COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 71

Ordinances Fulfilled in Jesus Christ

STUDY GUIDE 4 OF 12:

Why God Permitted The Transition

An overview of why people needed time after fulfilment.



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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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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Website: cogma.com.au

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PREFACE

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The outward forms, figures and ordinances of the former covenant were given by God for an appointed purpose. They taught important spiritual truths and pointed forward to the greater reality that would come through Jesus Christ. Their fulfilment did not make their original purpose meaningless, but established that the spiritual reality to which they pointed had arrived.

Three truths must continue to govern everything that follows:

- Jesus Christ has come;
- Salvation is complete in Him;
- The born-again believer is complete in Him.

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 believer is therefore not waiting for an outward ordinance to complete something Jesus Christ left unfinished. Neither is the believer waiting for a future physical return of Christ before the spiritual reality can finally arrive. Jesus Christ has come to His people as Spirit and now dwells within those who are born again.

This raises the central question of our study: If the New Covenant had already been established and the spiritual reality had already come in Jesus Christ, why did practices associated with the former covenant remain visible for a period?

The answer is fundamental: the transition was not taking place in Jesus Christ, salvation or truth. It was taking place in people. God's work was complete, while human understanding and conduct still had to come into agreement with what He had accomplished.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why could a transition remain in people after Christ's work was already complete?

Personal Reflection

What does the difference between completed truth and growing human understanding help you recognise? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

Is there something about Christ's completed work that you need to understand more clearly rather than treat as unfinished? Explain. Identify one conviction or attitude that this teaching challenges. What specific response will you make?

INTRODUCTION: WHY GOD PERMITTED THE TRANSITION

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The former covenant had shaped Jewish life for generations. The Law, Temple, priesthood, sacrifices, circumcision and outward ordinances belonged to an order genuinely given by God.

Faithful Israelites had therefore been right to obey what God required while that covenant stood.

When Jesus Christ fulfilled that order, Jewish believers were not being asked to abandon something that had always been false. They had to understand that what God had once commanded for an appointed purpose had now reached its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

The truth itself did not need time to change. Jesus Christ had come, the New Covenant had been established, and eternal redemption had been obtained. What required time was the understanding of people whose religious lives had been formed within the former order.

Jesus demonstrated this principle with His own disciples. His work had already reached fulfilment, but their understanding still had to be opened so that they could recognise what God had accomplished.

Luke recorded the words of Jesus in **Luke 24:44-45**:

> *"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. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,"*

Notice the order. Fulfilment came first, and understanding followed. The disciples did not make Jesus Christ the fulfilment by understanding Him correctly. Their understanding had to come into agreement with what God had already accomplished.

This distinction is central to understanding why God permitted the transition. A sincere believer could continue a former religious practice while still learning the implications of fulfilment. That continued practice could reveal where the person stood in the transition, but it could not make Christ's work incomplete or restore permanent covenant authority to something Jesus Christ had already fulfilled.

This becomes especially important when we later examine communion, feet washing and water baptism. We cannot assume that an outward action became a permanent New Covenant requirement simply because believers continued to perform it after Pentecost.

The historical presence of an action must therefore be distinguished from its permanent authority. We must ask what Jesus Christ had already fulfilled, why the action continued, what the people involved understood, and whether Scripture establishes the practice as continuing New Covenant truth.

The central question is therefore this: Why did God permit people to pass through a period of transition when the spiritual reality had already come in Jesus Christ? The answer begins with the people themselves and with the understanding that had been formed under the former covenant.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does **Luke 24:44-45** *show that fulfilment came before the disciples fully understood it?*

Personal Reflection

How does this help you reconsider the assumption that continued practice proves continuing authority? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

When reading about an outward ordinance after Pentecost, what could help you distinguish historical occurrence from a lasting command? Choose one familiar claim, check the surrounding verses, and state what you will change if your earlier understanding was mistaken.

GOD WAS DEALING WITH PEOPLE

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God was dealing with people whose understanding still had to come into agreement with what Jesus Christ had already accomplished. Scripture establishes that the former covenant had reached its appointed fulfilment, Jesus Christ had come, and the born-again believer's completeness was found in Him.

