COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 68

Ordinances Fulfilled in Jesus Christ

STUDY GUIDE 1 OF 12:

From the Shadow to the Reality

An overview of Christ fulfilling former covenant ordinances.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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SUMMARY: FROM THE SHADOW TO THE REALITY

Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

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Purpose of This Module

This module, Ordinances Fulfilled in Jesus Christ, has been prepared to bring clear Scriptural understanding concerning water baptism, communion and feet washing. These practices are commonly called Christian ordinances. Water baptism and communion are practised by most Christian churches and fellowships, while many holiness groups and Church of God congregations also practise feet washing.

Because these practices have been followed for many generations, they are often accepted as part of Christianity without first asking an important question: Do these outward ordinances belong to the New Covenant Church?

- The answer must be established from the Word of God.

We do not want to accept a practice simply because it has been followed for many generations. Neither do we want to reject a practice because it is old.

We must understand:

- Why God gave outward ordinances;
- What those ordinances represented;
- How long they were intended to continue;
- And where their fulfilment is found today.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 28:10**:

> *"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:"*

This subject must therefore be considered carefully. We cannot build our understanding upon one verse, one outward action or one historical event. We must allow the whole testimony of Scripture to establish the truth.

Our purpose is not simply to explain why we do not practise water baptism, communion and feet washing. We want to understand what these outward practices represented and how their spiritual reality is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The Evening Light and Inherited Practices

We believe that we are living in the period commonly called the Evening Light. This period began with the sixth seal brethren near the end of the nineteenth century. These brethren received important light from the Word of God and took a courageous stand against religious division, denominationalism and many false teachings. However, receiving light in one area does not mean that every inherited belief and practice is immediately removed.

Inherited Teachings Had to Be Reconsidered

Many of the sixth seal brethren had come out of Protestantism and the holiness movement. Because of this, some teachings and practices from those systems remained among them.

We have sometimes referred to these inherited teachings and practices as Babel stones. For example, many continued to teach original sin and two works of grace. According to the teaching of two works of grace, a person was first born again and then later received the Holy Spirit through another experience commonly called entire sanctification.

However, Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

A person who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is received when a person is born again, not through a second work at a later time. As greater light came from the Word of God, former understandings had to be reconsidered.

The Ordinances Must Also Be Tested by Scripture

The same principle applies to the ordinances. The sixth seal brethren continued to practise:

- Water baptism;
- Communion;
- Feet washing.

We are not criticising them for walking according to the understanding they possessed. They received important light and faithfully walked in the truth they understood.

However, the Evening Light did not end with the understanding they had received. God continued to bring greater clarity from His Word.

Therefore, the question for us cannot simply be: What did the sixth seal brethren practise? The question must be: What does the Word of God teach?

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 30:26**:

> *"Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound."*

Everything we believe and practise must therefore be brought again into the light of Scripture.

Ordinances and the New Covenant

Before examining water baptism, communion and feet washing individually, we need to establish the Scriptural foundation from which these practices must be understood. The Old Covenant contained many outward forms and ceremonies. These things were not wrong. They were given by God.

They were right for the purpose and time for which God appointed them. However, they were not the final reality. They pointed beyond themselves towards something greater. They pointed towards Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:16-17**:

> *"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."*

Paul makes an important distinction.

- The outward things were the shadow.
- Jesus Christ is the reality.

That distinction will govern this entire module. We must understand what belonged to the shadow, what the shadow represented, and where that spiritual reality is now found. Before we examine the individual ordinances, we must therefore establish clearly what the believer has received in Jesus Christ. That is where this study begins.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must inherited practices such as water baptism, communion and feet washing be tested by God's Word?

Personal Reflection

How do you decide whether a familiar religious practice agrees with the Bible? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

Is there an inherited belief about outward ordinances that you need to examine more carefully in the Bible? Explain. Name one inherited expectation you will reconsider and explain how Christ's fulfilment changes your response.

INTRODUCTION

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Water baptism, communion and feet washing are widely practised throughout Christianity. For many believers, these practices have always been connected with what it means to be a Christian. They may have been taught from childhood that water baptism is an act of obedience, that communion is an important part of Christian fellowship, and that feet washing demonstrates humility and service.

Because these practices are so familiar, it can be difficult to consider them from another direction. A person may immediately ask:

- Why should we stop practising something that Christians have practised for generations?

However, before answering that question, we need to ask something more fundamental:

- What has the believer already received in Jesus Christ?

That question must come first.

We Must Begin With Jesus Christ

If we begin with the ordinance, our attention is immediately directed towards the outward action. We see water and ask whether the believer should be baptised in it. We see bread and a cup and ask whether Christians should continue to receive them. We see Jesus washing the disciples' feet and ask whether believers should continue to repeat that action.

Those verses must eventually be examined carefully. But they are not where we should begin. We must begin with Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:9-10**:

> *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

Notice those important words in **Colossians 2:10**:

> *"Ye are complete in him."*

Before we ask what an outward ordinance can provide, we must understand what it means for the believer to be complete in Jesus Christ.

- Before we examine the shadow, we must understand the reality.
- Before we examine the outward representation, we must understand the Person to whom it pointed.

This will change the way we approach the whole subject. Instead of beginning with the ordinance and asking how it fits into Christianity, we will begin with Jesus Christ and ask:

- What did the outward action represent?;
- What was it pointing towards?;
- Has that spiritual reality now come?;
- Where is that reality found today?

The answer must be established from Scripture. Something does not become New Covenant truth simply because Christians have practised it for many generations. Neither should something be rejected because it is old.

Everything must be examined in the light of Jesus Christ and the Word of God. We must first establish the Scriptural foundation that enables us to understand the purpose and fulfilment of water baptism, communion and feet washing.

We will first consider what the believer has received in Jesus Christ and why He is the New Covenant reality. From that foundation, we will then be able to understand correctly the shadows and outward ordinances that pointed towards Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should a study of outward ordinances begin with what the believer has received in Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have you usually begun with the ceremony or with Jesus Christ when thinking about ordinances? Explain.

Action Step

How could beginning with completeness in Christ guide your own thinking about a familiar ceremony? State one specific conclusion you need to correct or confirm in the Bible, and how it will affect your conduct.

CHRIST IS THE NEW COVENANT REALITY

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Before examining the shadows of the former covenant, we need to understand clearly what God has now given the believer in Jesus Christ. The New Covenant is not simply another outward religious system. God did not remove one collection of ceremonies and replace it with another collection of ceremonies. The New Covenant brings the believer into the spiritual reality found in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:9-10**:

> *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

The KJV uses the word *"Godhead"* in this verse. The meaning is deity, or that which is divine. Paul is teaching that all the fulness of God is found bodily in Jesus Christ.

These two verses belong together. First Paul says, *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* Then he says, *"And ye are complete in him."* All the fulness is in Jesus Christ. Nothing is lacking in Him, and the believer is complete in Him.

Complete in Him

The word complete is extremely important to this study. We are not partly complete in Jesus Christ, and we are not almost complete in Him. We are not complete in Christ except for something else that must still be added.

Paul says, *"Ye are complete in him."* If something is complete, nothing is lacking. If something must still be added before it becomes complete, then it was not complete before that addition.

This raises an important question that we must carry throughout our study of the ordinances:

- What can an outward act add to the completeness we already have in Jesus Christ?

