

Acts **of the** **Apostles**

God's Model
For
Today's Church

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INTRODUCTION

God's vision for Revival Fire Christian Fellowship is:-

“To walk in close relationship with Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit and see the Father's love poured out through salvation, signs, wonders and miracles on all people as experienced by the Church of Acts”.

In other words to be a Church operating under God's model for His Church as described in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

This set me thinking as to what the Church of Acts was really like. We readily recognise the signs, wonders and miracles that occurred and are described, but I felt that there was a lot more to the Church and the way in which it operated. A Church operating as written in the Acts needs to review all the activities and methods of the Act's Church and put them into practise. In this way it is then acting according to God's model and will see all that God did then take place in this present time.

The early Church was one of great power and influence in the world and had a significant impact on the cities and nations in which it operated. It grew rapidly in numbers as well as spiritual influence and the members were recognised for their boldness, fervour and commitment. They were not afraid to share their faith and were willing to be persecuted for what they believed. They spoke the word of the Gospel boldly and relied completely on the Holy Spirit for guidance, teaching and strength to do what God told them. They didn't have a Bible as we know it today nor did they have access to all the literature, interpretations and commentaries as we have today. They had to purely rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. This made them totally dependent on God for all things and not on man or man's ways. The results are spectacular in human terms but this is always the case when we let God be in charge,

As I studied the book of Acts I began to realise the completeness of the Church as described. This should not have been a surprise as God always has the perfect solution and model but it was not until looking at it closely that I recognised this fully.

The following pages seek to outline the various attributes of the Church of Acts and then to draw conclusions as to what a Church in this time needs to be doing to follow the model.

(All scripture references are taken from the New King James version unless otherwise stated.)

BACKGROUND

The disciples and apostles had just gone through a very difficult time. They had seen their Lord crucified and had scattered in fear. Then with great joy, they saw the risen Lord and realised that all He had told them was true i.e. that He would die and be buried but on the third day He would rise again. They had seen Him and He had spoken to them.

On one occasion He told them to wait in Jerusalem to receive power from on high (the Holy Spirit who He had promised them). They had seen Him ascend into heaven and had been obedient to His instruction and were waiting in Jerusalem.

Suddenly, their whole life was changed. The Holy Spirit descended upon them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus had promised. They were changed from timid people into bold people, willing to share the message of the gospel with those around. Of course there were some who mocked but on that wonderful day, the scriptures tell us that 3000 were added to the Church, This was the start of the Church of the Acts.

It was not founded by man but by God. He initiated the Church by filling the followers of Jesus with His power and gave them the gifts that were needed to fulfil the plans and purposes that He had for the establishment and growth of His Church.

From that single day in Jerusalem, the world was changed as the newly empowered Christians started to be obedient to Jesus command:

“And He said to them, Go into all the world, proclaim the gospel to all the creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned. And miraculous signs will follow to those believing these things: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will be well” – Mark 16 vv15-18

This is the point from which any Church wishing to model itself on the Church of the Acts must start, empowered from on high and being obedient to Jesus' command.

It means a commitment to all that Jesus did and taught whilst on this earth and to following all the actions of the Church of Acts. If we are to enter into all the fullness of God, we need to embrace all the facets of God's model for His Church, not just those we like or think are spectacular.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ACTS CHURCH

1. UNCOMPLICATED CHURCH

Too often today in our Churches, there is an over complication in the way that things are done. Many of the activities are centred on programmes, courses, activities and even worship performances with very little regard for the simple truths of the Church of the Acts or even the Gospel message. Again we need to realise that the growth of this Church was phenomenal and this was in spite of the situation that they had no courses, no bible schools, not even the New Testament. They relied quite simply on doing what God told them at the time.

We see that in some of the Churches this got a bit out of hand. The Corinthian Church started to follow the ministry of a man and had arguments as to who was the greater, dividing into factions (1 Corinthians 1 vv 11-12). They had forgotten that the Holy Spirit was to be their guide in all things and to follow Jesus. Paul makes it very clear to them that they are not to glory in men but in Christ and be devoted to Him (1 Corinthians 3 vv 21-23

In another situation they had gone overboard with the use of the gifts and had to be corrected (1 Corinthians 14). We could say that their enthusiasm ran away with them and more's the pity there is not more of this enthusiasm for the gifts of the Holy Spirit today. However, Paul gives them the guidelines in which they are to use some of these gifts (v 40 -Let all things be done decently and in order). Unfortunately this has been interpreted as having to control rigidly what happens instead of the meaning that is "appropriately, without discord and tumult". Of course there has to be leadership exercised to protect the flock, but this must be sensitive and unobtrusive and not quenching the Holy Spirit.

So what were some of the basic uncomplicated things that the Church did? We have a good list given to us in Acts 2 vv 42-47:

(42) And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

(43) Then fear came on every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

(44) Now and all who believed were together and had all things in common,

(45) and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

(46) So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

(47) praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved.

- Continued Steadfastly In The Apostles' Doctrine**
 Here we see the importance of teaching in the Church. They continued in what they had been taught by the Apostles and this was to form the basis of the way in which they operated. The word doctrine has come to mean a collection of ideas but here the meaning is ‘teaching’. Not that they followed blindly what was said but they received it, retained it and acted on its principles. Note that they continued steadfastly. This was showing an earnestness to learn and not be swayed by other teachings. It is necessary to know what we believe, to retain it, to be able to stand up for it and then to act upon it. This does not require lengthy courses etc but a reliance on the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth (John 16 v 13)
- Fellowship**
 The regular meeting together of like-minded people. It is so necessary to be with people who have the same vision and desire as us. The word actually means “a deep sense of spiritual unity”. Unity with our Lord and with one another. Who we associate with will influence our thinking, our attitude, our lifestyle and our commitment. Think about it from a worldly perspective. It is said that people grow to look and act like their pets!! It is undoubtedly true that those who associate with people who continually swear or blaspheme can be trapped into behaving the same way. The same applies to our Christian walk. If we associate (spend time) with Jesus, we will become more like Him. If we associate with people who are trying to flow in the Holy Spirit like the early Church, it follows that we will want to behave in the same way.

It is often said, “I don’t need to go to Church to experience God”. Of course this is true. Many people are ministered to and receive more of God’s power in their own homes. However, we need to fellowship together as we are reminded in this verse (Acts 2 v 42). If it was good enough for the early Church with all the wonderful results, who are we to believe that we know better. Paul tells us

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25)”

We come together to praise God for His faithfulness, His love and to encourage one another. These people were flowing in unity and love with God and one another by meeting together regularly. We are not to be exclusive but gregarious in our faith.

- The Breaking Of Bread**
 We are not to forget the sharing of Communion with each other regularly. This doesn’t mean that this has to be done every time we come together as this can then become a ritual and not a love feast. It

is so important that we remember what Jesus did for us and to express our love and thanks to Him and our Father regularly. Too often the communion is “preached” and used as an opportunity to put across our “pet” views, instead of a time of love and devotion, focussed on Jesus. Let it be a time of corporate love flowing up to Jesus for what He did and to the Father for His love in sending His Son to die.

