

Preliminary Reasons GAE is Flawed

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I wish to submit a list of indepth, formal reasons why I believe Gospels-Acts-Epistles (GAE) is unfounded as a biblical hermeneutic. But, before I turn to those lengthier, formal arguments, I would like to present a few preliminary, concise reasons why GAE is flawed:

First, the whole GAE construct is inaccurate and unsupportable. The divisions that GAE presents are more presumptive than factual. It is naïve say that the Gospels, or Acts, or the Epistles as a group, are completely unique and isolated divisions of salvation history. For example, many New Testament scholars categorize Acts as a Gospel because Acts is the twin to the Gospel of Luke. Each is a volume that can be combined into one book – Luke-Acts. If the Gospel of Luke is a Gospel, then Acts could be considered an extension of that Gospel. A more interesting fact is that one cannot separate Acts from the Epistles because Acts is in one sense an Epistle. Luke wrote the book to Theophilus in epistolary form. Luke is one of only two books in the New Testament that follows classic Hellenistic epistolary form.¹ The view that Acts should be treated completely distinct from the Epistles betrays sound genre discernment. *Acts is, in a specific sense, an epistle.* The lines between Gospels and Acts, or Acts and Epistles, are not as clear and broad as GAE claims.

Next, Acts recommends attention to its transitional quality. As Kevin Bauder writes, transition is the main point of Acts. Luke is showing God's move from national Israel to the church composed of all nations. Acts 2 begins with all Jewish believers. This fact is not a minor point for interpreting Acts 2:38. We see the particular formula in Acts 2:38 because Peter is speaking to Jewish non-believers who know little or nothing about the birth of the Church. As we follow Luke, we see the movement of the Gospel to the multiracial people of Samaria who were partially Jewish. The specifics of their conversion fit that unique situation historically, nationally and religiously.

¹ James M. Robinson, "Acts," *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, Robert Alter & Frank Kermode, eds, (Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 473.

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Acts 10 is the surprise, when God opens the door of the Kingdom to Gentiles. The special features of Cornelius' house are determined by the need to confirm to the rest of the Church that the Gentiles are truly accepted by God. As the church spreads throughout Asia Minor toward Rome, more Gentiles become Christians than Jews. It appears with the event of Acts 18 the work of Church is taking a specific turn. Ephesus answers the question of whether there will be a Jewish plan of salvation and a Gentile one. The disciples at Ephesus are Old Testament believers who were saved, as were all who believed in the Old Covenant, till the coming of Jesus. Paul's ministry to the elders tells the Church that there is only one plan and that God has one salvation and one people. That is why those disciples of John needed to hear the Gospel and becomes converts to Christ. All these events of Acts point to the great transition of God's working through Israel as a nation to the Church as a people from all the nations.

This development from a Jewish sect into a world religion is a theme to which Luke repeatedly returns, ...²

If we use a geometrical picture, GAE presents the relationship between the New Testament books as bell-shaped. Acts possesses the highest amplitude with the Gospels and Epistles the smallest. This image conveys how GAE construes the importance of Acts in salvation history. A better illustration would be the hourglass:

Think of the New Testament as an hourglass. The gospels are one bulb of the glass and the epistles are the other bulb. The book of Acts is the neck of the hourglass; it is the passageway from one way of administering God's work to another. This is not merely one transition among many, it is the most significant transition in all of salvation history.³

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.

² Ibid.

³ Kevin T. Bauder, "Acts as Transition," *In the Nick of Time*, December 2, 2005, Read Online November 15, 2008 at: <http://www.centalseminary.edu/publications/20051202.pdf>

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Second, *there are no Scriptural grounds (externally or internally) for Acts being the only book of salvation.* The GAE teaches that Acts is the “book of salvation.” It actually says that Acts is the *only* book of salvation because *only* Acts really tells you how to be saved. This is not only based on a misreading of the New Testament, it is a result of misunderstanding the real nature of the Gospel and biblical salvation. There are numerous places in the Gospel where Jesus tells his hearers how to be saved:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:14-18 NIV)

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36 NIV)

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. (John 5:24 NIV)

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:40 NIV)

I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. (John 6:47 NIV)

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. (John 7:38-39 NIV)

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26 NIV)

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Jesus unequivocally states that those who believe on him have eternal life, shall not perish, is not condemned, has everlasting life, has the Holy Spirit, will never die, and will be raised of from the dead. These are all realities of salvation. These benefits of salvation come through faith in Jesus Christ. This is taught in the Gospels and voids the GAE assumption that salvation cannot be found in the Gospels.