Nothing Can Be Added to Christ

Our completeness cannot be Christ plus water baptism, Christ plus communion, Christ plus feet washing, or Christ plus an outward religious ceremony. Our spiritual completeness is found in Jesus Christ Himself.

This does not mean that obedience, holiness or the commandments of Jesus Christ are unimportant. It means that no outward religious action can add to the complete salvation already received through the new birth. Jesus Christ has not provided part of our spiritual life and left an ordinance to provide the rest. The born-again believer is complete in Him, and obedience and holiness are expressed through His indwelling life.

The Christian Life Begins With the New Birth

The Christian life does not begin with an outward ordinance. It begins with the inward work of God. Jesus made this clear when He spoke to Nicodemus.

Jesus said to Nicodemus in **John 3:3**:

> *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

Jesus then said in **John 3:7**:

> *"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

A person must be born again. The new birth is not an outward religious ceremony. It is the inward work of God that brings spiritual life.

- A person does not become spiritually alive because water touches the body.
- A person does not receive eternal life by eating bread and drinking from a cup.
- A person does not receive the nature of Jesus Christ by washing another person's feet.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can an outward ceremony neither give spiritual life nor add to the salvation received at the new birth?

Personal Reflection

What does the difference between receiving Christ and performing a ceremony help you understand about your own confidence before God?

Action Step

Is there anything you need to reconsider about looking to a ceremony for spiritual life? Explain. What will you change in your understanding or practice so that the saving work belongs to Jesus Christ alone?

Spiritual Life Comes From God.

John wrote in **1 John 5:11-12**:

> *"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

Notice where the life is found. John says, *"This life is in his Son,"* and then, *"He that hath the Son hath life."* The life is not found in an outward ceremony. The life is found in Jesus Christ.

When a person receives Jesus Christ through the new birth, that person receives the life that is in Him. The believer does not need an outward ordinance to add spiritual life to what God has already given. The life is already found in the Son.

The Spirit of Christ Dwells Within

Paul gives another important test of whether a person belongs to Jesus Christ. The true relationship with Christ is not established by an outward ordinance. It is established by the Spirit of Christ dwelling within.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

Notice the words, *"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."* A person belongs to Christ because the Spirit of Christ dwells within. The outward ordinance does not establish that relationship. The inward work of God does.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 1:13**:

> *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,"*

The believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit. This is the true inward mark of belonging to Jesus Christ. God does not identify His people by an outward religious action, but places His Spirit within them.

Paul could therefore say in **Galatians 2:20**:

> *"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."*

Notice the words, *"Christ liveth in me."* This is the New Covenant reality. The believer does not simply have an outward picture of Jesus Christ, but has Christ living within.

Jesus Christ fulfilled His promise to come to His people as the Holy Ghost at Pentecost in AD 31. He now dwells within every born-again believer. Therefore, the spiritual reality to which the shadows pointed is not awaiting a future physical return of Christ. The believer already possesses the Person in whom the fulfilment is found.

The Outward Cannot Produce the Inward

This gives us an important principle. An outward religious action may represent something spiritual, but the outward action cannot produce the spiritual reality. The outward action can only remain an outward action.

- Water can touch the body, but water cannot produce spiritual life.
- Bread can be eaten and a cup can be received, but bread and a cup cannot place Jesus Christ within a person.
- Feet can be physically washed, but washing another person's feet cannot make a proud heart humble.

The outward action may represent:

- Cleansing;
- Fellowship;
- Humility;
- Service;
- Obedience.

However, the outward action cannot create these things within the heart. Only Jesus Christ can provide the spiritual reality.

The Reality Is Found in Christ

This is why our confidence must not be placed in the outward action. The outward action may point towards the reality, but it is not the reality itself. The reality is found in Jesus Christ.

What the outward form could only represent, Jesus Christ provides spiritually. The shadow could point forward, but it could never take the place of the substance. Therefore, our confidence must remain in Christ and not in the outward form.

We Walk in the One We Have Received

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:6**:

> *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:"*

Notice the progression. We have received Christ, and then we walk in Him. We do not receive Jesus Christ and then look outside of Him for the Christian life.

We do not receive the reality and then return to the shadow in order to make the reality complete. The same Jesus Christ whom we have received is the One in whom we continue to walk. The Christian life begins with the life of Christ within, and then that life is expressed through the way we live.

Our walk does not produce the life. Our walk expresses the life we have received. This is the New Covenant order.

First, Christ lives within. Then His life is expressed through us. That distinction will become very important when we later examine the individual ordinances.

Before doing that, however, we need to understand why God used outward forms at all. To answer that question, we must see that the Scriptures, the Law, the prophets and the Old Covenant shadows were all pointing forward to Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does walking in Christ express the life received through the new birth?

Personal Reflection

What does the difference between receiving life and expressing that life clarify for you? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

Think of one choice you face. How could trusting Christ's indwelling life guide your response? State what you will do differently in that situation, and why.

EVERYTHING WAS POINTING TO JESUS CHRIST

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Before we examine the ordinances themselves, we need to establish an important biblical principle: Everything in the former covenant was pointing forward to Jesus Christ. The Law, the prophets, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the tabernacle, the holy days, the washings and the ordinances were not independent ends in themselves. They were part of a greater revelation that was moving towards fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

If we look only at the outward practice, we can easily miss the spiritual reality to which it was pointing. Therefore, we must learn to read the former covenant in the light of Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures Testified of Christ

Jesus made this principle very clear when speaking to the Jewish people. Jesus said in **John 5:39**:

> *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."*

The Jewish people searched the Scriptures because they believed that eternal life was found in them. However, Jesus directed their attention beyond the written Scriptures to the Person of whom they testified.

Jesus said, *"They are they which testify of me."* The Scriptures were pointing towards Him. The Law, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the tabernacle and the ordinances were all pointing towards Jesus Christ.

The purpose of these things was not to turn the attention of God's people permanently towards outward forms. They were preparing the way for Jesus Christ.

This is extremely important when studying the ordinances. If we concentrate only upon the outward action, we may see the form without understanding what God was showing through it. The outward action had meaning because it pointed beyond itself.

Therefore, the correct question is not simply:

- Was this practice performed?

We must also ask:

- What was God showing through it?

All Things Had to Be Fulfilled in Him

After His resurrection, Jesus explained this same truth to His disciples. Jesus said in **Luke 24:44**:

> *"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."*

Notice the words, *"All things must be fulfilled."* Jesus then identifies where those things were written:

- In the Law of Moses;
- In the prophets;
- In the psalms.

Together, these represent the Scriptures given under the former covenant. Jesus said those Scriptures contained things *"concerning me."*

The Law was therefore not pointing to itself as the final reality. The prophets and the psalms were not pointing to themselves. They were pointing towards Jesus Christ.

The promises concerning Him had to be fulfilled. The prophecies, types and shadows concerning Him also had to be fulfilled. The outward forms that represented His work had to reach their fulfilment in Him. Jesus Christ stands at the centre of the whole picture.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do **John 5:39** *and* **Luke 24:44** *show the purpose of the former covenant the Bible?*

Personal Reflection

What do these verses help you see about reading the Law and the prophets with Jesus Christ at the centre? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

When you next read an Old Covenant command, how could its relationship to Jesus Christ guide your own belief or practice? Name one inherited expectation you will reconsider and explain how Christ's fulfilment changes your response.

The Former Covenant Was Preparing the Way

The former covenant contained many visible and outward things. These included:

- A literal tabernacle;
- A literal priesthood;
- Literal animal sacrifices;
- Literal washings;
- Appointed meats and drinks;
- Holy days;
- Sabbath days;
- Outward ordinances.

