

# 24 REASONS WHY "GOSPEL-ACTS-EPISTLES"

## HERMENEUTIC IS INCORRECT (OUTLINE)

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The following is a brief outline of the major reasons why the "Gospel-Acts-Epistles" hermeneutic and doctrine is indefensible. I expand on all of these point in my paper "Where Do We Find the Plan of Salvation." GAE is an interpretive method to validate the Acts 2:38-is-the-New Birth teaching of the United Pentecostal Church. It is also used to dismiss the biblical teaching of the epistles that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. For these following reasons the GAE interpretive method is untenable and should not be employed to defend the Acts 2:38-is-the-New Birth teaching of the United Pentecostal Church.

1. *The Gospels-Acts-Epistles hermeneutic (hereafter GAE) is based on an improper conception of the Bible.* Many of the problems with GAE concentrate on an *improper conception of the Bible*.
2. *The GAE scheme does not follow many basic rules of Scriptural exegesis.*
3. *The whole GAE construct is inaccurate and unsupportable.* The divisions that GAE presents are more presumptive than factual. The lines between Gospels and Acts, or Acts and Epistles, are not as dissimilar and solitary as GAE claims. Next, Acts recommends attention to its transitional quality. Acts forms a very vital and essential history of the transition of God's work from the Jewish people as a old covenant people to the nations as the new covenant people through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Regrettably, GAE does not recognize how this reality plays out in Acts.
4. *There are no Scriptural grounds (externally or internally) for Acts being the only book of salvation.* The way GAE distinguishes between and attaches salvatory significance to each division, is arbitrary and over-simplified.
5. *Acts does not use the phrase "born again," speak about being "born again," or mention anyone as being "born again."* This does not mean that people were not born again in Acts history. It means that the subject of new birth or being born again is not spoken of in Luke's account. It is not Luke's language. GAE tries to impose the language of the Gospel of John on the Gospel of Luke.
6. *Acts was not written to tell sinners how to be saved. It was written to Christians.* Luke wrote to Theophilus, a Christian, so he and other Christians would have an authentic account of what Jesus did after his resurrection. He did not write specifically to sinners to tell them how to be saved.
7. *The GAE hermeneutic fails to recognize the progressive or cumulative nature of biblical revelation.* The Epistles provide us with the clearest teaching about salvation of all the books of the Bible. Placed at the end of the New Testament they stand as the fullest expression of the meaning of salvation in all Scripture.

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8. *The GAE hermeneutic does not perceive the importance of the canonical shape of the New Testament books. The Epistles speak about salvation as much or more than Acts because of the place the early Christians gave them in the canon of the New Testament.*
9. *One cannot take everything in the book of Acts to be a repeatable pattern for the Church in all ages. We must look to the Epistles for a proper understanding of what is normative in Acts.*
10. *The GAE hermeneutic does not observe the principle that the didactic or teaching parts of Scripture must always interpret the narrative or historical portions. The historical parts of the Bible, such as those in Acts, must be interpreted in the light of the teaching parts, such as those found in the Epistles.*
11. *The GAE hermeneutic violates the interpretative principle of "authorial intent." The intent of Luke was to teach us that God has saved all nations by faith in Jesus Christ. It is not a collection of correct conversion experiences that all subsequent believers must imitate.*
12. *The teaching about how to be saved is the same in both Acts and the Epistles. They both teach that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.*
13. *The claim that the "plan of salvation" (in the GAE hermeneutic) is taught only in the Book of Acts, and that the epistles cannot be used for knowing or establishing the "plan of salvation," fails to understand the nature and purpose of the epistles. The purpose of the Epistles is to show Christians how to live based on the meaning of salvation. That salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. Therefore, the Epistles provide us with the clearest teaching about the plan of salvation in the Bible.*
14. *GAE claims that the Epistles "were written to the churches... AFTER they were baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ and... AFTER they received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost speaking with tongues."<sup>1</sup> This is an ambitious but hasty assertion.*

*First*, there are four churches that GAE lists as proof of their Acts 2:38 interpretation: Jerusalem, Samaria, Caesarea, and Ephesus. Only Ephesus, one of the four, has an epistles listed among the New Testament Epistles. *None of these other churches have an account in Acts of speaking with tongues or being baptized by the Jesus' Name formula, or in any other place in the Bible.*

*Second*, GAE maintains that "Not one person in the entire Bible was ever baptized using the words, 'in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'" While this is correct on the surface, it is also correct that *no one (in the entire Bible) had the name of Jesus pronounced over them while they were being baptized in the New Testament*. GAE assumes too much about the baptism formula.