- **In Prayers**

One of the keys to the early Church. They prayed regularly for one another, for the Church, for the lost and for God’s guidance. We can see several times during the book of Acts that they were praying and God moved mightily. The Church of God needs to realise that prayer is vital in maintaining and growing our relationship with God. It is through prayer that we talk to God and hear from Him the answer. As well, we need to come with an attitude of repentance and submission to Him. Through the ages, the prayers of dedicated men and women preceded all revivals. If we want to see God move more powerfully than He is doing at present, we need to fervently pray for His will and vision to come to pass, to transform us to be ready for it and to keep us humble throughout the whole process.

I have often said that if each member of a congregation committed to pray for at least 1 hour each day for God’s will to be done in our lives, in the Church and in the nation, we would see a huge result. If 50 people prayed 1 hour a day, this would mean the equivalent of over 2 days of continuous prayer rising up to the throne room in just one hour. Why not try it and see what happens.

Of course we must remember the faithful prayers of Intercessors who dedicate themselves to this calling. In any Church it is so important that the Pastors and Intercessors have regular communication. The Intercessors can then pray about what God has told the leadership, and the Intercessors can communicate what they sense God is revealing to them. Above all the Intercessors must be praying for God’s vision for the Church to be fulfilled, not the vision they want.

- **Fear came on every soul**

When the Holy Spirit descended on the crowd at Pentecost, there were basically 2 reactions from those who were not baptised in the Spirit. They were either amazed and puzzled or they were mocking, accusing them of being drunk with wine.

After some time, the reality began to sink in for those who had become Christians as well as those who were still hesitating (every soul). This was not a terror but rather a reverential awe at what was happening and what God had done. They had heard Peter explain what had happened and challenge them to repent and be baptised.

As a result, the early Church was established and grew as God continued to pour out His power and love on it. It was sufficient to silence the opposition and cause everyone to treat what was happening with respect.

God expects this of His people today. When we see the power of God moving, we need to treat it with reverent awe and submit to God in all that is happening. Any little sign of flesh will diminish what the Holy Spirit can do. This doesn't mean we should walk around with long faces but rather respect the anointing when necessary and enjoy what God is doing in His way.

- **Many wonders and signs were done**

An outward working of God's power was normal in the early Church. This was after all what Jesus had promised would happen in Mark 16 v 17-18

And these signs will follow those who believe in My name.

They will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.

This is the part of Jesus' Commission that the Church seems to have forgotten recently. These were done to confirm the gospel message and to testify to the truth that Jesus spoke. They had no concern about stepping out in the empowerment they had received and seeing God work these miracles. They had the faith to believe that God would answer their prayers in Jesus name and fulfil the promise made by Jesus.

In reviewing the book of Acts, it is obvious that this ministry formed a crucial part of how the Church grew and people were won for the kingdom. It is necessary however to caution an overemphasis on this part of the Church activity. As these thoughts unfold, it should become apparent that there was a lot more to what was happening in the Church than these miracles, signs and wonders, no matter how wonderful and powerful they were. They were a stepping-stone to so much more for the Church in those days and should be for the Church in modern times.

Above all, it is vital to seek the person behind the miracles i.e. focus our eyes on Jesus. We must not allow ourselves to be distracted by the miracles etc and be diverted from our love relationship with God

- **Had all things in common**

Here was a Church that was caring and willing to make sacrifices for each. It is part of the Christian walk that we love one another even as Christ has loved us (John 15 v 12). No member of a Church should be in need if there is anything to spare. This does not seem to be a command to go and sell up all our property but rather to share in what

the Lord has blessed us with. As Christians we should be looking to how we can bless each other at all times.

We must get rid of the tithe mentality and start to consider that all we have comes from the Lord and we should allow Him to decide what we do with it. It may feel comfortable to say, "I have given my tithe" but is that enough when there is a greater need. There is no problem with tithing as long as it doesn't become a ritual or a limit to what we give.

- **Praising God**

The early Church was one that put a lot of store on praise and worship. Many times we see them praising God in all circumstance and worshipping Him. This was not the performances we see in many Churches today but rather an intimate time with our Father, praising Him, loving Him and worshipping Him – in Spirit and in truth.

It has been wonderful to see over the last 10 years how those who have embraced the move of God through the outpouring of His Holy Spirit, have moved into an intimate worship of God as part of the celebration of meeting together with Him. Songs have been speaking to Him not only about Him, allowing those who wish to enter into His presence in a new way. We focus on Him rather than a person leading or singing. This is the way the Church started and we must continue to allow the Holy Spirit to guide in all things relating to our praise and worship, rather than trying to please those who attend

The result of this uncomplicated way of "Doing" Church was that there was daily growth in the Church. This means that the Kingdom of God was being increased, which is what we should be working for. The gospel was being proclaimed together with all the other activities that served to support and confirm the simple message.

An example of this uncomplicated approach is seen when the Ethiopian eunuch said he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, that he was baptised immediately (Acts 8 v 38). When Peter was speaking to Cornelius' household, the Holy Spirit fell upon them and they were baptised at that time (Acts 10 vv 47-48). This seems to be a clear sign that the practise of the early Church was to baptise people and then follow up with the teaching. All that was necessary was that the person confessed Jesus as Lord and Saviour. No 6-week preparatory course for the early Church but an acceptance of a person, who they were and their profession of Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

This Church was one that didn't have the complications of man's rules and intervention. It relied solely on the Holy Spirit for guidance and direction in all it did. It was comprehensive in its reach, both to the members and to those outside the Church. How God must long for a Church that relies in an uncomplicated way on the Holy Spirit and doesn't "muddy the waters" by

imposing all its own regulations, criteria and methods. The KISS approach for the early Church (Keep It Simply Spirit) was God's model and should be good enough for us today, provided we are willing to give up our ways and follow Him totally and completely.

2. UNITED CHURCH

From the outset, there was a clear sense of unity in the Church. This was no doubt brought about in part, by the events that had preceded Pentecost and the fear that they had experienced. Even before Pentecost, they were all together with one accord (Acts 2 v 1) waiting for the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The meaning of this is "with one mind, with one accord, with one passion" – Thayer). Note that it was a passion and of one mind, implying a unity of purpose. They were obedient to Jesus' command to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1 v 5) and realised that this was the way ahead for them now that Jesus had gone to be with His Father. Immediately after Jesus' resurrection, they gathered together in prayer and supplication "in one accord" (Acts 1 v 14), starting out the way they intended to continue.

We see again in Acts 2 v 46 that they "continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart". The result of this unity was that "The Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved" (v 47).

Not only were the original disciples of one accord, but those who had believed and joined the Church were also of "one heart and soul (Acts 4 v 32)". This indicates that they were all moving in the same direction that God had set and that they were all acting to further God's plans through the power of the Holy Spirit. They had been praying for God to release His power afresh and had seen this evidenced by the place where they were praying being shaken (Acts 4 vv 24-31). Where people get together and pray in unity for God's plans to be fulfilled, the results are what we see throughout the book of Acts. This was God seeing the unity of His people in prayer and releasing His power upon them. The result was "with great power (v 33)" the apostles went about God's work. Many signs and wonders were done through them as they were all "of one accord" (Acts 5 v 12)". This shows what can happen when the group of leaders and the whole Church are moving in the same direction, all agreeing on the doctrine, practice and direction that God has given them.