These things were real, and they were given by God. They were right for the purpose and time for which God gave them. However, they were not the final condition God intended for His people. They were preparing the way for something greater.

The tabernacle pointed beyond itself. The priesthood and the sacrifices pointed beyond themselves. The washings, appointed days and ordinances also pointed beyond themselves.

They were all directing God's people towards the reality that would come in Jesus Christ. This means that when we study the former covenant, we must not stop at the outward form. We must follow the form to its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

The Former Covenant Must Be Understood Through Jesus Christ

This gives us an important principle for understanding Scripture. We cannot take a practice from the former covenant and automatically carry it into the New Covenant simply because God once commanded it.

God commanded many things under the former covenant. He commanded animal sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood, ceremonial washings, certain meats and drinks, holy days and Sabbath observance.

These commands were not wrong. They were God's commands to the people living under that covenant. But their presence in Scripture does not mean that they continue unchanged for all time.

We must ask:

- Why did God give this practice?
- What was it pointing towards?
- Has the reality to which it pointed now come in Jesus Christ?

This is the same principle we must apply when we later examine water baptism, communion and feet washing. It is not enough to say, *"This action appears in the Bible."*

Many actions belonging to the former covenant appear in the Bible. The important question is whether an action belongs to the continuing New Covenant reality, or whether it belonged to the system of figures and shadows pointing towards Jesus Christ.

Later in this module, this principle will become especially important when we examine the book of Acts. Acts faithfully records actions performed by believers during a period of transition. The fact that an action is recorded after Pentecost does not, by itself, establish that God intended that action to remain a permanent New Covenant ordinance. We must still ask what the action represented, why it was being performed, and whether its spiritual reality had already come in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ Is the Centre

This brings us back to the foundation established in the Introduction. We begin with Jesus Christ.

We do not begin with the outward form and give it an independent place beside Him. We begin with the Person to whom the form was pointing.

Jesus said, *"They are they which testify of me."* He also said, *"All things must be fulfilled."*

Therefore, the former covenant must be understood according to its relationship with Jesus Christ. The sacrifices, priesthood, tabernacle, washings, Sabbath and ordinances all find their meaning in Him. Jesus Christ is the reality to which the former covenant was pointing.

The former covenant was not God's final destination for His people. It was preparing the way for something greater.

This raises an important question. If the former covenant was pointing forward towards Jesus Christ, did God ever say that another covenant would come? Did God Himself reveal that the covenant given through Moses would not remain the final covenant? The answer is: Yes.

Long before Jesus Christ came in the flesh, God declared through the prophet Jeremiah: *"I will make a new covenant."* That statement is extremely important. The movement from the former covenant to the New Covenant was not something invented later by the apostles. God had already promised it.

He had already revealed that a new covenant was coming. He also made something else very clear. The New Covenant would be: *"Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers."*

Therefore, the New Covenant would not simply be the former covenant continued under another name. God had promised something different from the covenant He had made with

Israel through Moses. Before we examine the individual ordinances more closely, we therefore need to understand this important promise.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does a practice appearing in the Bible not by itself establish a permanent New Covenant requirement?

Personal Reflection

Have you assumed that every recorded religious action must continue? What do you now understand?

Action Step

Choose an outward practice you have accepted. What do you still need to understand about its covenant setting and fulfilment? State one specific conclusion you need to correct or confirm in the Bible, and how it will affect your conduct.

GOD PROMISED A NEW COVENANT

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We have seen that the former covenant was pointing forward towards Jesus Christ. The sacrifices, priesthood, tabernacle, washings, appointed days and ordinances were not God's final purpose for His people. They were preparing the way for something greater. This raises an important question: Did God Himself ever say that another covenant would come?

The answer is: Yes. Long before Jesus Christ came in the flesh, God declared through the prophet Jeremiah that He would establish *"a new covenant."*

This is extremely important. The movement from the former covenant to the New Covenant was not something invented later by the apostles. It was not a change of direction that God decided upon after the Old Covenant had failed. God had already revealed that a New Covenant was coming.

"I Will Make a New Covenant"

Jeremiah wrote in **Jeremiah 31:31-34**:

> *"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*

The opening words are very clear: *"I will make a new covenant."* God Himself announced that another covenant was coming, so the covenant given through Moses was never intended to

be the final covenant arrangement for God's people. It had an appointed purpose and an appointed time. God had already declared that a New Covenant would come.

"Not According to the Covenant That I Made With Their Fathers"

Jeremiah then gives an extremely important distinction. God said that the New Covenant would be: *"Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers."*

The New Covenant would therefore not simply be the Old Covenant continued under another name. God was not saying that He would keep the same covenant and make a few small changes.

He said: *"I will make a new covenant."* And then: *"Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers."* This means that when the New Covenant came, we should expect a real change in covenant order.

The former covenant had contained many outward things, including:

- A physical sanctuary;
- A Levitical priesthood;
- Animal sacrifices;
- Ceremonial washings;
- Meats and drinks;
- Appointed days;
- Outward ordinances.

But God promised a covenant that would be different from the one He had made when He brought Israel out of Egypt. This prepares us to understand why the outward forms of the former covenant cannot simply be carried forward automatically into the New Covenant.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What did God mean when He promised a covenant different from the one made with Israel's fathers?

Personal Reflection

What does God's promise to write His law within His people help you understand about knowing Him? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

How might the promise of an inward relationship with God guide what you seek in your own life? Identify one personal response you will make, trusting in Jesus Christ rather than your own religious effort.

From the Outward to the Inward

Jeremiah then describes one of the great characteristics of the New Covenant. God said: *"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts."*

Notice the movement. Under the former covenant, God's commandments were written outwardly. But the New Covenant would bring an inward work.

God said: *"I will put my law in their inward parts."* And then *"write it in their hearts."*

This is one of the great movements we must understand throughout this module:

- From outward form to inward reality.

The New Covenant is not simply another outward religious system. God did not remove one collection of ceremonies and replace it with another collection of ceremonies. The New Covenant brings the work of God within.

This agrees with what we have already seen concerning the new birth. Spiritual life is not produced by an outward action. God works within the heart.

The New Covenant Would Bring a Personal Knowledge of God

God also said: *"They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them."* The New Covenant would bring God's people into a direct spiritual relationship with Him. The emphasis is not simply upon knowing outward requirements. It is upon knowing God.

This is important to our study of ordinances. The purpose of the New Covenant is not simply to make people more skilled in performing religious actions. God's purpose is to bring His people into the spiritual reality of knowing Him.

The outward form could teach about God. But the New Covenant brings the believer into a living relationship with Him.

The New Covenant Would Bring True Forgiveness

God also promised: *"I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."* This is another great difference. The former covenant contained repeated sacrifices. Those sacrifices pointed forward and taught God's people about sin, sacrifice and the giving of life.

But they could not provide the final spiritual reality. The New Covenant would bring true forgiveness. God Himself said: *"I will forgive their iniquity."*

The shadow could point towards forgiveness, but the New Covenant would bring the reality. This again shows us that God's purpose was moving beyond the outward form towards something greater.