*Third*, it should not be assumed that what happened in Acts 2, 8, 10, 19 are patterns followed by all the churches of the Epistles. Even further, considering Luke's intent, one may conclude that these narrative records are preserved to

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<sup>1</sup> "Salvation, You Have a Right to Know the Truth." Note: the phrase "Baptism of the Holy Ghost" is intended to refer to 'baptism with the Holy Spirit.'

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prove something significantly different. These forms of conversion are presented, not because they are a normative pattern for the future, but because Luke and the early Church *saw them as significant because they were atypical*. One might say *Luke presents Acts chapter two as the Jewish Pentecost and Acts ten as the Gentile Pentecost*. Both are unrepeatable historical events.

It is my thesis that, even though Luke provides numerous conversion experiences, he is not essentially concerned with the nature or formation of each conversion as a normative pattern. Close examination shows the particular circumstances of each conversions in Acts is directly shaped and determined by the specific case and situation of each conversion group. I believe his concerns are more encompassing, magnificent, and pivotal to the mission of the Gospel. *Luke is most intent about the mission of preaching Christ as Savior, to all the nations, for the glory of God*. Luke tells us that those who God brings into the Kingdom come through faith in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Luke is not preoccupied with defining the "steps" one must follow to be "in,"<sup>2</sup> the Church.

Luke's perspective is more to show who is "in" and less about the normative pattern of conversion. Rather than a micro-vision of individual salvation, Luke conveys a macro-vision of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, the promises of the Old Testament Prophets, and the commission of Christ: that in the sovereign plan of God, and by his matchless grace, God ordained that Gentile peoples (παντα τα εθνη<sup>3</sup> and not exclusively "righteous" Jews) would be included in the new covenant.

*Fourth, the conversion of the Ephesians in Acts nineteen, which GAE cites to prove its position, can be easily understood without resorting to the GAE construct*. If we look at Luke's account of the beginning of the Ephesian church in Acts nineteen, we see Paul inquiring about their faith status. They were essentially Old Testament believers, like Abraham or Anna. That confirmed to Paul that they did not know Jesus. Thus, he said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

Hearing the Gospel message and believing it is how disciples at Ephesus were saved. Acts 19 harmonizes more with the biblical understanding -- that all are

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<sup>2</sup> I believe one can infer what one must do to be "in" from the teaching of Paul and Peter as recorded in *Acts*, and as found, much more comprehensively, in their epistles. But it is not Luke's overarching purpose to spell out the "steps" of conversion, nor adduce a formula for obtaining personal salvation. On the contrary, the Gospel of Jesus puts to shame all religious formulae, procedures and methods. It is not about what *we do* to obtain God's favor and salvation, rather it is about *what Jesus has done* to extend to us God's grace. The Gospel dispels all formulaic religion, and Christianity for that matter. With the coming of the Christ with the nail-scarred hand, we abandon all techniques, formulas, human obedience and embrace by simple faith alone the perfect life and death of Jesus Christ. No longer can we come to God by minding what we do, but only by gazing at the Cross of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Louw Nida Lexicon: εθνος ους ν' λαός οὐ μ' the largest unit into which the people of the world are divided on the basis of their constituting a socio-political community - 'nation, people.' εθνος" καθελών εθνη επτά εν γη Χανάν" 'he destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan' Ac 13.19. λαός" δ ήτοιμάσας κατά πρόσωπον πάντων τών λαών 'which you have made ready in the presence of all peoples' Lk 2.31. In a number of languages a term meaning basically 'tribe' has been extended in meaning to identify 'nations.' In other instances different nations are spoken of simply as 'different peoples.' In certain cases distinct nations are classified primarily in terms of their diverse languages, for example, 'those people who speak different languages.' Such an expression should not, however, be used if it only refers to multilingual persons.