The book Acts does not claim to be the exclusive source of salvation. Luke as writer and the Apostles as persons within Acts, never state or imply that Acts would be the only book of salvation. Acts is *absolutely not* the only book that tells us how someone is saved. Salvation is a prevalent throughout the Epistles. The Epistles are filled with the words saved, saves, salvation and Savior (cp. Point eight below). The Epistles engage the advanced implications of believers' salvation as the supply by which they as Christians must live. The way GAE distinguishes between and attaches salvatory significance to each division, is arbitrary and over-simplified.

Third, *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.

Under the "ACTS" header in the GAE chart it says, "WE LEARN HOW TO BE BORN AGAIN." But the book of Acts never mentions the phrase "born again." How can we learn how to do something that is never mentioned? I believe that people were born again in Acts. But, Acts does not tell us where it happened in such terms. It must be interpreted by viewing the conversions of Acts through the teaching of the Epistles. For example, Peter states that we are born again by the word, which is the Gospel:

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God . . . And this is the word that was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:23-25 NIV)

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Fourth, *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. The creator of GAE, S.G. Norris stated, "The Bible is not written to sinners. The only biblical passage for sinners is "repent!"⁴ Even the author of GAE acknowledges that the Gospels, Acts and Epistles are written to Christians and not sinners. An unbeliever can read Acts and learn how to be saved. But that was not Luke audience.

The Book of Acts was available to be read at the same time many of the Epistles were being read. Christians and not sinners read Acts. Christians would have learned what they should believe about the plan of salvation from both the Epistles *and* Acts. Acts does present the Gospel of salvation by faith in Christ. Thus, Acts does teach salvation. But it is over-reaching to claim that sinners can only find the plan of salvation in the Book of Acts. The message of salvation comes from both Acts and the Epistles. Christians reading the *whole Bible* is the proper way to understand the plan of salvation. Then, Christians are to tell the message of the whole Bible -- the Gospel of Jesus Christ -- to sinners. This is how sinners can know the plan of salvation.

Fifth, *One cannot take everything in the book of to be a repeatable pattern for the Church in all ages.* It is the hallmark of restorationists to seek a restoration of all the experiences of Acts in the church today. For restorationists, reiteration of Acts phenomenon is a sign of the true New Testament church being restored from a long era of apostasy in the "Dark Ages." Pentecostals, as restorationist readers of the Bible, place a high priority on seeking a recapitulation all the phenomena reported in Acts. GAE takes restorationism and the recapitulation of Acts so literal, that it determines all Christians' salvation by whether they have correctly followed Acts 2:38.

Is it wise to seek a contemporary repetition of all the experiences, events or actions of the churches or the Apostles in the book of Acts? For example, are we to choose Apostles by casting lots? (Acts 1:20-26) Are all church members to share their material goods in a communitarian manner? (Acts 2:44-45) Should ministers seek to strike blind those who oppose them? (Acts 13:11) Should we expect to see apostate Christians fall over dead in church because they did not give their proper offering? (Acts 5) I realize that some would actually say "Yes" to these questions. John Stott comments:

⁴ S.G. Norris, Doctrine 1 class, Apostolic Bible Institute, notes taken by Bernie Gillespie in class on 9-22-1972.

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For example, are we to make local church elections by drawing lots, because this was what they did when choosing an apostle to replace Judas (1:23-26)? Are we to hold our possessions in common, sell our goods and share the proceeds with the needy, as the members of the early church in Jerusalem did (2:44-45; 4:32ff.)? Again, are we to expect at our conversion to see a bright light and hear an audible voice, as Saul of Tarsus did (9:3ff.)? It should be clear from these examples that not everything that people are recorded in Acts as having done or experienced is meant to be replicated in our lives. So how are we to decide?⁵

Some of the practices that are customary to Pentecostals are not found as a model or pattern in the Book of Acts:

If your Oneness Pentecostal friend persists in maintaining that Acts is a blueprint for all church history, ask him to show you where in the Book of Acts does one find *individuals seeking* for the Holy Spirit and expecting to receive tongues as the sign that He's come? This is the standard way the "baptism of the Spirit" occurs among Oneness Pentecostals, but it has no parallel in Acts.⁶