The question is therefore not whether the spiritual reality had arrived. The question is why people needed time to understand what had already happened.

Their Lives Had Been Formed Under the Former Covenant

The Jewish people had lived under the Law for generations. Its influence extended through family life, worship, national identity and their understanding of obedience to God.

Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 6:6-9**:

> *"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."*

The former covenant was woven into everyday life. The Temple, priesthood, sacrifices, circumcision, feast days, washings and outward ordinances had been associated with obedience to God for generations.

Fulfilment Came Before Understanding

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When Jesus Christ fulfilled that order, the people were therefore not simply changing a few ceremonies. They had to reconsider an entire religious framework through which they had understood worship, obedience and covenant life.

The difficulty was not that God was uncertain about what should happen after Jesus Christ came. Neither was the work of Christ incomplete or waiting for human understanding before it could become effective.

The New Covenant did not gradually become true as people understood it. The difficulty was in human understanding.

People who had associated outward practices with obedience now had to understand what those practices had been pointing towards. They also had to understand what their fulfilment in Jesus Christ meant for the way they worshipped and lived.

As **Luke 24:44-45** has already shown, Jesus Christ had fulfilled what was written before the disciples fully understood it. The fulfilment came first, and their understanding followed.

This gives us an important principle: A work of God can be complete before people fully understand all of its implications. God's truth did not change, but the people had to grow in their understanding of what He had already accomplished.

Their understanding did not create fulfilment. It brought their minds into agreement with the fulfilment that was already true in Jesus Christ.

This helps explain why an outward structure can change quickly, while understanding formed over many years may take much longer to change. A building may cease to be used, a ceremony may stop, or an outward religious system may pass away, yet the ideas, expectations and associations formed through that system can remain deeply established within people.

This was especially significant for people who had been taught the former covenant from childhood and had associated its practices with obedience to God. God was therefore dealing not only with outward practices, but with people whose thinking, habits and religious understanding had been formed through generations. Their conduct had to change as their understanding came into agreement with what Jesus Christ had already fulfilled.

The former covenant had shaped how Jewish people understood worship, righteousness, cleansing, obedience and access to God. Their thinking had been formed within that outward covenant order for generations.

They now had to move:

- From the outward form to the fulfilment;
- From the shadow to the reality;
- From confidence in the former order to confidence in Jesus Christ.

The transition could therefore take time without suggesting that Christ's work itself took time. Christ was already the reality, while the people were learning what that reality meant.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did people formed under the former covenant need time to understand what Christ had fulfilled?

Personal Reflection

What does this help you recognise about how deeply religious habits can shape your own understanding?

Action Step

How could testing a long-held religious expectation by God's Word guide your own trust rather than relying on familiarity? What assumption will you examine, and how will your response change if it does not agree with the Bible?

Former Practices Had Reached Their Appointed Purpose

This change was difficult because many former covenant practices had genuinely been commanded by God. The question was not whether God had once commanded sacrifices, washings, circumcision or appointed days, because He had.

The question was whether those practices had now reached the purpose for which He gave them. Something that had once been right to practise could reach its appointed fulfilment when the greater reality came.

This helps explain why God's patience was necessary. People had to understand that a former act of obedience could reach the end of the purpose for which God had appointed it.

Because understanding did not change instantly, former practices could remain visible after fulfilment. The Temple could stand, priests could minister, Jewish families could circumcise their children, and customs connected with the Law could continue.

However, continued visibility did not mean continued covenant authority. Something could remain historically present after its appointed spiritual purpose had already been fulfilled.

This distinction becomes especially important in Acts. The presence of an action in the historical record does not, by itself, establish that God intended it to remain permanently binding.

If a believer continued a former practice, that action may tell us something about the person's background or understanding at that point in the transition. It may show that the person was still learning the full implications of what Jesus Christ had accomplished.

What that action could not do was reverse divine fulfilment. Human conduct could not restore the first covenant, make eternal redemption partial, make salvation incomplete or turn a fulfilled reality back into something still future.