Hebrews Confirms the Promise

The writer of Hebrews takes the promise from Jeremiah and applies it directly to the change of covenant. The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 8:6-7**:

> *"But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second."*

Notice the expressions *"a better covenant"* and *"better promises."* The writer then says: *"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second."*

There was a first covenant, and there was a second covenant. The second was not simply another name for the first. It was *"a better covenant."*

The First Covenant Was Not the Final Covenant

The writer of Hebrews continues by quoting Jeremiah's prophecy. The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 8:8-12**:

> *"For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."*

The writer does not present Jeremiah's prophecy as something unimportant. He uses it to explain the movement from the first covenant to the New Covenant.

Again, the main characteristics are clear:

- A New Covenant;
- Not according to the former covenant;
- God's laws placed within;
- God's laws written in the heart;
- God's people knowing Him;
- Sins and iniquities remembered no more.

The direction is unmistakable. God was moving His people from an outward covenant order towards a greater spiritual reality.

The First Became Old

The writer then gives an important conclusion. The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 8:13**:

> *"In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."*

Notice the words: *"In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old."* The very promise of a New Covenant meant that the first covenant was not permanent.

The first covenant had served the purpose for which God had given it. But it was not the final covenant. The promise of something new showed that the former order was moving towards fulfilment.

This is an important principle:

- The Old Covenant did not become old because men decided to reject it.

God Himself promised a New Covenant. *"He hath made the first old."*

A Change of Covenant Means We Must Ask What Belonged to the First

This has an important effect on how we study the ordinances. If Scripture distinguishes between the first covenant and the New Covenant, then we cannot simply assume that every outward practice found under the first covenant continues unchanged into the New Covenant.

We must ask:

- To which covenant did this practice belong?

The writer of Hebrews has already told us that the first covenant had *"ordinances of divine service."* Therefore, when we encounter an ordinance, we must determine whether it belonged to the outward order of the first covenant or whether Scripture establishes it as part of the continuing spiritual reality of the New Covenant.

That question cannot be answered simply by saying: *"It is in the Bible."* Many practices belonging specifically to the first covenant are in the Bible. We must understand their covenant setting.

The New Covenant Is Not an Improved Old Covenant

This distinction needs to be very clear. The New Covenant is not simply the Old Covenant with Christianity added to it.

- It is not: The former covenant plus Jesus Christ.
- It is not: The old outward system with a few Christian ceremonies added.

God said, *"I will make a new covenant."* And: *"Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers."* The writer of Hebrews says: *"He hath made the first old."*

Therefore, we must allow the New Covenant to be understood according to the spiritual reality God promised.

- The former covenant pointed forward. The New Covenant brings fulfilment.
- The former covenant emphasised outward forms. The New Covenant brings the work of God into the heart.

The Promise Prepares Us to Understand the Ordinances

This gives us an important foundation before we define the word ordinance more carefully. We now know that:

- God gave the first covenant;
- The first covenant had an appointed purpose;
- The first covenant contained outward ordinances;
- God promised beforehand that a New Covenant would come;
- The New Covenant would be "not according to" the former covenant;
- The New Covenant would bring the work of God inwardly;
- The New Covenant would bring a personal knowledge of God;
- The New Covenant would bring true forgiveness;
- Scripture says that the first covenant became old.

Therefore, when we now study the ordinances, we cannot ask only: *"Was this practice ever commanded by God?"* We must also ask: *"To which covenant did it belong?"* And: *"What spiritual reality was it pointing towards?"* This brings us naturally to the next question: What exactly is an ordinance?

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does God's promise of a new covenant require us to examine the place of former ordinances?

Personal Reflection

What has the difference between the first covenant and the New Covenant clarified for you? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

When considering an ordinance, how could you avoid assuming that a former command continues unchanged? Identify one practice or belief you will test against the Bible, and explain what you are prepared to change.

WHAT IS AN ORDINANCE?

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Before we can understand how the ordinances were fulfilled, we need to understand what an ordinance is. The English word ordinance can have different meanings depending upon the verse in which it is used. Therefore, we should not assume that every occurrence of the English word ordinance in the Bible refers to a religious ceremony.

The word can refer to:

- A decree or regulation;
- A requirement connected with law;
- An instruction that has been handed down;
- An outward religious practice.

The meaning must always be determined by the context. In this module, however, we are principally concerned with ordinances in the ceremonial sense.

An Outward Action Pointing to a Spiritual Truth

A ceremonial ordinance is an outward action appointed to represent or point towards a spiritual reality. The action can be seen and physically performed, but it is not the reality itself. Its purpose is to direct attention beyond the outward form towards the spiritual fulfilment found in Jesus Christ.

The outward form is physical, but the truth it represents is spiritual. This distinction is very important. The outward action is not itself the spiritual reality.

Under the Old Covenant, God used visible and physical things to teach His people and to point forward towards greater spiritual realities. These included:

- Sacrifices;
- Meats and drinks;

- Washings;
- Holy days;
- New moons;
- Sabbath days;
- Priestly service;
- Tabernacle worship;
- Other outward ordinances.

These things could be seen and physically performed. However, their meaning reached beyond the outward action itself. They were pointing forward to something greater.

The Outward Form Was Not Meaningless

Because we describe these ordinances as outward forms, we must not conclude that they were meaningless. They were given by God and had an important purpose within the covenant in which God placed them. The outward form could teach, represent, illustrate and point forward.

For example:

- Washing could represent cleansing;
- Sacrifice could represent the giving of life;
- The Sabbath could represent rest;
- The priesthood could represent mediation;
- The tabernacle could represent access to God.

The physical action had meaning because God had appointed it. However, the outward form was not the final reality. It pointed beyond itself towards something greater. Therefore, we must hold both truths together: The outward form had meaning, but the outward form was not the final spiritual reality.

The Ordinances Were Given by God

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that the Old Covenant ordinances were not simply religious customs invented by men. The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:1**:

> *"Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary."*

Notice the expression, *"ordinances of divine service."* These ordinances belonged to *"the first covenant."* They were part of the order God established for natural Israel.

Therefore, we are not saying that the ordinances were wrong. They were right for the people to whom God gave them and for the period during which that covenant remained in force.

This gives us an important principle:

- Something can be commanded by God for an appointed purpose without being commanded by God for all time.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can an ordinance be given by God and still have an appointed end?

Personal Reflection

What does the difference between an outward form and its spiritual reality help you recognise? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

Is your own confidence directed towards an outward form or towards the reality found in Christ? Explain what you are considering. Name one inherited expectation you will reconsider and explain how Christ's fulfilment changes your response.

The Spiritual Truth Does Not Disappear

There is an important distinction we must make at this point. When an outward covenant form reaches the end of its appointed purpose, this does not mean that the spiritual truth represented by that form also disappears. The outward form may pass, but the spiritual reality remains.

For example, the animal sacrifices belonged to the former covenant and pointed forward to Jesus Christ. When those sacrifices reached their fulfilment, the truth of sacrifice did not disappear. Jesus Christ became the true sacrifice.

In the same way, ceremonial washings could represent cleansing. When those outward washings reached their appointed end, the spiritual reality they represented did not disappear. True cleansing is found in Jesus Christ, who cleanses the believer through the saving work accomplished at the new birth.

The Sabbath could represent rest. When the outward Sabbath shadow reached fulfilment, rest did not disappear. The believer now enters into the greater spiritual rest found in Jesus Christ.

The priesthood could represent mediation and access to God. When the Levitical priesthood reached its fulfilment, access to God did not disappear. The greater reality came in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must distinguish between the outward covenant form and the spiritual truth represented by that form.