Another aspect of unity is that of being in accord with those who are moving in the power of the Holy Spirit and getting behind them to support and encourage them. This is shown in Acts 8:6 – "And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." The people were quite comfortable with what was happening and recognized that the Spirit of God was moving powerfully through Phillip. Any Church that wants to be like the Acts Church must stand behind those who are seeking to move in God's power and be in accord with what is happening. Some may not like parts of the "package" but God's ways are

not always our ways. As long as we are sure that what is taking place is from God and not of the flesh, then we must be “in accord” with what God is doing. Of course there will be the flesh at times, but it is surely better to have 90% of God and 10% flesh rather than 10% God and 90% flesh. This in no way condones activities that are of the flesh but rather encourages us to weed those out and continue to move in the power of the Holy Spirit together. This way we will see God’s power at work and His plans fulfilled and the Holy Spirit not “squashed” (squashed and quenched).

A Church moving in unity can also take correction. In Acts 8 vv 18 – 25, Simon got hold of the wrong idea about the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Peter immediately corrected and rebuked him so that the Church would see this false teaching. In this day and age, there are many false doctrines and teaching arising. This should be no surprise because we are told that this will happen in the last days (Matthew 7 v 15 – Jesus statement and 1 John 4 v 1). Paul also warns the Church at Ephesus about ‘wolves coming in’ and exhorts the Leaders to exercise pastoral care over the people in the Church (Acts 20 vv 28-32). A Church in unity will be able to withstand this false teaching and prophecy and stand firm in the power of God. People in unity will also be able to take correction without taking offense if it is given in love.

Of course we know that there were also problems. We are told that the number of disciples was multiplying (Acts 6 vv1-7). This was the first recorded time that there was not “accord”. It arose because of a practical situation, not spiritual. The growth had put pressures on the Apostles and they had probably taken their eye off the ball because of the numbers involved. It is a clear warning to Churches that as growth occurs, the Leadership must use great wisdom and discernment in the Holy Spirit to ensure that unity continues. The danger of factions forming as a Church grows must be avoided at all costs. There must be appropriate organization and delegation to ensure that God’s work is not interrupted or derailed by disputes over practical matters (or even spiritual matters). It is clearly up to the Leaders to ensure that all those who are in the Church are pastored, taught, mentored and released in their gifts and ministries without fear or favour. This is what happened in this instance. The Apostles used their discernment to appoint anointed people who could look after other aspects of the Church and release the Apostles to continue with their calling. Unity in the Leadership brought discernment, which in turn restored the unity in the Church.

The Acts Church clearly indicates that God wants a united Church so that His Kingdom can come. Jesus clearly taught this when He said “*Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand (Matthew 12:25)*”. Psalm 133 tells us that “*where brothers dwell together in unity.....God commands the blessing*”.

God commands the blessing where there is unity as is evidenced in the book of Acts. That is a challenge to everyone in a Church that wants to be like the Acts Church.

3. EMPOWERED CHURCH

That Jesus wanted the Church to be a Church moving in the power of the Holy Spirit is clearly seen from the scriptures. He started by giving the disciple's the Holy Spirit by breathing on them (John 20 v 22). This was moving from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. All those who believe on Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour receive the Holy Spirit i.e. they are filled with the breath of God. Jesus then went further. He commissioned His disciples in Mark –

“And He said to them, go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe. In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover (Mark 16:15-18)”.

Jesus had already promised that those who believe would do the works He did, even greater works (John 14 v 12).

Clearly they could not do this in their own power or strength. It would need supernatural power to fulfil this command.

Jesus promised that they would receive this supernatural power at a later stage, what we now know as Pentecost. In Luke 24 v 49 they were told to *“tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high”*. Further in Acts 1 v 5 He promised they *“shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit”* and in verse 8 that they *“would receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”*. What for? To *“be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and all the ends of the earth”* – fulfil His commission.

Of course this happened at Pentecost when all those who were there were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2 v 2). From this day on, God's Church was established in His way, empowered by the Holy Spirit to work according to God's plan and purpose. What a difference it made to this that were there. They were transformed from frightened people who had just seen their Lord crucified into people with boldness to tell others about Jesus and to step out and do what Jesus did. It has been described as being transformed from *“men of fear to men of fire”*

Another consequence of Pentecost was that after Peter's sermon, 3000 souls were added to the Church (Acts 2 v 41). The aspect of a growing Church is discussed in a later chapter.

Not only was there a big harvest, there were many wonders, signs and miracles done through the Apostles. They had taken notice of Jesus command and stepped out to do what He did. The flow on effect was that *“the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved. It was like a snowball, gathering momentum and increasing in size as the disciples moved in the empowerment they had received and passed it on. What an*

excitement there must have been and an enthusiasm among all the believers. God was at work powerfully and His kingdom was being established and increased.

There can be no doubt that the “filling” at Pentecost was not a one off event. We see in Acts 4 v 8 that Peter was *“filled with the Holy Spirit”* as he stood to spoke to the Sanhedrin. Afterwards Peter and John went back to their companions and had a praise and prayer meeting. What a meeting, *“the place where they were assembled together was shaken and they were ALL filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4 v 31)*. As Peter and John were present at both Pentecost and here, it is clear that they received more of the Holy Spirit. There are many other instances in Acts where this is clearly stated but it is not part of this review to dwell on that point.

We are told that the apostles gave witness with *“great power”* to the resurrection of the Lord. This word for power is *dunamis*, which means *force; specifically miraculous power; abundance; mighty (wonderful) work (Strong's)*. The Holy Spirit within them gave them the ability and boldness to witness as to Jesus’ saving work and to couple this with the miracles that happened. They pointed the people to Jesus and repentance through their witness and obedience to do what Jesus did.

That this empowerment wasn’t limited to the apostles and the Jews is wonderful news for each of us. Peter tells us in Acts 2 v 39 *“the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call”*. What a wonderful promise. We can rejoice in the fact that the empowerment is available for us. This is confirmed in Acts 8 vv 14 – 17 where Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans and they received the Holy Spirit. Here were baptized believers who had not heard about the filling of the Holy Spirit. The leaders of the day were so sure that this was what God wanted that they sent Peter and John to ensure they were empowered and giving the means by which they could do the work that God wanted, His way. Praise God for such leaders who are willing to make sure that people have the “whole package” and don’t miss doing what Jesus has promised.

Again in Acts 10 vv 44 – 45, Peter was preaching to Cornelius’ household when the Holy Spirit fell upon them. This was a fulfillment of Peter’s words and also the prophecy of Joel where he said *“I will pour out my Spirit on ALL flesh (Joel 2 v 28 – emphasis added)”*. Similarly at Ephesus, Paul laid hands on them and they were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 19 v 6).

There are many other references to the empowered Church. Take time to read through the book of Acts and find them and note that the Holy Spirit came upon many different people and in different ways. The key point however is that they WERE empowered by the Holy Spirit. They were willing to be Jesus’ disciples not only in name but also in word and deed through that empowerment.