Many of the events reported in Acts are unique to salvation history. They are not repeatable by their very nature:

We have to recognize the historical particularities of Scripture, especially of the 'salvation-history' which it records. In one sense, for example, the Day of Pentecost was unique and is unrepeatable, because the outpouring of the Spirit on that day was the final act of Jesus following those equally unique and unrepeatable events, his death, resurrection and ascension. Similarly unique in some respects was the ministry of the apostles, whom Jesus appointed to be the pioneer teachers and the foundation of the church. We have no liberty to copy everything they did.⁷

The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus are unrepeatable. They are once for all time. Consistent with that, Pentecost, as an act of Christ, is unrepeatable because it is the beginning of Church. Something can only begin once. Because there are unrepeatable events in Acts, we must be very careful as to what we require the Church to repeat today.

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today series, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), p. 8.

⁶ Gregory A. Boyd, "Sharing Your Faith with a Oneness Pentecostal (Part 1)," Online December 18, 2008, at: <http://www.equip.org/>

⁷ John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), p. 7.

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There are events, and parts of events, in the Book of Acts that are paradigmatic, or models for the future. There are events that are programmatic, that is, are following an over-arching, or larger plan. They are actions or events that are unrepeatable but are vital part of overall narrative. Their purpose is to show God's larger plan, and not merely to fix attention on themselves. To better explain what I mean: There are events that are a model or typical of a pattern that Christians should follow in the future. One of these is the preaching of Christ as risen from the dead. Acts does not present a method, or exact formula of preaching as paradigmatic. It is the act of preaching Christ that is. This event is not merely incidental to the Acts story, but is at the heart of what Acts is about. It shows as a universal ministry of the Apostles that future leaders are to follow.

On the other hand, Acts 5 tells us that Ananias and Sapphira died for lying about their gifts. We cannot read this to mean that it is paradigmatic for all future offerings. It is not a typical way that God treats those who hold back their money; otherwise the church would be full of dead people on a regular basis. It is a programmatic event. Luke does not express this story as paradigmatic. It serves a vital purpose at that particular point in the whole Acts narrative. That is, it is an event that serves to enhance the whole Acts story by telling us how God guarded the integrity of the infant church from fraudulent Christians at a critical juncture at its inception.

There is a bigger challenge. The paradigmatic and the programmatic are intermingled in the narrative, so that both can occur in the same events. There are parts of the narrative that are intended as unrepeatable because they are programmatic. And there are parts that are to be perpetuated by the Church, they are normative, because they are paradigmatic. The reader of the New Testament must determine which is episodic (unrepeatable) and which are normative (to be repeated). The Epistles are essential for helping us discern the difference.

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This is true of the conversion experiences in Acts. They are programmatic because they tell something important about the particular groups being incorporated into the Church. That is why each conversion is unique. They are not giving us a universal, perfect example of what must happen in all future conversions. They are showing us specific realities that existed, and how God worked to weave disparate, opposing groups into His Church. For example, there is a specific religious and cultural reason that Samaria did not receive the Spirit but was only baptized. There were separatist from Judaism, breaking away as a people from Jerusalem and establishing their own temple and priesthood. God did not want them to do the same with the Gospel. He did not give them the Spirit until they recognized their dependence on the Apostles from Jerusalem. So the Holy Spirit was uniquely withheld until the authority of the Jerusalem Apostles was recognized with the laying on of hands. Samaria was not typical but exceptional to tell the bigger story of God working to unify His people. It is extremely important that we carefully discern which events are paradigmatic and programmatic in Acts.

Scripture gives us a way to discern the things in Acts that the Apostles were convinced was incumbent on the Church of all ages -- from Acts or any other part of Scripture. That is the reason for the Epistles. They give us what the Apostles knew to be essential and repeatable. This is one of the vital functions of the Epistles: giving meaning to the messages and events of the Book of Acts. This is why the epistles are so vital to the interpretation of Acts. They give a larger theological context for understanding what Acts intended. The Epistles often explain the meaning of events, speeches, or historical facts found in Acts. There is greater safety and soundness in resorting to the Epistles as a hermeneutical resource for Acts. We must look to the Epistles for a proper understanding of what is normative in Acts.