Therefore, human conduct cannot reverse divine fulfilment. What people did must be interpreted in the light of what Jesus Christ had already accomplished.

The Transition Was in People

We can now state the central truth plainly: The transition was not taking place in Jesus Christ. It was taking place in people.

Christ did not become more complete as people understood more, and the New Covenant did not gradually gain authority as the Temple system weakened. What God had accomplished was already true.

People had to bring their understanding and conduct into agreement with that truth. The transition therefore concerned human understanding rather than the completeness of Jesus Christ.

Why This Matters to the Ordinances

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This principle is essential when we later examine communion, feet washing and water baptism. If an outward practice continued during the transition, its continued performance does not, by itself, prove that God intended it to remain a permanent New Covenant ordinance.

We must ask what Jesus Christ had already fulfilled, why the action continued and whether Scripture establishes the practice as continuing after fulfilment. Historical continuation must always be interpreted in the light of completed spiritual reality.

The central point is therefore clear: God permitted the transition because He was patiently dealing with people whose understanding had been formed within the former covenant order. The reality had already come in Jesus Christ, while the people had to learn to live in agreement with it. This brings us naturally to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can human conduct not reverse what Jesus Christ has already fulfilled?

Personal Reflection

What does the difference between a practice remaining visible and retaining covenant authority clarify for you? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

How could this distinction guide your own conclusion about an outward practice recorded during the transition? Examine where you have placed your confidence. What will you change to keep that confidence in Jesus Christ?

THE POWER OF GENERATIONAL RELIGIOUS FORMATION

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Why can a religious practice become so deeply established that sincere people continue to regard it as necessary even when Scripture reveals something greater?

One reason is the power of generational religious formation. What is repeatedly taught and practised can eventually feel inseparable from faithfulness to God.

A religious practice may be followed sincerely by one generation and then passed to the next. Children grow up seeing it performed, congregations hear it taught, and over time what is familiar can begin to feel necessary.

The understanding can gradually move from *"Christians have done this"* to *"Christians must do this."* Those are not the same statement.

Repetition can establish familiarity, but it cannot create divine authority. A practice must still receive its authority from the Word of God.

Jesus Confronted the Authority of Religious Tradition

Jesus dealt directly with inherited religious practices being treated as though they possessed divine authority. The practices He confronted had been passed down and had become deeply connected with accepted religious behaviour.

Mark wrote in **Mark 7:1-5**:

> *"Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?"*

Notice the expressions *"the tradition of the elders"* and *"which they have received to hold."* These practices had been handed down, and repetition had given them the appearance of necessity.

What had been received from earlier generations could therefore begin to carry more authority than Scripture gave it. Familiarity made the practice feel settled even when its authority still needed to be tested.

Jesus then identified the real problem. The issue was not simply that the traditions were old.

Jesus said in **Mark 7:7-8**:

> *"Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do."*

The problem was that human tradition had been elevated until it was being taught *"for doctrines."* A human practice had been given authority that belonged to the Word of God.

Therefore, a religious practice must never become binding simply because generations have preserved it. It must still be tested by Scripture.

A practice can become so familiar that questioning it feels almost like questioning God. This can happen when an outward action has been closely connected with worship and obedience for many years.

Someone who has always associated water baptism with conversion may assume that conversion is incomplete without it. Someone raised receiving bread and a cup may assume that Christian fellowship requires the ceremony, while someone taught feet washing from childhood may regard it as an essential mark of obedience.

Those associations may be sincere and deeply rooted, but they do not answer the doctrinal question. The question must remain: Does Scripture establish the practice as part of the permanent New Covenant order?

Paul himself had been deeply shaped by inherited religious understanding. As **Galatians 1:13-14** shows, he had been *"more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers."*

His convictions were powerful and sincere, yet the strength of those convictions did not make his earlier understanding correct. His life demonstrates an important warning: Strong conviction is not the same as Scriptural correctness.

We will return to Paul's zeal more fully later when considering sincerity and religious confidence. For now, his example shows that inherited conviction must still remain subject to Scripture.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What did Jesus identify as wrong when human traditions were taught as doctrine?