What a challenge to us today. Are we empowered to do what Jesus did and to proclaim the gospel with authority in the Holy Spirit? Paul was sure that this was the way he had to fulfill His work. He says:

“And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God”
1 Corinthians 2 vv 4 – 5.

God’s way gives Him all the glory. It’s a way that has to be grasped and a step that has to be boldly taken. Oh for a new boldness and empowerment to do what Jesus did.

4. HUMBLE CHURCH

In spite of all the signs, wonders and miracles, and the many 1000’s of people added to the Church, the Acts Church remained a humble Church. There was no glory seeking, no man seeking to be the “all-powerful, anointed” person. They were all in unity in the Holy Spirit. This is the true unity that has been forgotten in many instances today. Competition is the watchword and an unwillingness to allow the Holy Spirit to move in peoples lives for fear that something might happen which is not planned. This is a sign of pride and wanting to do things our way. Acts 2 v 43 shows that *“great fear came upon every soul”*. They had seen many miraculous things and rapid growth, but they still had a reverence for what God was doing. They were willing to put aside their fears and acknowledge God’s hand at work. To allow Him to work and just worship and praise Him for what He was doing (v 47).

Even though the miracles were attracting a lot of attention, Peter was very quick to give God the glory. When the lame man was healed (Acts 3 vv 3 – 12), he came with a lot of people to the portico of the temple to see Peter and John. Peter pointed them to God and spoke the gospel to them with the result being a big harvest again. The miracle was great in itself, but it was used to bring people into the Kingdom of God through Peter using the opportunity to explain what had happened and why. The opportunities need to be grasped as they arise, especially when signs, wonders and miracles occur. After all, the commandment is to preach the gospel to all nations.

Even the Sanhedrin had to admit that a miracle had been done and the effect that it was having on the people. Here was an example of ‘people power’ giving God the glory and allowing God’s servants to go free (Acts 4 vv 16, 21).

Paul and Barnabas made it clear to the people of Lystra that it was God who should receive the glory after another miracle (Acts 14 vv 8 –18). The people thought that the gods had come down amongst them and were preparing to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. In verses 14 and 15, Paul and Barnabas

rend their clothes and forcibly tell the people that God must have the glory, as they are only men like them. Later Paul tells the Elders at Ephesus that he served the Lord with humility (Acts 20 v 19). The intent of this word is “no self aggrandisement”. When God moves powerfully with many signs, wonders and miracle, there must be a complete abdication of any intent or desire to take any glory and point everyone affected to Him. There are so many opportunities today to “publish” what God is doing e.g. Internet, magazines etc that we must be very careful what we do. In the past, when God moved in Revival, there was not the communication that we have today but people came running from afar because the Holy Spirit drew them to the place where God was inhabiting. This is not saying that we shouldn’t tell others what God is doing in lives or places, but rather that we must be very careful of the tone and way in which it is expressed. Lets thank God for the means of communication at our disposal today but make sure we walk humbly before our God.

Micah 6:8 tells us this is what God wants – *“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?”*

A clear way of walking Gods way through the Holy Spirit

5. SUPERNATURAL CHURCH

That the Church of Acts was a supernatural Church is surely beyond dispute, even to the most severe critics. A simple reading of the book will produce numerous examples of God’s supernatural power at work in the Church and in the Community. Rather than saying a “supernatural Church” it would probably be better to describe it as a Church operating in the supernatural power of God, through the Holy Spirit. The Church had been empowered by the Holy Spirit right from the start at Pentecost. Acts 2 v 43 states that “many signs and wonders were done by the Apostles. This was at the beginning and was clearly in accordance with Jesus’ promise.

Time or space doesn’t permit a complete record of all the occurrences throughout the book of Acts. It is worth just picking out a few to show the variety and breadth of the Holy Spirit power at work.

- Acts 3 v 10 - Man lame from birth healed – leaping and praising God
- Acts 4 v 31 – Place where they were praying was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit
- Acts 5 vv 15-16 – Peter’s shadow falls on people and they were healed and set free
- Acts 6 v 8 – Stephen “full of faith and power” did great wonders and signs among the people. It is interesting to note that Stephen was not one of the original Apostles, yet he was able to see wonders and signs done through him by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is showing that the Holy Spirit power is available to all who are willing to

receive it. Paul in fact says in Romans 8 v 11 - “ *But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*” Peter also told us that the promise (of the Holy Spirit) is for all who are afar off. Hallelujah, that means each of us can have God’s power within to enable us to do His will.

- Acts 8 v 7 – Deliverance from unclean spirits and healing
- Acts 8 v 39 – the Holy Spirit “*caught Peter away*”. The eunuch saw him no more and Peter was found in Azotus. The Holy Spirit had sovereignly moved Peter from one place to another.
- Acts 9 v 40 – Tabitha was raised from the dead
- Acts 16 vv 25-26 – Deliverance from prison for Paul and Silas. Result was the Jailer and his family were saved
- Acts 19 vv 11-12 – Paul’s aprons and handkerchiefs were used to provide healing or deliverance.
- Acts 27 v 44 – An entire ship of people was saved after a great storm
- Acts 28 vv 3-5 – Paul was bitten by a snake and he was not harmed

As has been said, this is not an exhaustive list. It does however show the range of God’s power at work with signs and wonders.

There are other examples that show a different aspect of the Holy Spirit power working in the Church. In Acts 5 vv 1- 11, the result of deceiving the Holy Spirit is clearly seen with Ananias and Sapphira. They lied about the value of the land and tried to make out they were giving a greater portion than they actually were i.e. hypocrisy. It can only be assumed that they wanted to look good in the eyes of the other believers. The result was swift and a real example to the rest of the Church who were taken with great fear. What an example to the Church today that God will not tolerate any hypocrisy in our dealings with Him and the Holy Spirit. There must be a constant check of our attitudes and motives so that God can do what He wants in and through us. Any glory seeking or running our own agenda will displease God and result in consequences that may not be pleasant.

Herod was one who took the glory to himself and did not deny he was god. The result was that an angel struck him and he died, a broken, humiliated man (Acts 12 v 23). God WILL receive the glory for all He does.

In other cases, the Holy Spirit through prophecy gave guidance to the Church and to the Apostles. Peter’s vision and his call to go and minister to Cornelius in Acts 10 vv 9-16 shows the power of God moving through a vision. Another example of this was Barnabas and Saul sent to Cyprus (Acts 13 v 4). Yet another is of Paul being told in a vision to go into Macedonia (Acts 16 v 9).

The key point in considering that the Acts Church was a supernatural Church was that they expected to see the supernatural at work and to walk in the supernatural. In the prayer meeting in Acts 4 vv 29 - 30, they asked: *“And now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your Word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that **signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus**”.*

There was an expectation that healing, signs and wonders would be done through them. This must be the same expectation today in the Church. God will do these things if there is an expectancy. The result will be many people healed, set free and restored and His kingdom will come as people come to know salvation through the power of God. This is how God set up His Church to operate – in power.