Sixth, *Acts is a transitional period in the history of salvation.* For that reason *it is not prudent to establish doctrine solely on narratives in a shifting period of salvation history.* Just as the Gospels, which record another intermediary era, the Spirit had not been poured out (because Jesus was not yet ascended). In Acts, in a continuum, Jews and Gentiles are being incorporated into the Church for the first time. The ministry of the Apostles is being fulfilled and is ongoing. As some scholars claim, the theme of Acts is transition. Understanding the meaning of the transitional nature of Acts will show the faults of GAE:

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From Acts 10 onward, the church is no longer a subset of Israel. On the contrary, Israel and the church are now overlapping categories. The narratives after Acts 13 show the Gentiles membership of the church rapidly outnumbering the Jewish membership: Gentiles keep turning to Christ while Jews keep rejecting Him.⁸

Acts traces the transition from an all Jewish Church to a Church made up of increasingly more Gentiles. As we read on in Acts we see a time when the Church is becoming predominately Gentile and questions arise about those who, like John the Baptizer's disciples, are saved in an Old Testament sense:

This juxtaposition of Israel and the church creates a tension. What does God intend to do for the duration of the age? Will He be working through two peoples simultaneously? Will His plan proceed along two tracks, something like Track A for Israel and Track B for the church? The answer to this question is given in the unusual case of the Ephesian disciples in Acts 19. This episode represents the third major stage in the transition from Israel to the church. The Ephesian disciples are believers, but they are believers on Old Testament terms. They have not yet received the Holy Spirit, which for Luke is always a way of referring to the Spirit's baptizing work. They are not part of the church. They have received John's baptism, but they evidently have not heard the details about Jesus' work as Messiah. They are saved people, but they are more like Simeon and Anna in Luke 2 than they are like Cornelius in Acts 10.

The point of Acts 19 is that it is no longer possible to continue as a righteous Jew under the Old Covenant. All Jews must now turn to Jesus as Messiah. Moreover, they must identify with the New Testament people of God, the church. This is what the Ephesian disciples do, identifying themselves with Jesus by submitting to baptism in His name. When Paul lays his hands on them, they receive the Spirit, whose baptizing work unites New Testament believers with the body of Christ.

The episode of the Ephesian disciples implies that the door is being closed (temporarily) closed on national Israel. For the duration of the age, the church alone will be the people through whom God works among humans. While God does not cast Israel off, he does set Israel aside.⁹

Consequently, in Acts there are developing realities, born of new and unique events, which require later theological explication. We need to interpret the meaning of what Jesus taught in the Gospel through the instruction of the Apostles in the Epistles. *We need the Epistles to explain what things in Acts are doctrine and what are unique for that time period.*

⁸ Bauder, *Op. Cit.*

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Seventh, GAE claims that the Epistles “were written to the churches... AFTER they were baptize in the Name of Jesus Christ and... AFTER they received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost speaking with tongues.”¹⁰ 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. We do not have epistles written specifically (naming them) to the other three churches. The claim that all the other churches – Corinth, Philippi, Galatians, Thessalonica, Rome, and the Hebrews – were baptized in the Jesus’ Name formula and spoke with tongues is not based on biblical evidence. There is nothing in Acts about these churches repeating the Acts 2:38 formula. 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 “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 New Testament (in the entire Bible) had the name of Jesus pronounced over them while they were being baptized. The question is not, “Did the one baptizing say the name of Jesus during the baptism?” We assume they did, but we have no account of it in Acts. We have no present tense description of a baptism beyond the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:36-39. But even in that case no formula was pronounced over the Eunuch as Philip baptized him. 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. One of the outstanding New Testament scholars, Gordon D. Fee (licensed minister with the Assemblies of God), does not believe Luke was providing a pattern of normative conversion experiences that all subsequent Christians must recapitulate. Fee presents three operating interpretive principles:

¹⁰ “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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(1) Authorial intent is the chief factor in determining normative values from narratives. (2) That which is incidental to the primary intent of a narrative cannot have the same didactic value as the intended teaching, although it may provide insight into the author's theology. (3) For historical precedent to have normative value, it must be demonstrated that such was the specific intent of the author.¹¹

Fee believes Luke does not intend to present the pattern of conversion. More germane to his study, Fee does not view the Spirit-baptism experiences in *Acts* 2, 8, 10, 19, as normative (what must be adhered to by all Christians at all times and in all places). He also does not believe that we can take such events from a narrative alone (as in *Acts*) and treat them as providing doctrinal requirements for all Christians. The didactic (doctrinal or authoritative teaching) test would be to see if such events corresponded to explicit teaching material (doctrinal propositions) elsewhere (as in the epistles) in the Bible. Stott explains:

It is here that the didactic must guide us in evaluating and interpreting the descriptive. We have to look for teaching on the issue, first in the immediate context (within the narrative itself), then in what the author writes elsewhere, and finally in the broader context of Scripture as a whole.¹²

In other words, one cannot take an event, such as those at Samaria (Acts 8), and propose that, because they believed prior to their Spirit-baptism, that Spirit-baptism is always, for all Christians, a separate, post-conversion experience. Why? Because there is no explicit instruction given – either in Acts 8, the rest of *Acts*, or in the epistles – to confirm such a conclusion.¹³ This is a major clash with “Gospels-Acts-Epistles.”

¹¹ Bradley Truman Noel, “Gordon Fee and the Challenge to Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” *Pneuma*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Spring 2004, p. 65.

¹² Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, p. 8.

¹³ Cp. my paper entitled [“Where Do We Find the ‘Plan of Salvation’ in the Bible?”](#)

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Even further, considering Luke's intent, one may conclude that these narrative records are preserved to prove something significantly different. These forms of conversion are presented, not because they are a normative pattern to be reiterated in detail in all future conversions, 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 appears that this is exactly what Peter argues for in Acts 15. He seems to say that no one has spoken with tongues *since* Pentecost until it occurred within the family of Cornelius. For Peter it was such a rare event that he took it as a sign that God was doing among the Gentiles what he did first among the Jews at Pentecost. Both events were *epochal* (unrepeatable moments or events, e.g. Christ's birth, crucifixion and resurrection) rather than *normative* (standard for all time).

I would suggest, in light of his theme and purpose, that Luke is not using his narratives to teach that Spirit-baptism *follows* conversion, or even that the pattern of conversion can be regimented. 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 conversion in Acts is directly shaped and determined by the specific case and setting of each conversion group. I believe his concerns are for the mission of the Church and the Gospel. Each conversion account is unique to each group's religious and cultural status and the tensions between the Jews and other people groups (Samaritans, Gentiles, Disciples of John the Baptizer). All the conversions follow a special pattern to show us the particular ways God healed the differences between these groups with the Gospel. *The Holy Spirit showed the Apostles and the Church that the Gospel was for all peoples and not strictly for Jews*.

For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." (Acts 13:47 citation of Isaiah 49:6).

Luke is most intent about the mission of preaching Christ as Savior, to all the nations "all the families of the earth" (Acts 3:25), for the glory of God. If one lays aside the Pentecostal template or eyeglass, which myopically focus on individual experience, one can see that in Luke's conversion accounts he tells the larger issues through the particularity of each conversion. He is not providing five examples for constructing a pattern of normative conversion. I honestly don't even think it is an issue in his mind. Neither do I believe that Luke is trying, by any stretch, to establish a doctrine that all must speak with tongues.¹⁴ I believe his concerns are more all encompassing, more magnificent, and more pivotal to the mission of the Gospel. *Luke is most absorbed with the mission of preaching Christ as Savior, to all the nations, for the glory of God*. This is clearly evident by the closing words of Acts:

¹⁴ If the "other tongues" in *Acts* means all other tongues except Hebrew – the *leshon ha-kodesh* or holy

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"Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" (Acts 28: 28 ESV)

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,"¹⁵ the Church. Luke's perspective is more to show who is "in" and less about the normative pattern of conversion. If there is one normative pattern in the conversions of Acts, it is that all believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. This pattern points to the theme of Luke. I believe Luke *is writing to supply the church with a history demonstrating God's election, incorporation, inclusion, "gathering," or harvesting of those who trust in Jesus from all the nations, into his Body.* He does this by sending his disciples and apostles to preach to them the Gospel of Jesus. He warrants their accepts through baptizing or immersing them in his Spirit.

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 εθνη¹⁶ and not exclusively "righteous" Jews) would be included in the new covenant. This means that Jesus died for Gentiles as well as Jewish people – as God eternally intended. In *Acts* Luke shows us how God gathered the Gentiles, whom he elected, into the net of the Gospel (Matt. 13: 47-48). They were caught in the net with the Jewish believers to form one new people.

tongue, the tongue thought by Jewish scholars to be the language of God, and the only tongue in which Temple worship could be conducted and which the prophets were permitted to prophesy – then all do speak with other tongues (unless of course they speak only pure Hebrew).

