

4

Acts of the Apostles

Living Praise Presbyterian Church - Home Cell Group Bible Study Feb-Jul 2001



THE TEST OF CONVICTION

.....

Caricatures

Most of us don't realize the caricatures, the ludicrous and distorted mental pictures folks have of church-going, Bible-toting "saints."

It's true. We represent a host of spooky, hard-to-understand concepts.

We refer to being "born again" even though we reject reincarnation. That's *strange* to the uninitiated. We talk out loud to a Person we cannot see, and we commit out entire future to One we've never met because a Book we believe He wrote (though we didn't see Him do it) tells us that we should. That's quite a dose for some to swallow. We say we are followers of Christ, but there are a few times every year we act like the devil. We claim to be citizens of heaven, but we walk around on earth. We talk about love and forgiveness, purity, and compassion, but we murder with our mouths, lust with our eyes, and ignore with our ears.

You and I understand those contrasts because we have been carefully instructed, we have learned about the carnal-spiritual battle. So we leave room for such contradictions...but the guy outside doesn't. He mentally constructs a distorted conglomeration of things that are a mixture of exaggeration, confusion, and the fact. The word sees us rip off one another and pictures us with two faces and a forked tongue. In a weak or hurried moment, we make a couple of stupid statements - so an empty head is added to the caricature. I don't know how many people have told me that a major battle before becoming a Christian was the fear of having to commit intellectual suicide. We nod in agreement that "it is better to give than to receive," then spend our days grabbing and grasping - so our hands are oversized and our eyes are bulging with greed. How rare are the authentic models of Christian character!

Our worry list is long enough though we say He takes our burdens...our patience with the waitress is short even though she saw us pray...our driving is often somewhere between irritating thoughtlessness and rank lawlessness even though that bumper sticker identifies us as people who model the gospel message. Color us red. Rather than that, give us masks. Better still, *make us invisible!*

Caricatures, admittedly, are flase freaks, extreme representations. But they cause formidable hangups when the subject of Christianity is brought up. The cross is supposed to be offensive, remember, not the Christian. The death and resurrection of Christ have sufficient power to penetrate like a double-edged razor. Like it or not, fake models dull the edges.

The answer is not to try hard to be perfect (waste of time) or to peel off the "Jesus is Lord" sticker (cop out) or to keep apologizing (guilt trip) so all caricatures might be erased. Face it, some folks wouldn't change their erroneous ideas about CHristians even if every one of us were suddenly more devoted than John the Baptist. Furthermore, the life of faith and our deeply significant convictions are not suspect because the majority in our day choose to walk by sight and mock those who don't.

Then what's the point? You can't change the model of other Christians. And you can't change the mind of other non-Christians. But you can do something about the lack of character inside your skin.

The presence of caricatures doesn't matter nearly so much as the absence of character.

(from *The Quest for Character*, by Chuck Swindoll)



A disabled person becomes abled! And a one-time burden to society, a beggar, becomes functional and a contributing citizen!

How do the religious leaders respond to these miraculous events? Instead of expressing gratitude, they become extremely upset. The two men responsible for the healing are arrested.

How do we as Christians today see the parallel in today's inequalities?

REFLECTION:

How has your faith in Jesus Christ been challenged by others? List some instances of "persecutions" in your life.

DISCOVERY:

1. Read Acts 4:1-22. What has upset the religious leaders (vv1-2)?
2. What actions did they take (vv3-7)?
3. Just a few weeks have passed since Annas and Caiaphas had been involved in the condemnation of Jesus. In his response to their question "By what power or what name did you do this?" Peter is forcing them to encounter Jesus again. What does Peter say about him?



Who are the people you know who appear to get along well with others? What is so special about them? What qualities do they possess which make them people persons? The people I know who get along well with others are enjoyable to be with. They show genuine interest in others. When they are with you, they are really with you.

I think of a man I know who is very gracious, friendly, and refined in his dealings with people, whether they are his friends, his co-workers, or the waiters who serve him. His pleasant manner is not put on; it's genuine. And he gets along with almost everybody. When I'm with him, he treats me as an individual. I am accepted for who I am and viewed by him as a person of worth. He listens to me and appreciates my contributions to the conversation.

A man who encourages and builds up others, he is compassionate and empathetic, touching people in times of joy and sorrow. He fits the description of a likeable character I read about recently in a novel. This man was described as "large-hearted with everyone." The way my friend treats the people in his life is how most people want to be treated.

Do these qualities describe how you would like to be treated? Are these qualities evident in your dealings with others? It takes time to develop the qualities I find in my friend. I'm still working on them in my life. Fortunately, we all have the capacity to learn them and put them into practice.

