

Understanding the Apostolic Nature of the Church: Lessons from Acts 14

In Acts 14, we see a powerful picture of how the early church operated through the apostolic ministry of Paul and Barnabas. Their journey reveals important principles about how God designed His church to function and spread throughout the world.

What does it mean to speak with boldness and confidence?

Paul and Barnabas entered the Jewish synagogue in Iconium and "spoke with such power and boldness that a large number of Jews as well as Greeks believed and confidently accepted Jesus as Savior." This wasn't about being loud or forceful, but about having unshakable confidence in the truth of the gospel.

Boldness in sharing our faith doesn't mean we all need to be extroverts or public speakers. It simply means we believe firmly in who Jesus is and share that conviction with others. God wants us to be steadfast in our faith, built upon the rock of Christ, so that when storms come, we don't waver.

Some people are naturally soft-spoken, while others are more outgoing. The key is not changing your personality but allowing God to use who He made you to be. Your unique approach will reach people that others cannot.

How should we respond to opposition?

When faced with opposition from unbelieving Jews who stirred up trouble, Paul and Barnabas didn't retreat. Instead, "they stayed for a long time, speaking boldly and confidently for the Lord." They understood that not everyone would receive their message, but they remained faithful to their calling.

Opposition is inevitable when sharing the gospel. Not everyone will accept what you say, but that shouldn't discourage you from continuing to plant seeds and water them. Remember, it's not up to us what people do with the gospel - our job is simply to share it faithfully.

Does God still perform miracles today?

In Lystra, Paul saw a man who had been crippled from birth and had never walked. As Paul preached, he noticed the man had faith to be healed. With a loud voice, Paul said, "Stand up on your feet!" Immediately, the man jumped up and began to walk.

God is still the same miraculous God He has always been. While we may not see miracles as frequently in our Western context as in other parts of the world, it's not because God has changed. Often in places where people have fewer resources and greater desperation, faith is stronger and miracles happen more frequently.

We need to remain open to God working in unexpected ways. Don't limit Him to your preconceived notions of how He should work. Whether He leads you to lay hands on someone, speak a word of healing, or simply pray silently, be ready to follow His direction.

How should we handle praise and recognition?

When the people of Lystra saw the miracle, they mistakenly believed Paul and Barnabas were gods. They called Barnabas "Zeus" and Paul "Hermes" and wanted to offer sacrifices to them. The apostles immediately tore their robes in distress and rushed into the crowd, insisting they were "only men of the same nature" bringing good news.

This teaches us an important lesson about avoiding the elevation of church leaders. In God's kingdom, there should be "no heroes who take the place of Christ." While we respect those in leadership positions, we must be cautious about putting people on pedestals.

Paul and Barnabas were desperate to redirect the praise to God alone. They understood that their role was simply to point people to Jesus, not to receive glory themselves.

What is the apostolic nature of the church?

The apostolic work we see in Acts 14 involves:

1. Establishing local churches
2. Teaching and strengthening disciples
3. Appointing elders through prayer and fasting
4. Maintaining accountability relationships
5. Reporting back to the sending church

This pattern differs from our modern concept of "missionaries" who go out temporarily. The apostles were "sent ones" who helped establish local churches, set up leadership, and maintained ongoing relationships with those churches.

The apostolic function helps keep churches on course and accountable to something bigger than themselves. It ensures that churches don't become isolated or drift from their mission.

Should we expect an easy Christian life?

Paul and Barnabas were honest with new believers, telling them "it is through many tribulations and hardships that we must enter the kingdom of God." They didn't promise an easy life but prepared people for the reality of following Christ.

Being a Christian, especially in a post-Christian society, is not always easy. You will face opposition and difficulties. Sometimes the biggest struggles are internal - the battle with your own sinful nature.

However, the prize is worth more than the price. We get Jesus, eternity with Him, forgiveness of sins, and the promise of a new body that doesn't experience pain or death. These rewards far outweigh any temporary hardships we might face.

Life Application

This week, you have the privilege of being the light of Christ in a dark world. No matter your age or experience level, you are qualified to share God's love because of the Holy Spirit within you.

Challenge yourself to:

1. Step out in faith, expecting God to work miracles that point people to Jesus
2. Be willing to endure hardship for the sake of the gospel
3. Remain accountable to other believers
4. Speak boldly about your faith, in whatever way fits your personality
5. Give glory to God alone, never seeking recognition for yourself

Ask yourself:

- Am I limiting what God can do through me because of fear or doubt?
- Do I speak with boldness and confidence about my faith?
- Am I prepared to face opposition for the sake of the gospel?
- Have I been putting church leaders on pedestals instead of focusing on Christ?
- Am I accountable to other believers who can help keep me on course?

Remember, the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. You don't need to know all the answers or have special abilities. God simply wants to use you as you are to bring His light to others.