6. GROWING CHURCH

That the Church grew rapidly in numbers cannot be denied. Right from the beginning when 3000 souls were added to the Church at Pentecost (Acts 2 v 41); people added daily as they were saved (Acts 2 v 47); 5000 believed by hearing the word (Acts 4 v 4); multitudes following signs and wonders (Acts 5 v 14); the number of the disciples multiplied (Acts 6 v 1); walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit they were multiplied (Acts 9 v 31); Power evangelism at work (Acts 9 vv 32-35); Saul and Barnabas at Antioch – great number believed (Acts 11 v 21); Barnabas was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit and a great many people were added to the Lord (Acts 11 v 24); as many Gentiles who were appointed to eternal life believed (Acts 13 v 48); the Churches strengthened and increased in number (Acts 16 v 5). These are some of the references to the numerical growth of the Acts Church.

This sort of growth through salvation (either through supernatural actions, peoples way of life or direct preaching of the word) would be welcomed in most Churches today. It would be interesting to take a survey of a city after a Sunday and see how many people had been saved the previous day. Would it reach the 3000 added to the Church at Pentecost? If not, there is a need to sit down and ask God what we are doing that prevents this happening. Maybe a fresh look at how the Acts Church operated would give a few pointers as to what is needed, the word with the power of the Holy Spirit and signs and wonders seems to be the combination that worked, not “Seeker Sensitive Services” or performance based worship. God’s power at work will change any person who is willing, if the Church will allow the Holy Spirit a place to do it. This will bring true growth in numbers not just cross Church growth.

Of course this growth in numbers is not really the most important aspect, even though at the stage they were at, it was vital to get the number of followers up. The other main area of growth was Spiritual Growth. From the start, they were immersed in the teaching of the Apostles (Acts 2 v 42). Note

that the “continued steadfastly” i.e. – took hold of, used in a practical way. This was not theoretical growth but a practical spiritual growth where the people went out with boldness and used what they had been taught (Acts 4 v 31). That is the sort of action teaching that set apart the Acts Church and is an example to us as to how teaching should be conducted. Even the Leaders knew they had to study the word of God do they could pass it on. They appointed other people to do the running of the Church so this was made possible (Acts 6 vv 2 - 7). The result was that the word of God spread and the disciples multiplied. This required the Leaders to let go and let others take on the daily running of the Church, a problem for some Pastors and Leaders who need to be involved in everything so as to retain tight control over what happens. This is not Leadership but Management of the Church, restricting what God and other people with anointed ministries can do.

There is a need to take the Acts example and find true Leaders for the Church who will focus on God and what He wants, not on their agendas and their necessity for control. This can become pride and insecurity, a trait that is not good for the spiritual growth of the Church. Of course there has to be accountability to the authority vested in Leaders by God. True Leaders involve people, communicate to people, “take them with them” and facilitate what God wants. People need to be released into their ministries and allowed to fulfil them in the Holy Spirit without the “looking over the shoulder” syndrome. Then spiritual growth will occur with a much greater speed and also a wider sphere of activities.

God is looking for Leaders who are filled with the Holy Spirit and will devote their time and efforts to Him and His way of building the Church. Then He can do things His way and make the Leaders the facilitators that He wants them to be, letting the Holy Spirit do the work and God being given all the Glory.

The growth in the Church, therefore, was a combination of the Holy Spirit power at work, practical teaching of the Word of God and sensitive empowering leadership

7. OUTWARD LOOKING

The key requirement of the Church is to reach out to those that are lost and in need of Jesus. This was Jesus command to us all in Mark 16 vv 15 –18.

“And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe. In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover”.

This is of course the expanded version to that in Matthew. Unfortunately the Church has ignored this version for years, as it requires the belief and faith to do what Jesus did. This is clearly what Jesus intended His Church to do as He also gave us the means by which this could be achieved, the promised Holy Spirit.

It was in this context and instruction that the Acts Church operated as an outward looking Church. They openly proclaimed the message of the gospel as often as they could to bring people into the Kingdom of God. They followed up by baptising them in the name of Jesus and praying that they be filled with the Holy Spirit. Salvation also came as a result of signs, wonders and miracles. When people were healed, set free and released from the power of demons, they realised that God had worked the miracle and were happy to commit to His way of life and faith in Jesus

There are many examples of this throughout the Acts i.e. the healing of the lame man (Acts 3 v 19) resulted in 5000 people being saved (Acts 4 v 4); gospel preached to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4 vv 8 -12); Dorcas (Tabitha) healed and many believed (Acts 9 v 42); Cornelius' household (Acts 10 v 34 ff); Philippians Jailer (Acts 16 vv 30 – 34). God used the Church to spread the gospel in these and many others places so that His kingdom would be established and grow.

Not only were they spreading the gospel, but they also cared for one another and the needy amongst them. The healing of people in the community was an example that Jesus cared for these people as well as those in the Church. The believers had “all things in common and made sure that everyone was looked after (Acts 2 vv 44 –45). There was also a daily distribution of food to the widows (Acts 6 v 1). Although this caused some problems, they were quickly solved by the Leaders and more people were catered for in this distribution.

To quote a well-used phrase, they “walked the walk as well as talking the talk”. What had been entrusted to them by Jesus and the Holy power was used in the way that Jesus intended. They were willing to “give it away”. They didn't keep the salvation message to themselves in some comfortable Church, neither did they keep the power of God hidden, but used it as directed by the Holy Spirit to do the things that Jesus did. The Kingdom of God was established and grew through this outward looking attitude of the Acts Church.

8. PERSECUTED

We cannot look at the Acts Church without realising that in spite of all the wonderful things that God was doing, they had to face persecution. In many parts of the World today, Churches and Christians are facing intense persecution for their faith. In many Western countries, the physical

persecution is not present, rather a more subtle form of intolerance and mockery. This was even present at Pentecost when they were accused of being full of new wine (Acts 2 v 13).

It is interesting to note that many of the references to the persecution of the Christian Church came from the established Church of the day i.e. from the Chief Priests, the Sanhedrin and the Jews in the Synagogues. When a review of objections to the current examples of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with the accompanying signs, wonders, miracles (and of course the manifestations), we see that most of it comes from the established Church. Persecution of those who are trying to move in the Holy Spirit power as outlined and commanded by Jesus is mostly from the Churches. One has to wonder if it an attempt to maintain control over what they have set up, rather than allowing God to have His way and do what He wants to do in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can learn a lot about this by seeing how the established Church opposed God's power at work in the Acts Church.

The persecution was intense and frequently involved suffering, imprisonment and even death. As has been said, in many cases it was initiated by the Church of day and the High priests etc. The first instance of this is in Acts 4 vv 1 – 3 where Peter and John were preaching about Jesus and His resurrection. The priests, the temple captain and the Sadducees came and arrested them. The people had just seen the lame man healed and were eager to know what this new faith was. The next day they were challenged as to by what power or name they had done these things. A clear case of trying to prevent this "new" faith growing outside their authority. Note that Peter "filled with the Holy Spirit" (again) resisted their "bully tactics". They didn't back down but just again proclaimed the gospel in the name of Jesus. The Leaders didn't succeed at this attempt even when they threatened them. God's power enabled them to withstand this persecution.