The outward form could be temporary. The spiritual reality to which it pointed is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

This is why fulfilment does not mean that God's people are left with less. The sacrifice gives way to the true sacrifice. The ceremonial washing gives way to true cleansing.

The Sabbath shadow gives way to true rest. The earthly priesthood gives way to the greater spiritual reality in Jesus Christ. The outward ordinance gives way to the spiritual reality it represented.

Therefore, when we say that an outward ordinance was given for an appointed time, we are not saying that the spiritual truth behind it became unimportant. We are saying that the truth has reached its greater fulfilment.

- The form may pass.

- The spiritual reality remains in Jesus Christ.

Five Questions We Must Ask

This gives us a simple method for examining every ordinance and outward religious practice found in Scripture. We should not begin by asking only: *"Was this practice ever commanded?"*

Many things were commanded by God under the former covenant. The more important question is: *"What place did that practice have within God's covenant purpose?"* Therefore, whenever we examine an outward practice, we should ask five questions.

To Whom Was This Practice Given?

We must first identify the people to whom the command was given. Was it given to:

- Natural Israel;
- The Levitical priesthood;
- People living under the Law of Moses;
- The disciples during the period of transition;
- The New Covenant Church.

This question is important because a command given to one people under one covenant cannot automatically be applied to everyone in every age.

Under Which Covenant Was It Given?

We must then ask: *"Under which covenant did this practice belong?"* The writer of Hebrews tells us that the first covenant had *"ordinances of divine service."* Therefore, the presence of an ordinance in Scripture does not by itself prove that it belongs to the New Covenant Church.

We must determine its covenant setting. Was it part of the first covenant or the New Covenant?

What Spiritual Reality Did It Represent?

An outward ordinance was not meaningless. God used visible things to teach spiritual truth. Therefore, we must ask: *"What was God showing through this outward action?"*

Did it represent:

- Cleansing;
- Sacrifice;
- Rest;
- Fellowship;
- Access to God;
- Holiness;
- Humility;
- Service.

The outward action must be understood according to the spiritual reality towards which it pointed.

Did Scripture Place an Appointed Limit Upon It?

We must also ask whether Scripture itself tells us how long the outward form was intended to continue. *"Did God give the practice permanently, or did Scripture place a limit upon its duration?"* This question is especially important in Hebrews chapter 9, where meats, drinks, divers washings and carnal ordinances were: *"imposed on them until the time of reformation."*

The word *"until"* establishes an appointed limit. If Scripture places a limit upon something, we must respect that limit.

Has the Reality Now Come in Jesus Christ?

Finally, we must ask the most important question: *"Has the spiritual reality to which the outward practice pointed now come in Jesus Christ?"* If an outward washing pointed towards cleansing, has true cleansing come? If an outward rest pointed towards spiritual rest, has true rest come?

If an outward sacrifice pointed towards the true sacrifice, has that sacrifice come? If an outward ordinance pointed towards a spiritual reality, does the believer now possess that reality in Jesus Christ? This is the question that brings every ordinance back to Jesus Christ.

These five questions will guide us throughout this entire module:

- To whom was this practice given?
- Under which covenant was it given?
- What spiritual reality did it represent?
- Did Scripture place an appointed limit upon it?
- Has the reality now come in Jesus Christ?

If we ask these questions carefully, we will not simply follow an outward practice because it appears somewhere in the Bible. We will understand why God gave it, where it belonged, what it represented, how long it was intended to remain, and where its fulfilment is found. That is the method we must now carry into our study of the word: Ordinance.

Greek Words Translated as Ordinance or Ordinances

The King James Version uses the English word ordinance or ordinances to translate different Greek words. These Greek words do not all have the same meaning. Therefore, we must not find the word ordinance in an English translation and immediately assume that the verse is referring to water baptism, communion or feet washing.

Each verse must be understood according to its own context. Three Greek words are particularly important to this study:

- DOGMA;
- DIKAIOMA;
- PARADOSIS.

DOGMA: Decrees and Regulations

The Greek word DOGMA refers to a decree, regulation or imposed requirement. Paul used this word when speaking about the Law of Moses and the commandments that separated Jew from Gentile.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:15**:

> *"Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;"*

The word translated *"ordinances"* in this verse is connected with commandments and regulations. Paul is not establishing Christian ceremonies. He is speaking about the former law of commandments contained in ordinances. Paul says that Jesus had *"abolished"* the enmity connected with that former order.

Paul also wrote in **Colossians 2:14**:

> *"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;"*

Again, the word does not refer to the establishment of water baptism, communion or feet washing. It refers to written decrees or regulations. Paul says that these were *"taken out of the way."*

DOGMA does not establish ceremonial ordinances for the New Covenant Church. It refers to decrees and imposed regulations.

DIKAIOMA: Righteous Requirements

Another Greek word translated ordinance is DIKAIOMA. This word can refer to a righteous requirement, or something required according to law. It is especially important in Hebrews 9, where it is used in connection with the outward order of the first covenant.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:10-12**:

> *"Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."*

Notice what is included:

- Meats;
- Drinks;
- Divers washings;
- Carnal ordinances.

These were outward requirements connected with the former covenant. The word carnal does not mean that these ordinances were sinful. It means that they belonged to the outward, physical order.

They involved things that could be eaten, drunk, washed, touched and physically performed. But the writer gives them an appointed limit: *"imposed on them until the time of reformation."*

That word *"until"* is extremely important. These ordinances were not intended to continue permanently. They belonged to an appointed period. Then the next verse gives the great turning point: *"But Christ being come..."*

The outward requirements pointed forward, and then Jesus Christ came. The figure gave way to the greater reality.

The writer of Hebrews expressed the same change in **Hebrews 10:9**:

> *"Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."*

The first order was not intended to continue beside the second. The writer says, *"He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."*

Therefore, where DIKAIOMA is used of the carnal ordinances in Hebrews, it refers to outward Old Covenant requirements that belonged to an appointed time. They were imposed until the greater reality came in Jesus Christ.

PARADOSIS: Instruction Handed Down

A third Greek word translated ordinances in the King James Version is PARADOSIS. This word has a different meaning. It refers to something handed down, delivered or passed on as instruction.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 11:2**:

> *"Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you."*

The word translated *"ordinances"* here is PARADOSIS. Paul is speaking about instruction that he had delivered to the believers. The emphasis is upon something that had been handed down or taught.

The word itself does not mean a ceremonial ordinance such as water baptism, communion, feet washing, sacrifice or ceremonial washing. This is important because someone may read the word ordinances in this verse and assume that Paul was commanding the Church to keep religious ceremonies.

PARADOSIS refers to instruction handed down or delivered. The surrounding context must determine what that instruction concerned.

The Context Must Determine the Meaning

We can therefore see why it is important to study the word ordinance carefully. The English word is used to translate different Greek words with different meanings.

- DOGMA refers to decrees or imposed regulations;
- DIKAIOMA, in the context of Hebrews 9, refers to outward requirements connected with the former covenant;
- PARADOSIS refers to instruction or teaching that has been handed down.

Therefore, simply finding the English word ordinance in the New Testament does not prove that water baptism, communion or feet washing were established as continuing New Covenant ceremonies. We must ask what Greek word is being used and, more importantly, what the verse is actually teaching. The context must determine the meaning.

The Physical Action Cannot Produce the Spiritual Reality

There is another principle we must understand before leaving this section. An outward ordinance can represent a spiritual truth, but the outward action cannot produce that spiritual reality.

