

# ACTS Lesson 11

.....he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.  
*Acts 14:27*

## *Paul's first missionary journey*

### **Acts 14**

- A city divided
- Iconium
- Lystra
- Gentiles

### **Acts 15**

- A conflict for the new church
  - Judaisers
  - The Jerusalem Council
- When Christians part

*“Today I quit being a Christian. ... I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being ‘Christian’ or to being part of Christianity. It’s simply impossible for me to ‘belong’ to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group. For 10 years, I’ve tried. I’ve failed. I’m an outsider. My conscience will allow nothing else” (Facebook post, 7/28/2010). Anne Rice*

**(A response to author Anne Rice, Excerpt from World Magazine)**

In the final chapter of Acts, Paul has survived storm and shipwreck to stand before Caesar in Rome. While waiting under house arrest for his trial, he reaches out first to the local synagogue leaders, who are eager to hear from him. News about Jesus of Nazareth and his followers has reached them, but “we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against” (Acts 28:22).

But wait—back in the early days, the first followers of Jesus were finding “favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). What happened?

One obvious development was the rise of the Judaizers, Jewish believers who insisted on preserving the Mosaic law, including circumcision. These synagogue rulers had likely received an earful from them. But another reason for Christianity’s bad press was Christians.

We tend to idealize the early church, and the historical record gives us sterling examples from saintly Stephen to heroic Irenaeus. The record also offers cautionary tales. Some Christians were hypocrites, like Ananias and Sapphira. Some were libertines, like the gluttonous Corinthians. Some harped on dietary laws and holy days, wounding others for whom Christ died. Some preached Christ out of selfish ambition. Some deserted the faith entirely, trampling underfoot the Lord who saved them.

And the rest, in spite of shortcomings and failures, took the gospel into all the world, transforming lives and history.

John writes plainly, “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20). Scorning the church for her checkered past and conflicted present harms the soul in two ways: It makes mere mortals the arbiters of holiness, and it deprives them of sanctification through loving fellow Christians in spite of themselves (and vice versa).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul contends for the church as *e pluribus unum*, building to his great prayer of 3:17-19: “that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.” This is determined love, difficult love, not-for-sissies love.

We can’t comprehend the love of Christ individually. There may be a time to leave the local congregation but never a time to leave the church. I’ve compared her to an ugly bride, stumbling down the aisle toward glorification. That’s me, and that’s you.

Who truly sees her? Who loves her? Who beautifies her? In His honor, we glory in the name “Christian.”

**Janie B. Cheaney** is a senior writer who contributes commentary to WORLD and oversees WORLD's annual Children's Book of the Year awards. She also writes novels for young adults and authored the Wordsmith creative writing curriculum. Janie resides in rural Missouri.