Stephen was the first one to lose his life in the Acts Church as far as we know. He had openly moved in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6 v 8) and when parts of the old Church saw the effect it was having, they encouraged false accusations to be made against him. When he challenged them, they were even more upset and killed him. Saul (Paul) was there and little did he know what was going to happen in his life and how radical a change God had planned for him

Saul was responsible for a lot of the early persecution under the auspices of the Church. He consented to the death of Stephen (Acts 8 v 1) and we are told that he made 'havoc of the Church" in verse 3 by imprisoning men and women. This did however cause the new Church to spread as the disciples were scattered. Later Saul, as he was "breathing threats against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9 v 1), went to the high priest and asked for letters so that he could arrest more of the Christians. We all know the story of his encounter with God on the Damascus road, his sovereign conversion

and later his filling with the Holy Spirit. He was a changed man from a persecutor of the gospel to a purveyor of the gospel.

We all know that he then became the subject of much persecution as he clearly told us in 2 Corinthians 11 vv 23 – 27. He remained faithful and true to His God and his faith. He is an example to us all that, even in persecution (which may not be as physical as in the early Church), we need to keep strong through the power of the Holy Spirit and stand up for our belief and faith. This means proclaiming the truth of the gospel, not deliberately criticising other faiths (or even churches). The Holy Spirit is perfectly able to use our words to convict if we speak what he tells us, rather than enter into vain arguments. Give the Gospel ‘airplay’ not any other religion.

Persecution will come to all of us in the Church from time to time from many sources. Let us all pray that those in the Church today will be able to see God’s plan and power at work as outlined in the Acts and at least give God a chance to try things His way. Of course man will always get in the way in every move of God, but let’s not stop moving in Holy Spirit power because of the views of a small minority.

9. REJOICING

In spite of all the persecution and hardships encountered, the Church was one that praised and worshipped God. They were praising God whilst continuing daily in the Apostles doctrine (Acts 2 v 47). We see that when the lame man was healed, he praised God as his first action (3 v 8). At the prayer meeting after Peter and John were released, they rejoiced in what God had done and what He was going to do (Acts 4 vv 29-30). After being arrested again and being released, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5 v 41)

There was joy when people were healed and set free from demons (Acts 8 v 8); joy at salvation – the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8 v 38) and the Philippian Jailer and his household (Acts 16 v 34); joy after the blessings and conflict at Antioch (Acts 13 v 52): through fellowship and testimonies of the Apostles at Phoenicia and Samaria (Acts 15 v 3).

God wants His Church to be a joyful Church. One that enjoys God’s presence and moving in His power as He commanded. The joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8 v 10). This should not be confused with human joy (fleshly laughter), but a spiritual joy as we worship our Father and let Him change us and empower us. This strengthens and upholds us as we move on His path for our lives.

Our worship should be joyful outpouring of our love of God and a celebration of the intimate relationship we enjoy with our Father. A rejoicing in His love

10. OBEDIENT

A Church seeking to move in God's power must above all be obedient to His words and the Holy Spirit's prompting. The Acts Church was clearly obedient to God's direction and heard very clearly what He told them. They realised that if they were to walk and live in the Holy Spirit, obedience was one of the key aspects.

Peter showed his obedience by going down to the desert to talk to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8 v 26ff). His obedience led to the man being born again and baptised and who knows what the consequence of the conversion was in the man's country. The Holy Spirit was clearly at work as He caught Phillip away from the chariot.

Ananias was told by the Spirit to go and pray for Saul (Acts 9 vv 10-12). We can surely appreciate his reluctance to do this as Saul didn't have a very good reputation as far as Christians were concerned. He was however obedient and the result was that Saul received his sight and was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Think what would have happened if Ananias had not been obedient. Saul might not have been the person we know of today because one man was disobedient. Thankfully that was not the case but it shows how seriously we should take God's instructions for us.

Peter was again challenged to go and do something that all his upbringing and teaching told him was wrong. He was told by God in a vision to eat unclean meat (Acts 10 v 9ff). The meaning of this, of course, was that he should go and preach the gospel and pray for Cornelius, a Gentile (v 17ff). He questioned God (v 14) but God clearly corrected Him and emphasised it to him 3 times and told him to go with the men who would come to his house (vv 19-20). The result we know. Peter went to Cornelius and he and his household were born again and filled with the Holy Spirit. Thankfully Peter was obedient so that the Gentiles could be included in God's plan of salvation. It should be noted that Cornelius was also obedient and sent for Peter (v 22). The result caused a bit of a stir in the Church at Jerusalem, but after Peter had explained it, they were willing to accept what God had done and they glorified Him. They accepted the change willingly as they recognised it was part of God's plan.

There are several examples of the Holy Spirit leading people to go (or not go) to various places. Saul and Barnabas sent to Seleucia and Cyprus (Acts 13 v 4); Paul and Timothy forbidden to go to Asia and Bithynia (Acts 16 v 6-7); Paul and Timothy told to go to Macedonia (Acts 16 v 9); Paul told he would be safe if he stayed in Corinth (Acts 18 vv 9-11).

Paul himself was obedient to God when he was on the Damascus road as he told King Agrippa (Acts 26 v 19). He accepted at that time that he was wrong and turned from his old ways to become one of the most powerful

men of God. Thankfully we have all of his teaching as a result of that obedience.

The obedience of the Acts Church enabled God to do what he wanted to do. The disciples went where He told them and did what He told them in His timing. This is the model for us today. Hear from God (make sure it is God speaking and not man wanting his way) and just do it rather than imposing our ways and methods on what He wants to do. Let God be God in all things

11. BOLD

There was nothing timid about the Acts Church. They went about their mission with great boldness and without fear. In the environment they were in, this was necessary to ensure that the Church survived and was not “closed down” by their critics and opposition.

This boldness cost many of them their lives and caused great hardship. Yet they were willing to endure it for the sake of spreading the gospel message. Of course they were empowered by the Holy Spirit which gave them access to God’s power but nevertheless, the speaking of the truth wasn’t easy. They had a strong conviction and commitment to Jesus and His saving grace. Liberal views were not tolerated. Remember that the early Church did not have a copy of the New Testament or the millions of reference books that are available today. They had to rely on the Holy Spirit to “fill their mouths” and speak out boldly. What a wonderful way to be, having to rely totally on God and live in His power.

The references to their boldness are many in the book of Acts, just a few examples will suffice to confirm this: - Acts 4 v 13 – the boldness of Peter and John was recognised by the Sanhedrin; Acts 9 v 27 – confirmation that Paul had spoken boldly at Damascus shortly after his conversion. This would have taken great courage as well as boldness after all that Saul had said and done to the Church; Acts 13 v 46 – Paul and Barnabas speaking to the synagogue at Antioch. This caused a great amount of envy to rise up in the existing Church because people started to follow the truth as spoken by the Apostles; Acts 19 v 8 – Paul again speaking boldly to the Synagogue and confronting the leaders, convincing people of the gospel message.

Just to reiterate how they did this. By continually asking the Holy Spirit to “Grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your Word, by stretching forth of Your hand for healing, and miracles, and wonders may be done by the name of Your holy child Jesus (Acts 4:29-30). This is the way for the Church to reach out to the lost and to speak out God’s truth boldly, rather than the grey speech of compromise that seems to emanate from the Church today.

