Today *Someone needs God’s help. You are God’s answer to someone’s prayer. Help someone today. Ask God to show you as He showed Barnabas the need on Straight Street, or as He brought Cornelius and Peter together, to lead you to the person you can help in faith and grace today.*

Act Four

Activity (Acts 13-16)

13:2 *“Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”*

14:4 *“But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.”*

15:36 *“And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.”*

16:9 *“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”*

Read: Chapters 13-16 of Acts.

Theme: Activity

Notice the book has been known as the Book of Acts by the church. It is a historical account of the earliest believers of Jesus Christ. A New Testament church is an active church. It could not be relegated to the privacy of a chapel or an upper room. The world would gladly zone it, relegate, restrict it, and ignore it. But a living church will not cooperate with the world’s planning boards. The church not only had a mandate, it also was on a holy mission.

The first mission team set out from Antioch. This was the same place the word “Christian” was coined. Notice how these missionaries used the Word of God in their missionary work. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. A recital of Hebrew history, the law and the prophets was concluded with a warning *“Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets.”* When we speak to people about faith, we must use the Bible.

- 1 What did Paul and Barnabas speak to the Jews and Gentiles and what were the results? (Acts 13:40, 42, 44, 46,48).
2. What happened in Iconium and in 14:4? What will the Word of God do to a crowd of hearers?
3. The apostles received a very different reception at Derbe. There were two extreme reactions to Paul and Barnabas. How are these two extremes still very dangerous? How do both aim at our pride?
4. What happened to Paul reminds us that missionary work is very dangerous work. Why should it not be taken lightly? How should we pray for missionaries in the light of what is recorded here in Acts?
5. What was it that prompted the apostles to return to Jerusalem? What was the result of the historic council meeting?
6. When Paul and Barnabas disagreed, how did the work continue?
7. How was Paul directed by the leading of the Holy Spirit in his activities? How should we measure our activities?

Act - Share the Gospel Message Today *Do not let the sun go down without telling someone about Jesus. Give someone a tract, or write or call someone who needs to know Christ. Don't be guilty of this sin of Omission. Today!*

Act Five

Community (Acts 17-20)

Read: Chapters 17-20 of Acts.

Theme: Community

17:16 “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”

Notice that a church is “people.” It is not buildings. It is more than doctrines. It is more than creeds. The church is a community. These chapters trace the growth and development of faith within given communities. The Apostle Paul “*went through the cities,*” and none were quite the same when he left. No one changes a community like Jesus Christ. John 3:16 is clear that “*God so loved the world.*” That means the intellectual, the religious, and the barbarian. Jesus Christ died for the whole world. We are to tell the Gospel to everyone.

18:10 “For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city.”

1. What kind of community was Athens? What troubled Paul when he visited the place called Mars Hill?

19:18 “And many that believed came and confessed, and showed their deeds.”

2. The philosophers and intellectuals listened to Paul until he spoke of the _____ (v.32) and then they _____. Where are we likely to have a Mars Hill experience today and what should be our expectation?

3. What kind of community was Corinth? Where are the Corinthians of today?

4. What kind of believers did Paul encounter in Corinth? (19:2).

20:7 “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”

5. What did the converts do at Ephesus that demonstrated the reality of their faith and repentance? (19:18:19)

6. Who were those most offended by the gospel message in Ephesus, why? How is this paralleled today?

7. The believers gathered together on _____ to break bread.

Act - Build up the Body *Cities and communities must be built. Old ideas sometimes need to be torn down if they are to make room for a new edifice. Do something today to build up yourself or others. Prepare to give an answer to those still on Mars Hill. Prepare yourself to influence more than be influenced when walking through Corinth. Share with others the reason for hope that is in you.*

21:13 “Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Act Six

Captivity (Acts 21-24)

Read: Chapters 21-24 of Acts.

Theme: Captivity

The world is a hostile environment. The world system will do everything to stop the mission and program of Christ. Paul, rather than running from this hostility walked directly into the line of fire. First, he went to the religious center and next to the political center of the world. It is easy to understand the hostility of the “ungodly.” It is more difficult to understand the hostility of those who portend to be “godly.” The acts and reactions of people are a good outward indicator of what is actually the condition of an unbelieving heart.

22:21 “And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.”

1. Notice the “straight course” in 21:1. Following the Holy Spirit and the Word of God is a “straight course.” Even when it appears that we are blocked or side tracked, there is a Spirit-led life that we must all seek. How can we know we are “on course?”

23:1 “...I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’

2. Paul was attacked in the temple. Strange but telling that such uncharitable behavior often takes place in religious precincts. Like Jesus, Paul yielded to the hand of God as much as the hand of man. How did Paul use what he had at his disposal to take advantage and making the most out of a bad situation?

3. Paul began his experience with the church by trying to crush it. He had arrest warrants and was determined to imprison believers showing no mercy on men, women, and children. How is it appropriate that such a one as Paul be called to experience the full brunt of hostility from those not unlike his earlier self? How did Paul’s background prepare him and equip him to be Christ’s representative and ambassador in such a world?

4. How did Paul use each confinement as an opportunity to give his testimony? What can we learn from his experience that we can apply to our own?

5. What did Paul have that kept him free? (23:1) What can we do to have such a handy key to prison cells?

Act - Don’t Stop *There will be many reasons to stop today. Don’t do it. The world and enemies of your soul are trying to arrest or discourage you. Don’t let it happen. Use every attempt to “lock you up” to witness to those who try. Remember, How we “react” is more telling than how we “act.” One catches us off guard and is the true picture of what is in our heart.*

Act Seven

Fidelity(Acts 25-28)

25:25 *“But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.”*

26:19 *“Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.”*

27:23 *“For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.”*

28:31 *“Preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”*

Read: Chapters 25-28 of Acts.

Theme: Fidelity

In the end, faith has only one real test. Was it faithful? Faith is faithful. It is as simple as that. Those who do not endure to the end fail because they had something less than faith. Jesus said “follow me.” Real faith follows. This faith has very little to do with ourselves however. It has everything to do with God. We are just “witnesses.” We cannot help but speak the things we have seen and heard. A witness does not “invent” the events, but merely tells what he knows and what he has witnessed.

1 Paul was told that he would bring the gospel to Rome. That in itself might have sounded incredible since it was a Roman cross that crucified Christ. It was God’s will and it was God’s word. Think of all the ways the early believers were “faithful.” Why is fidelity so important in both the ministry and the message of the church? What is the significance of the word “continued steadfastly” to this and the next generation?

2. Secular history describes Paul’s world as one of violence, intrigue, immorality, and danger. In what way was his world similar to ours and in what was it different?

3. How could Paul display such courage in the midst of the great storm while seasoned sailors gave way to fear? What are the lessons about sailing through troubled waters that we can lift from this biblical account and apply in our own life?

4. What happened to Paul on Malta? What kindness did he find and what comfort do we derive from his experience?

5. In what way does the book of Acts continue?

Act- Be Faithful *If you are going through a terrible storm, “stay the course.” If you have to lower the sails and “let her drive.” be of good courage. Even if the ship breaks apart, God is faithful. Like Paul, don’t panic. Every storm will pass. The God of all comfort will embrace you with His “helps.” Don’t be disobedient to the heavenly vision. Soon enough, you will make port and hear God’s word “Well Done!”*