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Louw Nida Lexicon: ἔθνος οὗς ἴ' λαός οὗ 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.' ἔθνος" καθελών ἔθνη ἕπατα ἐν γῆ Χανάν" 'he destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan' Ac 13.19. λαός" ὃ ἠτοίμασας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν '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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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. He asked them about the whether they had believed by quizzing them about the Holy Spirit. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They had not because they had not believed in Christ yet.

Then Paul asked about their baptism. Why? If they had already believed in Christ, they would have been baptized unto Christ, instead of unto John. Notice that these disciples were followers of John the Baptizer and had not heard of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Paul asked about their baptism to determine whose disciples they were. They told him they knew only John's baptism – that is, they were followers of John. 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."

If they had believed on Jesus, Paul would not have needed to tell them this. When they heard this message of the Gospel, they received it. We know that because they submitted to Christian baptism. They became converts to Christ. The clearest way we can find out how the disciples at Ephesus were saved is to read what Paul later said about their salvation. He reminded them in his epistle of how they were saved:

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, (Eph. 1: 11-13 NAS my underline)

Hearing the Gospel message and believing it is how disciples at Ephesus were saved. Even Ephesus, the only church that GAE cites to prove its theory, can be understood in a far better way than GAE teaches. Acts 19 can be clearly understood without implies the Acts 2:38 formula. This treatment of Acts 19 harmonizes more with the biblical understanding -- that all are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone -- than by the GAE obedience to Acts 2:38-as-the-New Birth formula.

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Eighth, 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*. GAE is an attempt to explain why the Epistles don't mention the Acts 2:38 formula or even hint to it as the "true steps" to salvation. The GAE rationale follows: the Epistles don't need to mention it because the readers were already saved by Acts 2:38, and the apostles already assumed it when they wrote the Epistles.

Looking deeper at this argument a problem emerges: If the Acts 2:38 formula was THE plan and essential knowledge for a person needing salvation, why don't the Epistles extol, reinforce, reiterate, and elaborate on it? Oneness Pentecostals preach about it, teach it and write about it all the time among themselves. They talk about it to Christians and to those already part of the UPCI. So, why don't the Epistles do this? If the Epistles are the example of how we don't need to repeat Acts 2:38 among the saved, then why doesn't the UPCI follow the example of the Epistles? I can hear a UPCI person reply: "We talk about Acts 2:38 in our meetings because there are unbelievers who attend our services and they need to hear Acts 2:38 to know how to be saved." In that case, the same logic should be expected in the Epistles. Many attending the earliest churches, where the Epistles were first read, would have been attendees who needed to hear about Acts 2:38 and have it explained. Therefore, the Epistles should have contained at least a repeat of Acts 2:38 and at best a deeper, amplified explanation of the theology and practical need to obey Acts 2:38. *But they don't!*

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*. The exhortations to specific practices and attitudes were based on the theological truth of the Gospel. This is the pattern of the Epistles: Paul reminds them of God's work of redemption on their behalf, and then urges them to act in a way that reflects Christ and his Gospel. "Paul's method of epistolary instruction was to lay down the theological principles, then build the practical and exhortational on that basis (see Paul's famous "therefore" clauses, e.g., Eph. 4:1; Rom. 12:1)."¹⁷

¹⁷ "Israel and Scripture - Part One," by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Th.D., Tuesday, November 25, 2008, read online November 25, 2008 at: <http://againstdispensationalism.blogspot.com/>.

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If Acts is the book of salvation, then are sinners to read only certain books of the Bible but not others? Where does it teach this in the Bible? The Gospels don't contain such a teaching. The Epistles never teach that only Acts should be read to sinners, lest reading other parts of the Bible confuse them. The GAE chart states that the Epistles were written "To instruct born again Christians (not sinners)." But where does Paul or Peter advise the churches that they should not read their epistles to sinners? Or, equally where do the Apostles leave clear instruction that only the book of Acts should be read to sinners?

One critical question needs to be answered: If a sinner were only able to find a partial copy of the Bible, which contained only the Epistles, would he or she have enough knowledge to know how to be saved? I would say, "Absolutely!" The UPCI would have to say "No."