The Church was not created in the world's image or to bend to the current thinking. It was established to bring people into God's Kingdom by speaking the simple message of the Gospel and taking action through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit

The late Selwyn Hughes summed it up well by saying *"It is time to stop being trendy and become transformative"*

HOW TO BECOME AN ACTS CHURCH

- **Pray Regularly**

If we look at all the previous outpourings of the Holy Spirit over the ages, the pattern follows that for the Pentecost outpouring. People had gathered to gather to pray. Acts 1 v 14 tells us that they continued with one accord in prayer and supplication. This is the necessity if we are going to see God pour out His Spirit amongst us and upon His Church in the way He has done before. Not just a touch from God but such an outpouring that whole neighbourhoods and cities are affected by His power. People being healed, set free and brought into God's kingdom with little or no involvement by the Church. It is clear when this happens that it is God and man cannot take any credit, God receives the glory, as is His due.

The power of prayer will bring the necessary keys into place for God to be able to move His way. Intercessory prayer will open up those dry places, bring people to repentance, point the way to holiness and initiate the changes that God requires for Him to "Open up the heavens". Any Church wishing to be part of what God is going to do and to be like the Acts Church needs strong intercessory prayer flowing to the throne room. God honours those who open their hearts and tell Him that they desire His will and His ways, not their own.

- **Directed Prayer**

Any prayer must be directed to what God has told the leaders He wants to do in the particular Church. The vision that has been given must be prayed into being. It is no good a group of people praying for what they think should be done. This only causes division and confusion as the prayers are asking for something that God has not directed. Of course we can ask for over and above all that we think, but firstly we must ask God to fulfil His plans He has given.

The wider requests for God to move mightily are quite legitimate and should be prayed. God wants to know who is willing for Him to move powerfully in His way and take back control of His Church. We should always be expecting more than what God has given us and not limit Him in any way. This is a step of faith that we all should be prepared to take and cede control to God.

The obligation for prayer is certainly on the Pastors as they are the ones chosen by God to help bring about what He wants to happen. They must spend the time with both directed and intercessory prayer to be able to hear all that God wants to say and do. The Pastor's support for Intercessory Prayer Groups is essential if they are to intercede for what God requires in the Church

- **Teaching**

It is obvious from the book of Acts that the Church moved powerfully in the power of the Holy Spirit and many signs, wonders and miracles took place. What we need to remember that as a result of this, many people were added to the Church. These people required teaching in the basics of the Christian walk. As they grew, they needed more "meaty" teaching to help them continue into all the fullness that God has to offer.

The well known (and often quoted) saying that "Too much of the Word and you dry up, too much of the Spirit and you blow up, a balance of both means you grow up" is very true. The absence of the Holy Spirit from many Churches has meant that when He is "rediscovered" and His power is manifested, the tendency is to concentrate on that part of the book of Acts with little time for any of the other aspects. It is probably preferable to err this way, at least for a season, as this enables the Church to be renewed and Christians to be set on fire for Jesus afresh.

However as we see in Acts, we must follow this up with the teaching as to what it means and the guidelines as to how we move in God's power. If this does not occur, then the flesh is liable to take over, and what was mostly God becomes mostly flesh with the associated hurt and diminishing of the anointing of God. A fleshly show looks good and can make it seem as if God is moving powerfully. We should realise however that this type of meeting with its associated hype does nothing to grow those involved, except the pride and man-pleasing of people involved.

John Wimber once said that signs, wonders and miracles will occur and the theology will follow later. We may never understand what is happening or what God is doing, but let's not stifle the Holy Spirit by waiting for understanding and teaching. Of course we must be aware of false anointings but that is a question of discernment and wisdom, not understanding.

A balance of the Holy Spirit power and teaching will enable a Church to grow up into a powerful Acts Church, flowing in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the 5 fold ministries. Then we won't have to be like the Corinthian Church that basically over emphasised the gifts and power of God without any teaching or guidelines to allow God to be in control.

- **Evangelism**

The model of the Acts Church clearly shows us that the purpose of the Church is to bring people into the Kingdom. This was Jesus' command to all of us and must be obeyed. The use of the power of the Holy Spirit to bring people to a born again experience is obviously one of the ways that the Acts Church operated. If we are to be like the Acts Church, we cannot keep all the power of God to ourselves and just remain a "Bless Me" club or a place where we just come to receive from God all the time. What flows in MUST flow out to all we come into contact with. We cannot party all the time, as there is work to be done and we need also to be changed to enable us to do the work that God wants. I am not suggesting that we go back to boring, "Holy Spirit ignored" services and meetings. But rather that we continually move ahead and accept God's challenge to be more like Jesus through the Holy Spirit working in our lives and changing us, being continually filled with the Holy Spirit.

Bill Johnson has said, "*The Church has largely hoarded the anointing for themselves and for their enjoyment. We only get to keep what we give away*". Where God moves powerfully and we see the people willing to share what God has given them, then the power of God continues to flow and increase. Where they keep it for themselves, it gradually diminishes and eventually, man's ways take over in an attempt to keep the anointing flowing, with not much success.

By being continually filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and walking in a Spirit filled life, we can have a new personal evangelism based on God's way and power not our strength. We should be so walking in our lives that people will see there is something different about the way we act, speak and relate to them and want to have what we have. This provides the opening without us having to "make it happen". God's power will enable us to then do whatever He wants in the life of the person enquiring. Be alert to these opportunities as they are set up by God for us to 'be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and all the ends of the earth'

A Church wishing to be like the Acts must look at how to win people for the kingdom of God through the power of the Holy Spirit as well as the other ways of evangelism. The world is searching for something different and we have the answer, Jesus. What is essential is that when these people are introduced to Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, the next step must be taken by them i.e. to be baptised in the Holy Spirit just as the early Christians were. In this way God's kingdom will be increased and grown in His way.

- **Holy Spirit Gifts**

As we are baptised in the Holy Spirit, God gives us the gifts to fulfil His plan for our lives and His Church. As with any gift, it has to be "unwrapped" to be used i.e. we have to use it to make it active and useful. The place to do this is in a Church moving in the power of the

Holy Spirit with people who can guide and assist in the activation and operation of the particular gift. There should also be assistance in the identification of the gift for the individual. Often, people will see someone moving in a particular gift and then want that gift regardless of whether God wants them to be used in that area. Of course, we can all use any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as required by God and should be bold in stepping out in this way. However, we should not only desire the ‘spectacular’ gifts as this is often associated with pride and wanting to be seen to a “powerful” person. We must allow God to guide us into the right area of ministry and then completely surrender this to Him so He can use it in His way. Remember, Jesus said, *“By their fruits you shall know them”* (Matthew 7 v 20).