- A ceremonial washing could wash the body, but water itself could not cleanse the conscience.
- An animal could be sacrificed, but the death of an animal could not place the life of Jesus Christ within the worshipper.
- A priest could enter a physical sanctuary, but his movement into that sanctuary could not produce the inward spiritual relationship that the believer now has in Christ.

The outward action could teach, represent, illustrate and point forward to the spiritual reality. However, it could not produce that reality. Only Jesus Christ can give the believer the spiritual life that the ordinance represented, and that life is received in full at the new birth.

The same principle will become important when we later examine water baptism, communion and feet washing.

- Water can touch the body, but water cannot give spiritual life.
- Bread and a cup can be physically received, but bread and a cup cannot create fellowship with Jesus Christ.
- Another person's feet can be washed, but the physical action cannot create humility, love or service within the heart.

The outward act may represent something spiritual, but only Jesus Christ can provide the spiritual reality.

Looking Beyond the Outward Form

The purpose of an ordinance cannot be understood by looking only at the outward action. We must look beyond the action and ask what God was showing through it.

If an outward washing represented cleansing, where is true cleansing found? If an outward rest represented something greater, where is true rest found? If an outward act represented fellowship, where is true fellowship found? If an outward act represented humility and service, where does that life come from?

- The outward form points beyond itself.

This is why we must understand the purpose of the former covenant correctly. God did not give the Law, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the washings and the ordinances as ends in themselves. They were part of an order that was leading His people towards something greater.

Paul uses another helpful picture to explain this. He says that the Law was like a schoolmaster.

A schoolmaster has an important purpose. He teaches, prepares and brings the learner towards an intended goal. But the schoolmaster is not the final destination. Paul tells us exactly where the Law was intended to bring God's people: *"Unto Christ."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the meaning of ordinance be determined from its Greek word and context?

Personal Reflection

What has the distinction between DOGMA, DIKAIOMA and PARADOSIS corrected or clarified in your understanding? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

How could you respond if someone used the English word ordinances alone to establish a ceremony for the Church? State one specific conclusion you need to correct or confirm in the Bible, and how it will affect your conduct.

THE LAW WAS A SCHOOLMASTER UNTIL CHRIST

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We have already seen that God promised a New Covenant. We have also seen that the outward ordinances of the former covenant were given by God for an appointed purpose.

Paul now helps us understand that purpose even more clearly. He describes the Law as a schoolmaster.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:23-25**:

> *"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."*

These verses give us another clear picture of the movement from the former covenant to Jesus Christ. Notice the progression. Paul first says, *"Before faith came..."* Then he says, *"The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ..."* Finally, he says *"But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."*

The Law had an important purpose. That purpose was to bring us unto Christ.

The Schoolmaster Had an Important Purpose

When Paul calls the Law a schoolmaster, he is not saying that the Law was wrong. A schoolmaster has a genuine purpose. He teaches, prepares and leads the learner towards an intended destination.

In the same way, the former covenant taught God's people through visible and physical things, including:

- Sacrifices;
- Priesthood;
- Tabernacle worship;
- Meats and drinks;

- Ceremonial washings;
- Appointed days;
- Outward ordinances.

These things taught important spiritual truths. They taught about sin, sacrifice, cleansing, holiness, access to God and rest.

The former covenant was therefore preparatory. It was preparing God's people for something greater.

To Bring Us Unto Christ

Paul tells us where the schoolmaster was leading: *"To bring us unto Christ."* That expression is extremely important. The Law was not the final destination. Neither were the sacrifices, priesthood, tabernacle, washings, appointed days or outward ordinances.

They were all part of the preparatory order, and that order was leading towards Jesus Christ. The sacrifice prepared the people to understand the true sacrifice. The priesthood prepared them to understand the greater Priest. The tabernacle prepared them to understand greater access to God.

The ceremonial washings prepared them to understand true cleansing. The Sabbath prepared them to understand true rest. The outward ordinances prepared them to understand greater spiritual realities.

The schoolmaster had a destination.

- That destination was Jesus Christ.

After That Faith Is Come

Paul then says: *"But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."* Notice the time language. There was a before, and there was an after. Before faith came, *"we were kept under the law."* After faith came, *"we are no longer under a schoolmaster."*

This confirms an important principle we have already established: God-given does not necessarily mean God-given for all time. The Law was given by God. The schoolmaster was necessary for its appointed purpose. But once that purpose had been fulfilled, Paul says, *"we are no longer under a schoolmaster."*

The Law did not fail because its role as schoolmaster came to an end. It fulfilled its purpose. It brought God's people unto Christ.

Therefore, when Jesus Christ has come and the purpose of the schoolmaster has been fulfilled, God's people are no longer under that former covenant order. This does not dishonour the Law, because it accomplished the purpose for which God gave it. The Law pointed forward to Jesus Christ, and in Him the promised spiritual reality has come.

From the Schoolmaster to the Shadow

Paul's picture of the schoolmaster prepares us for another biblical picture. The schoolmaster was leading God's people towards a destination, and that destination was Christ.

In the same way, the former covenant was looking forward towards something greater. The sacrifices, priesthood, tabernacle, washings, appointed days and ordinances all looked forward.

Scripture uses another expression to describe this forward-looking character of the former covenant. Paul calls these outward things *"a shadow of things to come."*

A schoolmaster prepares for the destination. A shadow points towards the reality. Both pictures teach the same fundamental truth: The former covenant was pointing forward towards Jesus Christ. We must therefore now consider the movement from the shadow to the reality.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Paul's picture of a schoolmaster explain both the purpose and the limit of the Law?

Personal Reflection

What does the movement from the schoolmaster to Christ help you understand about religious requirements? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

How could the Law's purpose of bringing people to Christ guide your own approach to Old Covenant commands? Examine where you have placed your confidence. What will you change to keep that confidence in Jesus Christ?

FROM THE SHADOW TO THE REALITY

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We have seen that God used outward ordinances to represent and point towards spiritual truth. We now need to understand an expression the Bible uses to describe many of those outward things. The Bible calls them a shadow.

This is one of the most important principles in our study of the ordinances. The Old Covenant contained many visible and physical things, including:

- Sacrifices;
- Priests;
- A tabernacle;
- Meats and drinks;
- Washings;
- Holy days;
- New moons;
- Sabbath days;
- Outward ordinances.

These things were real, and they were given by God. They were right for the purpose and time for which God appointed them. However, they were not the final reality. They were pointing beyond themselves towards something greater.

What Is a Shadow?

Think about an ordinary shadow. If someone is approaching from around a corner, you may see the person's shadow before you see the person. The shadow tells you that someone is coming and gives you an outline of the person who is approaching. But the shadow is not the person.

When the person finally comes around the corner and stands before you, your attention is no longer fixed upon the shadow. The shadow has served its purpose. It pointed forward to the person who was coming.

This helps us understand the biblical meaning of a shadow. A shadow has meaning because it is connected to a reality. But the shadow is not the reality.

- The shadow gives an outline, but the reality gives the substance.
- The shadow points forward, while the reality is what the shadow was pointing towards.

The Shadow Pointed Forward

Paul explains this principle very clearly in **Colossians 2:16-17**:

> *"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."*

Notice the things Paul mentions:

- Meat;
- Drink;
- Holy days;
- New moons;
- Sabbath days.

