

Principles and Patterns of Acts in Today's Church

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Abstract

This paper focuses on opposing viewpoints relating to “A Look Through Three Lenses,” Gene Getz (1984). With Absolutes versus Nonabsolutes and their effects on the establishment and growth or lack thereof in the church.

Principles and Patterns of Acts in Today's Church

There are many principles and patterns from the book of Acts for the modern day church to model itself after. Getz (1984) suggests that there are three lenses to help the church, “develop an adequate philosophy of ministry – one that God espouses....”(p. 34) They are comprised of a) Lens of Scripture which is basic and foundational (p. 35); b) Lens of History and c) Lens of Culture. Within the lenses are the absolutes – that which should not change and nonabsolutes – things that should change. Absolutes are comprised of function, principle, organism, truth, and message completing a supraculture. Whereas nonabsolutes are comprised of form, pattern, organization, tradition and method completing a culture (p. 42). However when nonabsolutes are too closely adhered to lack of understanding and division can develop. In Acts 6:1-4 there was a tradition and organization issue between the Grecian Jews and the Hebraic Jews.

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:1-4, New International Version)

Division was avoided in this instance because the nonabsolute, organization was changed when the absolute of function, teaching and proclaiming, and the message were found to be in jeopardy of delay to the kingdom. The message of the great commission continued going forth.

Repercussions occur when resistance to change and stagnation happen. Getz indicates that historians have found over a period of time people are fixated on form. They do not want to change unless there is a crisis. (Getz, 1984, p. 40) The nonabsolute of tradition can serve as an excellent reference, but when it used as a standard other problems manifest. In Acts 10 Cornelius and Peter both were changed from tradition derived from their divinely inspired instructions and messages of truth. Cornelius, a centurion received an angelic visitation with specific instructions pertaining to receiving Peter. The next day Peter had a vision regarding what is clean vs. unclean. Under the Holy Spirit's directive Peter went to Cornelius's home where he taught and realized that God does not show favoritism, but accepts many different people. As a result of both of their acts of obedience and willingness to change, souls were saved and baptized in the name of Jesus. (Acts 10, NIV)

Today's Church should maintain flexibility in an ever changing culture without compromise to the absolutes. The lenses help create a very focused philosophy of ministry that will aid in the continuance of the great commission.

References

Getz, G. (1984). A Look Through Three Lenses” from *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*.
Wheaton, IL: SP Publications.