In using the gifts, we must be careful to do exactly what God tells us and then not interfere in what He does. There is no point in asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us if we then put our restrictions or methods in the way. Too often we think we know best and interrupt the Holy Spirit when He is working in peoples lives e.g. by talking to them, by making them get off the floor or starting to pray with them again. God can and will do all that needs to be done and will involve us when He wants, not when we want. Our gifts should be the way of facilitating the Holy Spirit to come and do what is needed

The using of the gifts should be a normal part of Christian life. This is truly flowing in the Holy Spirit. Our life should be a supernatural life, based on God’s power flowing through and out of us into the lives of those who we come into contact with. The Acts Church had the power of God in the lives of the people and they expected and believed that all the things that Jesus had promised would happen. Oh that the Church today would expect and believe for those things to happen. It is happening in many pockets around the world but we need for this to be released into many Churches and people where it is not happening. We would then not have room to fit all those affected, changed, healed and saved by God’s power and love in our buildings. We must believe that what seems impossible in human terms is possible with God through the Holy Spirit

The Church of Acts did not have a form of religion denying its power. To the contrary it had the power of God and denied the religious way of doing things. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are for the use of Christians to further God’s work. They are not for our own use to entertain or show off, build us or our ministries up, but are given by God for a purpose – that all men might be saved, healed, set free and released into a new life of joy and peace with Jesus in control of their lives through the Holy Spirit.

Above all we must seek 1st the kingdom of God and ALL these things will be added to us. Seek the Giver NOT the gift.

- **Growth**

We all are looking for growth in the ministries in which we are involved. This is a normal situation and there should not be considered anything wrong with this. The alternative of shrinking should not really be a consideration as this might suggest that we need to review what we are doing with God.

Where it becomes a problem is when this becomes the focus of the ministry rather than on allowing the Holy Spirit to lead into whichever way He wants to go. Programs to grow the Church if they are not openly evangelistic and designed to increase the Kingdom of God not the Church numbers should be looked upon with suspicion.

The Church of Acts did not have these programs at their disposal. They also did not have the advertising that is available to us today. They relied on the power of God changing people's lives and giving them a desire to meet with like-minded people and learn to flow in the power of the Holy Spirit. The effect was dramatic. The Church grew rapidly as more and more people were born again and came into the Church. Surely this is a model that we need to seriously consider. We can of course use the modern technology to help with the growth of the Church but we have seen over the past few years how a mighty move of God attracts people without great publicity. There is a desire to be where God is moving so that lives can be changed, set on fire and the fire of the Holy Spirit spread across the world.

With growth comes the releasing of people into their gifts and the necessary work of mentoring, teaching and exhorting them in what they are doing. Too often people are released into a ministry and then left to their own ways without help, guidance and encouragement

Thus true growth comes when people are changed and the power of God is used to draw others to Jesus either through personal evangelism, public evangelism or signs, wonders and miracles. This is increasing the Kingdom of God not just numbers in Church

- **Pastoral Care**

Flowing on from growth, it should be realised that pastoral care is much more than caring for those who are sick and visitation. It encompasses all areas of Church activity to ensure that those under the pastoral care are involved, built up, taught, corrected, released, protected and encouraged.

A Pastor therefore cannot get tied down in one area of ministry to the neglect of the rest. More than ever, there is a need for the Pastor to be a Leader not a micro-Manager of Church activities and business. If there is a particular gifting in a Pastor then this should be exercised and others delegated to take up all the other areas of pastoral care that are required.

They should be allowed to exercise this ministry with minimal interference (i.e. true leadership) under the guidance of the Pastor. Of course there will need to be regular communication between these people but this is fundamental to all Church activities including Pastoral care.

The Acts Church did precisely this. In Acts 6 we see them appointing 7 men to oversee the welfare of the Widows. They set up a framework within which others could exercise their ministries, releasing the Apostles to continue with what God had told them to do. This framework also forms part of the pastoral care in a Church As long as the framework and practices don't become the focus leading to man's control, they are a necessary part of the Church to enable each person's ministries to be released for the building up of the Church.

It is necessary that the Leaders know what God wants for the Church and also are prepared to follow His direction to fulfil the vision and direction. They also need to be able to communicate the vision in such a way that the people know both what is required and how to progress towards the fulfilment. This requires plans and guidelines so that God's boundaries are established within which the Church can come into the fulfilment of a Church like the Acts. This is not control but rather a pastoral responsibility to those who are under the Pastor's leadership.

- **Praise and Worship**

The Church of Acts was one that praised and worshipped God at all times. This is vital so we give God all the glory at all times and enter into His presence in spirit and in truth. Intimate worship opens each of us up to that close relationship which God desires to have with His children. This means that we must be part of the worship, not just be part of a performance which unfortunately happens in many places. Too many of the new songs today do not speak to Him but about Him or are too complicated to sing that it is impossible for people to join in from their hearts. Worship should be a time where we meet with God intimately in His presence and allow Him to minister to us as we minister to Him.

God inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22 v 3). If we want Him to "dwell with us" then we must be prepared to make an effort to praise and worship Him the way He desires

- **Implications**

Some people will reject the power of the Holy Spirit and the direction of the Acts Church. These people will try and stop a Church and people from receiving God's power and using it by any means they consider necessary. Remember the Pharisees rejected Jesus and His ministry. We should bless them, encourage them in love and then continue with what God has told us to do. Pastors and Leaders who bow to these people are looking to please man rather than God.

There will of course be people who take this freedom in the Spirit to mean a right to do what they want rather than the power to do what God wants. They need to be nurtured, taught and corrected, else the potential for the flesh to completely take over will rise up and quench the Holy Spirit

As God moves powerfully, great wisdom and discernment is needed by the Leaders to hear very clearly from God and be obedient to what He wants and not get carried away with the moment and excitement

Pride must be avoided at all costs. The "I've got a more powerful anointing than you" or "My gift is more important than yours" syndromes must not be allowed to rise up. This applies to both Leadership and the Congregation, the latter often comparing Ministry Team members or Leaders before deciding who they want to pray for them. Humility is the watchword when the Holy Spirit is moving powerfully and we must allow Him to move through whoever He desires. God must receive the glory not man.

There will be much criticism, even from within the Church at large. We need to press on, ensuring that at all times we are doing what God wants us to do. Let the proof be God's power at work and the results not our arguments. Experience always wins over argument.

CONCLUSION

The Acts Church was an exciting, dynamic Church moving in the power of the Holy Spirit. They were acting out Jesus' promise that "*you will do the things I do, even greater*". It's growth and influence far outweighed its size. This can only be attributed to them allowing God's power to guide, direct and control their lives and the Church. Contrast this to the waning influence of the Church today. Can it be that we have not followed God's guidelines for what He wants his Church to be like?

The Acts of the Apostles is a blueprint that God gave us for the way He wanted His Church to operate i.e. in His power, not in our own strength. We have gone away and used our own methods, strength and intellect. God desires that we return to His ways. He has told us that "Its not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit"

I pray each of us will be awakened through His power filling us and that the power of God will engulf all aspects of His Church to an even greater extent than in the Acts Church, so that all men and women will know that “our speech and preaching is not with persuasive words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that our faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2 vv 4-5)

Lets rise up “Acts Church” and be identified as people doing what Jesus did and see all God’s promises fulfilled as His Kingdom comes on earth.

A PRAYER

Father, I recognise that for too long I have tried to do things the world’s way, my way or in my own strength

This day I surrender control of myself and the Church to you, Holy Spirit, and ask that you make all the changes necessary to bring me back to the way You want me and Your Church to be.

Teach me to hear Your voice more clearly and be obedient to your commands, so that Your name will be glorified and Your Kingdom come

I ask this in Jesus name

Amen