Paul does not say that these things had been meaningless. They had been given by God and had a purpose. But Paul tells us what kind of purpose they had. They were *"a shadow of things to come."*

Notice the direction. The shadow pointed forward. It pointed towards *"things to come."*

This is very important. A biblical shadow exists because the reality to which it points has not yet fully come into view. The shadow therefore looks ahead.

The meats, drinks, holy days, new moons and Sabbath days all pointed forward. Their purpose was not found finally in the outward things themselves. Their purpose was found in what they represented.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is the direction of a biblical shadow important when considering its fulfilment?

Personal Reflection

How does the illustration of a person's shadow help you understand the value and limits of outward forms? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

Is there an outward representation you have treated as though the reality were still absent? Explain what this means for your own trust in Christ. Identify one practice or belief you will test against the Bible, and explain what you are prepared to change.

The Body Is of Christ

Paul then makes the contrast very clear. He says that these outward things were *"a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."*

The word body gives the sense of the substance or reality in contrast with the shadow. The outward things were the shadow. Jesus Christ is the reality.

This distinction must remain clear throughout our study. The shadow was never intended to become more important than the reality. It did not exist for itself, but because it pointed towards Jesus Christ and what would be fulfilled in Him. Therefore, the shadow pointed forward, and Jesus Christ is the reality to which it pointed.

Once we understand this principle, we begin to see the former covenant differently. Instead of seeing the outward forms as ends in themselves, we see them as part of God's great picture pointing towards Jesus Christ.

The Law Had a Shadow

The writer of Hebrews uses the same expression. The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 10:1**:

> *"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect."*

Again, notice the words, *"a shadow of good things to come."* The Law contained the shadow, but it was not *"the very image of the things."*

The sacrifices were offered year after year, and the outward service continued. Yet the writer says that these things could never make the worshippers perfect.

This shows us the limitation of the shadow. It could point towards something greater, represent something greater and prepare the people for something greater. But it could not itself provide the full spiritual reality.

The Law therefore had *"a shadow of good things to come."* Those good things were still ahead. The Old Covenant was always moving towards fulfilment.

The Shadow Was Not the Final Condition

This helps us understand why the Old Covenant contained so many physical and visible things. God was teaching His people through the shadow.

The sacrifice gave an outward picture. The priesthood and the tabernacle gave outward pictures. The washings, appointed days and ordinances also gave outward pictures.

But God did not intend His people to remain permanently with the picture. The picture pointed towards the reality.

- The sacrifices were not intended to remain the final sacrifice.
- The earthly priesthood was not intended to remain the final priesthood.
- The earthly tabernacle was not intended to remain the final dwelling place.
- The ceremonial washings were not intended to remain the final cleansing.
- The Sabbath day was not intended to remain the final rest.
- The outward ordinances were not intended to remain the final spiritual reality.

They were shadows of something greater that was coming.

The Shadow Cannot Replace the Reality

There is an important danger if we do not understand this principle. We may give the shadow a place it was never intended to have.

Imagine again the person approaching around the corner. You first see the shadow, and then the person appears. It would make no sense to continue looking at the shadow as though the person had not arrived. Neither would it make sense to say: *"I have the person, but I still need the shadow to make the person's presence complete."*

The shadow cannot add anything to the person. Its purpose was to point towards the person until the person arrived.

The same principle applies spiritually. The Old Covenant shadow cannot add anything to Jesus Christ, for nothing is lacking in Him. The outward representation cannot make the reality more complete. Every born-again believer already possesses Jesus Christ, in whom the spiritual fulfilment is found.

This will become increasingly important as we later examine water baptism, communion and feet washing. If an outward ordinance is a representation of a spiritual truth, we must ask: *"Is the spiritual reality still coming?"* or *"has the reality already come in Jesus Christ?"*

The Direction of the Shadow Matters

This gives us an important principle to carry throughout this entire module:

- Biblical shadows point forward to the reality.

The sacrifice pointed forward because the true sacrifice was coming. The priesthood pointed forward because the greater High Priest was coming. The tabernacle pointed forward because a greater and more perfect reality was coming.

The ceremonial cleansing pointed forward because true cleansing was coming. The Sabbath pointed forward because true rest was coming. The shadow existed because something greater was still ahead.

Therefore, once the reality has come, we do not turn the shadow around and make it point backwards. The shadow fulfilled its appointed purpose by pointing forward to Jesus Christ. Its continued observance cannot be established simply by describing it as a representation of what Christ has already accomplished. Any claim that an outward practice remains a continuing New Covenant requirement must be established from Scripture.

This principle is especially important when we eventually consider the ordinances that Christians continue to practise. It is not enough to say: *"This outward action represents Jesus Christ."* We must ask: *"Was the outward action given to point forward to something that had not yet come?"* And then: *"Has that reality now come?"*

The Reality Is Greater Than the Shadow

The reality must always be greater than the shadow that represents it. The shadow could represent cleansing, but the reality must provide true cleansing. The shadow could represent rest, but the reality must provide true rest.

The shadow could represent access to God, but the reality must provide true access. The shadow could represent fellowship, but the reality must provide true fellowship. The shadow could represent humility and service, but the reality must provide the inward life from which humility and service flow.

Therefore, fulfilment does not move God's people from something greater to something less. It moves them from the shadow to the reality.

This raises an important question. If these outward forms were shadows, how long were they intended to remain?

The writer of Hebrews gives us a very clear answer. He says that the meats, drinks, washings and carnal ordinances were *"imposed on them until the time of reformation."* We must now consider the importance of that word: *"Until."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can the shadow add nothing to the spiritual reality already found in Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

What does receiving the greater reality mean to you when you think about cleansing, rest or fellowship? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

Choose one of these spiritual realities. How could looking to Christ rather than its outward picture guide you personally? Name one inherited expectation you will reconsider and explain how Christ's fulfilment changes your response.

IMPOSED UNTIL THE TIME OF REFORMATION

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have seen that the Old Covenant contained shadows that pointed forward towards something greater. The writer of Hebrews now helps us understand how long those outward forms were intended to continue.

He shows that they had:

- An appointed purpose;
- An appointed time;
- An appointed end.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:9-10**:

> *"Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation."*

There are several important statements in these verses. First, the writer says that the Old Covenant order was *"a figure for the time then present."* He then speaks of gifts, sacrifices, meats, drinks, divers washings and carnal ordinances. Finally, he tells us how long these outward things were imposed: *"until the time of reformation."* That word *"until"* is extremely important.

A Figure for the Time Then Present

The writer describes the Old Covenant system as *"a figure for the time then present."* A figure represents something beyond itself. The outward system had meaning because it was showing beforehand something greater that God would accomplish.

There were literal sacrifices, literal washings, literal meats and drinks, and outward ordinances. But these things were part of *"a figure."* They represented spiritual realities that had not yet been brought into their fullness.

The writer also tells us that the gifts and sacrifices *"could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience."* The outward service could be performed correctly. The sacrifice could be offered, the washing could take place, and the ordinance could be observed.

But the physical action could not produce perfection within the conscience. This again shows the difference between the outward representation and the inward reality. The figure could point forward, but it could not itself provide what only the reality could give.

Carnal Ordinances

The writer speaks of *"carnal ordinances."* As we have already seen, the word carnal does not mean that these ordinances were sinful. God had given them, and they were right for the covenant and time in which He appointed them.

They were carnal because they belonged to an outward and physical system. They involved things such as:

- Eating;
- Drinking;
- Washing;
- Sacrificing;
- Touching;
- Performing visible religious actions.