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":

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be **saved**. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are **saved**. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be **saved**." (Romans 10: 9-13 NIV)

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the **salvation** of everyone who believes: (Romans 1: 16 NIV)

[T]hat we have put our hope in the living God, who is the **Savior** of all men, and especially of those who believe. (1 Timothy 4: 10 NIV)

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being **saved** it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1: 18 NIV)

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to **save** those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1: 21 NIV)

[B]ut it has now been revealed through the appearing of our **Savior**, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1: 10 NIV)

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to **salvation** and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7: 10 NIV)

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By this gospel you are **saved**, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:2 NIV)

[A]nd at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our **Savior**, (Titus 1:3 NIV)

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your **salvation**. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, (Ephesians 1:13 NIV)

For it is by grace you have been **saved**, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV)

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the **salvation** that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. (2 Timothy 2:10 NIV)

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be **saved** through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:13 NIV)

For the grace of God that brings **salvation** has appeared to all men. (Titus 2:11 NIV)

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and **Savior** Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. (2 Peter 3:18 NIV)

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has **saved** us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our **Savior**, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 8-10 NIV)

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring **salvation** to those who are waiting for him (Hebrews 9:27-28 NIV)

[B]ut because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to **save** completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:24-25 NIV)

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But when the kindness and love of God our **Savior** appeared, he **saved** us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He **saved** us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our **Savior**, (Titus 3:4-6 NIV)

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the **salvation** of your souls. (1 Peter 1:8-10 NIV)

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the **Savior** of the world (1 John 4:14 NIV)

Ninth, 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:

All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Acts 10:43 NIV)

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:9-13 NIV)

After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." (Acts 15:7-11 NIV)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV)

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, (Ephesians 1:13 NIV)

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"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (Acts 13: 38-39 NIV)

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. (Romans 3:22-25 NIV)

"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:15-17 NIV)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (Romans 5:1 NIV)

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." (Acts 16:29-31 NIV)

[A]nd be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. (Philippians 3:9 NIV)

Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. (Acts 5:14 NIV)

Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:7-9 NIV)

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48 NIV)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 NIV)

When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. (Acts 18:27 NIV)

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These few passages illustrate the way to be saved in both Acts and the Epistles is by faith in Jesus Christ; not by following the strict interpretation of the elements of Acts 2:38, that turn exhortations into steps of salvation, as GAE dictates.

Tenth, if salvation is found in Acts alone, then *why is it that salvation must be strictly located in one verse – Acts 2:38?* As listed above, there are many places in Acts where salvation is described as justification *by faith in Christ*. Why must Acts 2:38 be the ultimate verse? There is a better way to understand Acts 2:38.

The proper way to interpret the teaching of salvation in Acts is *to interpret Scripture with Scripture*. If we compare all the verses that describe salvation as by faith in Christ with Acts 2:38 we see that Acts 2:38 has to be understood in the light of the majority of verses. When we do this, we can understand Acts 2:38 as truly pointing to salvation by faith. It helps us realize that repentance to Jews in Peter's day was the same as believing. The first hearers of Acts 2:38 would have understood Peter's call to repentance, and baptism in Christ's name, as calling them away from their religion unto trusting Jesus Christ alone.

In its own words, the UPCI teaches that the essential element of repentance, water baptism and Spirit-reception is true faith. UPCI writings say that one can only receive the Spirit by faith. Therefore, the greater overall point that I would like to make is this: If the essential element in repentance is faith in the work of Christ, and if the essential element in water baptism is faith in the work of Christ, and the essential element in Spirit-reception is faith in the work of Christ, then, what is wrong with salvation by faith alone as it has been taught traditionally in Protestant churches? Why does faith have to be redefined as obedience? Why is faith not sufficient in itself?

The problem with the UPCI definition of Acts 2:38 is that trusting in Christ's work is not sufficient. They see the *doing* of repentance, water baptism, and *seeking* for Spirit-baptism as additional to believing in what Christ has done through His Cross. Because of this, they must define *faith as obedience*. Many who write me at In Christ Alone! Ministries frequently admonish me that faith *is* obedience:

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Some attempt to harmonize the teaching of Romans with the Oneness view of Acts in this way: "There is no conflict between Acts and Romans from a UPCI perspective. Jesus said if you believe in me do what I say. Even Satan believes in Jesus. Does this mean Satan is saved? It is not just believing, it is believing and obeying that brings salvation. When Peter says "be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ.....", it is not a recommendation, it is a command. It is completely consistent with the rest of the Bible."¹⁸

Everybody is first touched by grace or we would never approach God. However the Lord clearly commands us to DO something, you cannot ignore HIS words by skipping over the book of Acts.¹⁹

I believe this is a serious error of UPCI theology. They cannot accept that Christ contributed all the obedience needed for our salvation. They must make faith into obedience because they see one's obedience as *equally essential as Christ's*. But, it is not how everyone must follow their definition of Acts 2: 38. At the heart or essence of Acts 2: 38 is faith alone in the work of Christ.