(from *How to Get Along with Almost Anyone* by H. Norman Wright)

a. In what ways does the church confront the world with Jesus Christ today?

b. How does the church fail to do this?

4. In vv13-22 what made it so difficult for the opposing religious leaders to bring this unacceptable behavior to a stop?

c. Imagine that you had been in a group of believers John and Peter returned to and told of what had happened. What would have been your reaction?

5. Read Acts 4:23-31. What was the reaction of the believers to John and Peter's account?

6. What's the significance of their unity when their task and power were being challenged?

7. What does their prayer tell you about their faith in the character, power and faithfulness of God?

d. "After they prayed...they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." In what ways do you need the power of the Holy Spirit to face the world today?

e. Ask God to fill you with the Spirit as you face constant challenges in the task communicating the gospel.



Topical Study:

THE NEW BIRTH

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 2:47)

This word tells us that men are saved by Jesus Christ and by no one else. But what does it mean to be saved, and how is one saved?

Some people who answer yes to the questions, Are you a Christian? are uncomfortable with the question, Have you been saved? This is because, for many, being a Christian is merely being a member of a church, having as a good neighbor, turning over a new leaf, or giving generously noble causes. But Christians are "Christ ones" - those who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God and who have come into His fellowship as His children.

Every true believer in Christ - whether parent, Sunday school teacher, friend, layman, minister - should be able to explain to the unsaved how to become a Christian. The entire book of Romans dwells on the general subject of salvation. Verses from different books of the New Testament are brought together in the following outline, teaching various aspects of the doctrine of the new birth.

1. You Must Be Born Again

Note the passive form of the verb "be born." This is something that must be done *to* you or *for* you, not *by* you, although there is something that you must do in order to make the new birth possible for you.

2. Why Must One Be Born Again in order to enter the kingdom of God?

Romans 8:7-8 answers the question. By natural generation we are brought into this world and, if we so live after the flesh, we shall die in our sins (Rom 8:13). It is impossible for the unsaved - the carnally minded - to enter God's kingdom and family when he is at "enmity against God," "not subject to the law of God," and utterly incapable of being subject to that law and of pleasing Him (Rom 8:7-8). The natural, unregenerate man is blind to the things of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:2:14) and corrupt in his affections (Gal 5:19-21). This is his condition regardless of how cultured, refined, or outwardly moral he may be.

Sources:

Chuck Swindoll, The Quest for Character.

Irving Jensen, **Acts - A Self-study Guide.**

Phyllis J. Le Peau, **Acts.**

H. Norman Wright. **How to Get Along with Almost Anyone.**

3. What is New Birth? (Read 2 Peter 1:4)

The new birth is the impartation of God's nature. Ezekiel 36:26-27, though spoken primarily to Israel, describes what takes place in every human life at the time of regeneration. "In the new birth God imparts to us His own wise and holy nature, a nature that thinks as God thinks, feels as God feels, wills as God wills."

4. How can one be born again?

What is man's part? What must I do? Read John 1:12-13. To be born again I must believe in Jesus Christ and receive Him into my heart as my Savior. I must confess the Lord Jesus and believe in my heart that God raised Him from the dead (Rom 10:9). This new life is by faith - "that believing you might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

5. Results of the New Birth

"Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor 5:17b). When I receive Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and am born of the Spirit, a new creation has taken place. From that time forth I am a temple of God, the Spirit of God dwells in me (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19), and the progressive process of being made anew into the likeness of my Creator begins.

6. Assurance of the New Birth

How may I know that this great miracle has taken place within me? In two ways. First, God's Word. If I have done my part (believe and receive), God has done His part (read John 1:12). Second, I may know by my own experience, according to the following tests:

- a. 1 John 5:1. Do I believe that Jesus is the Christ?
- b. 1 John 5:4. Am I overcoming the world?
- c. 1 John 3:9. "The person who has been born into God's family does not make a practice of sinning" (*Living Bible*). Am I practicing sin? Observe the present tense of the verb in this passage, denoting progressive or continued action. It is not taught that the one begotten of God never sins in a single act, but that he does not make a practice of sin.
- d. 1 John 2:29. Am I practicing righteousness?
- e. 1 John 4:7. Do I love all other Christians? The sense of the word "love" is not mere emotion or sentiment, but that genuine desire for another's good that leads to sacrifice for him... This love is the supreme result, evidence and test of the New Birth."

A Final Thought:

The apostles' primary concern was not their physical safety or public reputation. It was that they might continue to speak the word of the gospel to people who needed to be saved.