These things dealt with the outward order. But the New Covenant would bring something greater. The New Covenant would bring the inward spiritual reality.

This is why the writer makes such an important distinction between what could be performed outwardly and what could actually make the conscience perfect. The outward act could represent, but it could not produce the inward spiritual work.

The Importance of the Word "Until"

We now come to one of the most important words in this verse: *"Until."* The writer says that these outward ordinances were *"imposed on them until the time of reformation."* The word *"until"* establishes a limit. If something is imposed until an appointed time, it is not intended to continue indefinitely beyond that time.

For example, if someone is told to remain in a particular place until a certain event occurs, the instruction has a defined duration. The same principle applies here.

The meats, drinks, washings and carnal ordinances were imposed for an appointed period, not as permanent requirements for God's people. The word *"until"* establishes that their observance had a defined limit, and the following verse identifies the turning point: *"But Christ being come."* The outward order had served its appointed purpose because the greater reality had come in Jesus Christ.

They were moving towards a time when something would change. Therefore, we must not read the Old Covenant as though its outward forms were intended to continue forever.

Scripture itself tells us that they were imposed only *"until the time of reformation."* The answer is found immediately in the next verse.

The Verse Itself Gives the Answer

We do not need to look outside Hebrews 9 to discover when the time of reformation came. The writer continues directly into the next verse.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:11**:

> *"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;"*

The words *"But Christ being come"* are the turning point in the verse. The writer first describes the figure, the sacrifices, the meats and drinks, the washings, the carnal ordinances, and the appointed period expressed by the word *"until"*. Then he says: *"But Christ being come..."*

The answer is found in the words of **Hebrews 9:11**: *"But Christ being come."* The outward forms had been imposed for an appointed time, and Jesus Christ brought the greater spiritual

reality to which they pointed. Their purpose was fulfilled in Him, and the New Covenant established what those former ordinances could only represent.

Before examining that turning point in detail, we should hold firmly to what Hebrews 9 has already established:

- The Old Covenant system was a figure;
- Its outward service could not perfect the conscience;
- Its meats, drinks, washings and ordinances were physical;
- These ordinances were imposed for an appointed period;
- Scripture places a limit upon their duration;
- That limit is expressed by the word "until."

The question is now: *"What happened when the appointed time arrived?"* The writer answers with four powerful words: *"But Christ being come."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the words until the time of reformation and But Christ being come explain the duration of carnal ordinances?

Personal Reflection

What has the appointed limit in Hebrews 9 helped you reconsider about permanent religious requirements? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

How could **Hebrews 9:9-11** *guide your own response to a practice you have assumed must continue? State one specific conclusion you need to correct or confirm in the Bible, and how it will affect your conduct.*

SUMMARY: FROM THE SHADOW TO THE REALITY

BACK TO CONTENTS

This Study Guide has established the foundation we need before examining water baptism, communion and feet washing individually. We began with an important principle: We must begin with Jesus Christ.

The former covenant contained many outward forms, including sacrifices, priesthood, tabernacle worship, washings, appointed days and ordinances. These things were not wrong. They were given by God.

But they were not the final spiritual reality. They were preparing God's people for something greater.

The Former Covenant Pointed Forward

Jesus said that the Scriptures *"testify of me."* The Law, the prophets and the outward forms of the former covenant were all pointing towards Jesus Christ.

God also declared beforehand that the first covenant would not remain His final covenant order. He promised through Jeremiah *"I will make a new covenant."*

And He said that this New Covenant would be: *"Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers."*

- The New Covenant would bring the work of God inwardly, into the heart.

We also learned that the word ordinance must be understood according to its context. Not every use of the English word refers to a Christian ceremony.

Therefore, whenever we examine an outward practice, we must ask:

- To whom was it given?
- Under which covenant was it given?
- What spiritual reality did it represent?
- Did Scripture place an appointed limit upon it?
- Has the reality now come in Jesus Christ?

Paul gave us another important picture when he described the Law as a schoolmaster. Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:24-25**:

> *"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."*

The Law had an important purpose, but that purpose was: *"To bring us unto Christ."* The schoolmaster was not the destination. Jesus Christ was the destination.

Scripture also describes the outward things of the former covenant as *"a shadow of things to come."* The shadow had meaning because it pointed towards something real. But the shadow was not the reality.

The sacrifices, priesthood, tabernacle, washings, Sabbath and ordinances all pointed forward. The direction of the shadow was always towards Jesus Christ.

The Appointed Time Came

Finally, Hebrews tells us that the meats, drinks, divers washings and carnal ordinances were: *"imposed on them until the time of reformation."* That word *"until"* is important. The outward forms had:

- An appointed purpose;
- An appointed time;
- An appointed end.

The time of reformation was the appointed time when the figure would give way to the greater reality. Then Hebrews gives us the great turning point.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:11**:

> *"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;"*

Everything in this Study Guide has been moving towards those words: *"But Christ being come."* The former covenant prepared, the Law taught, and the ordinances represented. The shadows pointed forward to Jesus Christ, and their appointed purpose was fulfilled in Him.

The reality has come. Jesus Christ has fulfilled what the shadows represented, and every born-again believer now possesses His indwelling life. That is where the next Study Guide begins.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the covenant promise, the schoolmaster and the shadow together point to Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

Which of these connections has most clarified your understanding of outward ordinances? Explain. Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

What do you want to understand more clearly as you examine ordinances in the light of the reality already received in Christ? Examine where you have placed your confidence. What will you change to keep that confidence in Jesus Christ?

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

Why must the study of water baptism, communion and feet washing begin with what the believer has received in Jesus Christ? Explain how **Colossians 2:9-10** *establishes this foundation.*

2. Understanding

How do Jesus' words in **John 5:39** *and* **Luke 24:44** *help explain the purpose of an outward ordinance? Use one example to distinguish what the form represented from what Christ provides.*

3. Personal Reflection

God promised a covenant different from the one made with Israel's fathers, with His law written within His people. What has this corrected or strengthened in your own understanding of a relationship with God?

4. Response to Truth

The word ordinance can refer to decrees, lawful requirements or instruction handed down. How does this distinction challenge the way you have used an English Bible word to decide what you should practise?

5. Action Step

Consider an inherited practice such as water baptism, communion or feet washing. What would examining its covenant setting and fulfilment in Christ mean for your own beliefs? Explain what you want to consider more carefully.

6. Early Response

Have you already begun examining an inherited practice such as water baptism, communion or feet washing by its covenant setting and fulfilment in Christ? If yes, explain what you examined or now understand more clearly. If not, explain what you are still considering or what has made it difficult for you to begin.

7. Ongoing Practice

As you continue considering outward ordinances, how could the five questions about their recipients, covenant, meaning, duration and fulfilment guide your thinking? Explain one difficulty you may face when testing a familiar practice.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How do the Law as a schoolmaster in **Galatians 3:23-25** *and the shadow in* **Colossians 2:16-17** *explain the purpose and limit of the former covenant? Explain why its fulfilment does not mean that God gave something wrong.*

9. Living the Truth

Someone tells you that a God-given ceremony must remain necessary for all time. How could the words until the time of reformation and But Christ being come in Hebrews 9 guide a careful response?

10. Final Response

What has become clearer to you about moving from God-given outward shadows to the reality found in Jesus Christ? Bring together the promise of the New Covenant and the believer's completeness in Him, and explain what still needs your consideration.