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. They add repentance [as split away from saving faith],²⁰ water baptism by only one formula, seeking Spirit-baptism (with all the Pentecostal conditions), and speaking in tongues as proof of Spirit-baptism, to trusting in Christ.²¹ These certain things, as the UPCI defines them, must be done in order for one to receive salvation. In this way the elements of Acts 2:38 function as works. This, the Apostle Paul, and the New Testament writers, unyieldingly maintain as unacceptable and against the Gospel of Christ:

¹⁸ Private email sent to me at *In Christ Alone! Ministries* from E (name withheld for privacy) on Oct. 14, 2003. All grammatical and spelling errors in the original.

¹⁹ Private email sent to me at *In Christ Alone! Ministries* from K (name withheld for privacy) on August 30, 2004. All grammatical and spelling errors in the original.

²⁰ Faith is not a separate thing from repentance. Rather, repentance is another way that Luke describes faith in Luke-Acts. Cp. Guy D. Nave, Jr., *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002). This is an excellent historical and exegetical treatment of the meaning of repentance.

²¹ They also add a number of things, including keeping their version of behavioral holiness, to trusting in Christ. But they would say these must be kept in order to stay saved, and not to receive salvation. But if one must do these things in order to maintain salvation, then they are the same as doing works to receive salvation, since they must be done to retain the salvation one has. They are works for salvation. It is this teaching about holiness that betrays their basis of works salvation in Acts 2:38.

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For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. (Romans 4:2-8 KJV)

It does not matter what one adds to faith. It could be something as necessary as baptism. It could be the conditions for seeking Spirit filling. It may be spiritual gifts. It could be the ethical practices, which all Christians are called to follow. Whatever it may be, anything beyond believing God is a working for a reward out of debt, rather than out of grace. 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 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)

The emphasis by Paul in this passage on faith as trust is overwhelming. As sinners we cannot add anything to the finished work of Christ. That would make us greater transgressors. We are dead to law keeping, as a means to our salvation, in any form. Our relationship with God is based on faith in the Son of God. Paul makes salvation by any form of obedience or law keeping void on this basis.

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The real beauty of Acts 2:38 is to see it as a picture of justification by faith. The act of repentance, if understood properly, is truly the act of trusting in Christ alone for salvation. Water baptism is administered because of the forgiveness that is received when true repentance occurs. Water baptism is a visual proclamation of the Gospel, as well as a picture of the faith of the baptizand in that Gospel. Spirit-reception, receiving the Holy Ghost, comes as a gift from Jesus, the giver of the Spirit, as we placed faith exclusively in Him. God gives His Spirit to those who trust in Jesus Christ alone (John 7:38-39), rather than meeting man-made conditions and exercises.

The initial reception of the Spirit occurs at the moment one repents (believes and is justified) and not as a separate, subsequent act of faith. Ephesians 1:23 states that it is because one believes the Gospel that they receive the Spirit. This disallows the idea that one does not receive the Spirit until they receive an experience of the Spirit, which is evidenced through speaking in tongues. Any experience or manifestation of the Spirit cannot be a requirement for Spirit reception.²² It is given as an act of grace through faith in Christ, and not as a separate act of faith in the Spirit subsequent to justifying faith.²³

Acts 2:38 tells us what we are to do in response to God's Gospel message in Christ: believe/repent, which is faith alone. It tells us what the Church does to welcome us into the Body of Christ: water-baptize us. It tells us what God does to place us in Christ: Spirit-baptize us. 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 with Scripture, we are guarded from placing an eccentric interpretations of Acts 2:38 over against the rest of Acts. Also, we are preserving the full teaching about salvation in the whole Bible by understanding what Acts 2:38 really means.²⁴

²² I address the issues of Pentecostal Spirit-baptism in my articles on *What Does It Mean to be 'Born again'?* Parts 8-19. These parts will be posted on my website (www.inchristalone.org) in the near future. Parts 1-7 are already posted and address the issue of whether being "born of the water" is the same as water baptism.

²³ See my book *Can the Gospel Be Fractured?*

²⁴ 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>