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saved by grace through faith in Christ alone -- than by the GAE obedience to Acts 2: 38-as-the-New Birth formula.

15. *The GAE hermeneutic misunderstands the time and setting of the Book of Acts and the Epistles. The nearly all the Epistles were written during the time of the Book of Acts. They did not come after Acts but were written during the events of Acts. They expressed the meaning of the events happening in Acts.*
16. *It is true the Epistles are written to people already saved. Nevertheless, *it does not mean that the Epistles do not or cannot teach the nature of salvation.* There is no basis for saying the Epistles do not teach salvation. *The Epistles teach how to be saved, because their purpose is to teach Christians about how to live as Christians based upon the way they were saved.*  
  
*As I stated above, *salvation, and how we are saved, is a prevalent throughout the Epistles.* The Epistles are filled with the words "saved," "saves," "salvation" and "Savior."**
17. *The GAE hermeneutic does not properly respect the relationship between Acts and the Epistles.*
18. *Acts is a transitional period in the history of salvation. For that reason it is not prudent to establish doctrine solely based on narratives in a shifting period of salvation history. In Acts, as a continuum, Jews and Gentiles are being incorporated into the Church for the first time. *We need the Epistles to explain what things in Acts are doctrine and what is unique for that time period.**
19. *The "Gospels-Acts-Epistles" hermeneutic fails to recognize the nature, theme and purpose of the Book of Acts.*
20. *The GAE hermeneutic appears to set the ministry and teaching of the apostle Peter over the ministry and teaching of the apostle Paul.*
21. *The GAE hermeneutic leads the Bible reader to pit the writings of Luke against the writings of Paul. The GAE hermeneutic fails to see that Luke directs his readers to the primacy of the Apostle Paul's ministry and his epistles.*
22. *If salvation is found in Acts alone, then *why is it that salvation must be strictly located in one verse – Acts 2:38?* If UPCI teachers claim that the type of faith they use in obeying Acts 2:38 is the only true, saving faith, then they have a more disturbing problem. That is, *they add doing certain things to trusting what Christ alone has done* in order to obtain salvation. Paul contrasts this with the nature of the Gospel, which is; God forgives and imputes Christ's righteousness solely on the basis of faith.*

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I

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might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2: 16-20 KJV)

Acts 2: 38, as a statement in Peter's gospel sermon, teaches salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. This is the real truth of Acts 2: 38. By comparing Scripture by Scripture, we are guarded from placing an eccentric interpretation of Acts 2: 38 over against the rest of Acts. Also, we are preserving the complete teaching about salvation in the whole Bible by understanding what Acts 2: 38 really means.<sup>4</sup>

23. *The GAE hermeneutic assumes that Act 2: 38 is the chief interpretative center of all soteriology, while failing to recognize the consensus of the entire New Testament concerning salvation.*
24. *The GAE method ultimately appeals to a form of special revelation or inspiration of the reader, beyond the original meaning of the text of Scripture. GAE does not follow some very vital, sacred, principles of interpretation.*

### SUMMARY

There are certainly more reasons why the "Gospels-Acts-Epistles" hermeneutic is in error. But, I believe these are a sufficient challenge to its credibility. In summary, the error of "Gospels-Acts-Epistles" is a misreading of Scripture. It claims that Scripture says something that it actually does not say. It is invalid to devise an artificial "Gospels-Acts-Epistle" hermeneutic primarily to protect a denomination's distinctive doctrines. Scriptures alone must be allowed to tell us how to interpret Acts and the Epistles, based on their purpose and canonical relationships to each other. It is always safer and wiser to trust the simple, plain meaning of Scripture than to follow contrived or strained interpretations. GAE is a contrived rather than a true interpretation of the New Testament.

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<sup>4</sup> I have written a book on this subject: *Faith is the Essential Response of Acts 2: 38*. Portions of this can be found online at: <http://www.inchristalone.org/FaithEssentialMain.html>