



VI. Evangelism *and* Teaching in Acts

"The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the Apostles whom He had chosen." Acts 1:1-2

A highlights history. These verses are the opening words of Luke's second history document written to Theophilus. His first, the Gospel of Luke, is a history of the Life of Christ. His second account (the book of Acts) documents the initial expansion of the Gospel in the First Century. The four Gospels devote one-third of their coverage to the short time from the Triumphal Entry to the Ascension. That is 1,200 verses documenting what Jesus did and taught in about seven weeks. The entire book of Acts contains only 1,007 verses and covers about 28 years of early church history. On average, that is only 36 verses per year ... 3 verses per month ... or just under 2 words per day. That is why Acts can be rightly called a *highlights history*.

A count that counts. The Gospel spread rapidly and widely in the First Century, as Jesus outlined in His expansion strategy into *"Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth," Acts 1:8*. The book of Acts records early missionaries going to, or through, over 60 geographic locations ... traveling a total distance more than that from Log Angeles to London, more than from Beijing to Baltimore, more than from New Jersey to New Delhi. Initially, there were about 120 believers that met to pray in an upper room, Acts 1:15. Then the Holy Spirit arrived and Peter delivered a very teaching-like, fulfilled-prophecy based evangelistic message. About 3,000 people responded in faith, Acts 2:41. Immediately they were devoting themselves to the Apostles teaching, Acts 2:42. A short time later 5,000 men responded to the Gospel, Acts 4:4. These Bible-given statistics show that numbers can be important. They represent the number of people who believed. Nothing is found in those passages about local church membership roles. Did they gather together? Absolutely!

"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved," Acts 2:42-47.

Too often, church growth is measured in campus acreage, building square footage, budget prowess, number of staff, and people on the roles or in the pews. Some of today's church-growth body count is little more than a record of sheep shuffling as people move from one local church to another ... rather than the count of those who have believed in Christ. The Acts 2 and 4 numbers were counts of the people who believed in Christ in just the one city of Jerusalem. A count that counts is how many believe in Christ. What is that count in my city? What is it in yours? The Acts history of evangelism did not record early church sheep shuffling. It is a record of a count that counts. In addition, it is a history of teaching the Word.

Evangelism and teaching. In Acts, Luke wrote about evangelism and teaching in the First Century. Evangelism is the obvious first line of attack in obeying the Great Commission to "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,*" Matthew 28:18-20. However, teaching is also part of that commission. Jesus included the command, "*teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*" ... not some but *all* that He commanded. The first converts devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching, Acts 2:42. Preaching, proclaiming, and testifying in Acts were about the Gospel and directed toward non-believers. Teaching in Acts was directed toward believers. A great example of the balance of these two is found in the account of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch.

"But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch, " Acts 11:20-26.

Evangelism is found throughout Acts ... as is teaching from Acts 2:42 to the final words of the book describing Paul's ministry while under house arrest in Rome. "*And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered,*" Acts 28:30-31.

Extensive teaching. Do not be infer from Acts that those early Christians went on hurried mission trips stopping only a few days in each place as if they were flat stones skipping across the surface of a placid pond. The first seven chapters of Acts record their ministry in just Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas taught in Antioch for an entire year, Acts 11:26. They stayed a long time in Iconium, Acts 14:3. Paul taught for a year and a half in Corinth, Acts 18:11. Paul spent two years reasoning with those present at the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus, Acts 19:9-10. After staying in Asia for a while, Acts 19:22, he exhorted the believers throughout Macedonia and then spent three months in Greece, Acts 20:2-3. Paul was very evangelistic ... but he was also committed to teaching the believers. His commitment to teaching is evident in the following excerpt from his words to the elders of Ephesus ... as follows:

"You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and ... how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house ... I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God ... be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears," Acts 20:18-31.

Acts teaching was not via brief weekly messages. Moreover, it is not done the American-way in much of the World today. I taught many times in Poland for thirty or forty hours per week to a group of believers ... sometimes for three weeks in a row (equaling the time of four years of Sunday messages). For three days in the Ural Mountains, I taught 3 or 4 hours in the morning and 4 hours in the afternoon ... and taught again in the evening. That is ten months of Sunday messages in three days. First Century believers were committed to much teaching. They were continually devoted to the Apostles teaching, Acts 2:42. A lengthy message is mentioned in Acts 15:32. Paul gave *much* exhortation, Acts 20:2. In addition, Paul gave at least one message that continued until midnight ... then he talked with them until daybreak, Acts 20:7-11. The Acts believers feasted on more than a weekly 30-minute Sunday brunch of the Word.

Full obedience. We are not fully obeying the Great Commission, or following the example of the book of Acts, if we are not involved in the expansion of the Gospel. Likewise, we are not fully obeying the Great Commission, or following the example of the book of Acts, if we are not involved in teaching believers to obey all that He has commanded. The teaching *all that He has commanded* includes more than directing a new believer to a seat in the meeting hall, handing them a paperback New Testament, or teaching them a few needed basics of the pure milk of the Word. Good teaching means helping them press on beyond the basics of milk to the strong meat of the Word, Hebrews 5:11-6:3. Move them on from milk to meat. The goal is to make disciples ... not just believers. The goal is to make disciples ... not just milk-only veal Christians. Evangelism without meat teaching is not discipling.

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