Personal Reflection

Have you found it difficult to distinguish a familiar religious custom from God's command? Explain.

Action Step

How could you test an inherited practice by God's Word while showing respect for those who taught it to you? Identify one practice or belief you will test against the Bible, and explain what you are prepared to change.

The Correct Standard Is Scripture

Luke gives us the proper pattern in the Bereans. They were willing to hear what Paul taught, but they still tested what they heard by the Scriptures.

Luke wrote in **Acts 17:10-11**:

> *"And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."*

The Bereans *"searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."* Their respect for the messenger did not remove the need to test the message.

That must remain our standard. A minister, church, previous generation or long-standing practice cannot possess authority above Scripture.

Something is not wrong simply because it has been handed down. Truth can also be faithfully transmitted from generation to generation.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 3:14-15**:

> *"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."*

Timothy had received teaching from others, but the determining standard was *"the holy scriptures."* Therefore, the issue is not simply whether something has been inherited.

The question is whether what has been inherited agrees with Scripture. If it does, it should be retained. If it does not, age and familiarity cannot make it binding.

The Former Covenant Requires an Important Distinction

At this point, an important distinction must be made. The sanctuary, priesthood, sacrifices and ordinances of the former covenant were not human traditions like those Jesus confronted in Mark 7.

They had genuinely been given by God. **Hebrews 9:1** describes the first covenant as having *"ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary."*

The important point here is that Jewish believers were not simply being asked to reject customs that had never possessed divine authority.

They had to understand that something genuinely commanded by God could still have an appointed purpose and an appointed duration. That made the transition more difficult.

Why This Matters to the Ordinances

The same principles must be applied when we later examine communion, feet washing and water baptism. The fact that Christians have practised something for centuries cannot establish permanent New Covenant authority.

We must still ask:

- What does Scripture require?
- What did the outward action represent?
- In what covenant or transitional setting did it occur?
- Has the spiritual reality already come in Jesus Christ?
- Does Scripture establish the outward practice as permanently binding?

Historical continuity may explain why a practice feels necessary, but it cannot make the practice necessary if Scripture does not establish it. We can therefore state the principle clearly: A religious practice can become deeply established through generational repetition, but repetition does not create divine authority. Every inherited practice must remain subject to Scripture and to the New Covenant reality revealed in Jesus Christ.

However, the former covenant presents an even greater question because many of its practices were not human inventions. They had genuinely been commanded by God. That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the example of the Bereans show the right standard for testing inherited teaching?

Personal Reflection

What does their willingness to hear and examine the Bible help you recognise about your own approach?

Action Step

Choose a belief about ordinances that you have inherited. What do you want to examine in the Bible before accepting or rejecting it? Name one choice in your own life that should change because of this truth, and explain why.

GOD-GIVEN DOES NOT MEAN GOD-GIVEN FOR ALL TIME

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The previous section established that the former covenant order genuinely came from God. Its sanctuary, priesthood, sacrifices, washings and ordinances were not human inventions, and Israel was right to obey them while that covenant stood.

This raises an important question: Does the fact that God gave something mean that He intended it to continue forever? Scripture answers no. A God-given practice may have genuine authority, a real purpose and an appointed duration.

Divine origin does not automatically mean permanent duration. The same God who gives a practice also determines its purpose and how long it is to remain.

The Law Had an Appointed Purpose

Paul gives one of the clearest examples when he describes the Law as a schoolmaster. His words show both the purpose of the Law and the point at which that purpose had been reached.

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."*

Notice the progression. Paul speaks of *"before faith came"* and then *"after that faith is come."* He also explains the purpose of the Law when he says that it was *"our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ."*

The Law had a genuine role, but it was not the final destination. Once its appointed purpose had been reached, Paul could say, *"we are no longer under a schoolmaster."*

The same principle also applies to the outward forms of the former covenant. The sacrifices taught concerning sacrifice, the priesthood concerning access to God, the sanctuary concerning God's dwelling, and the washings concerning cleansing.

These things pointed beyond themselves towards something greater. They were leading to Jesus Christ.

This is important to the ordinance question. If an outward practice was given to direct people towards Christ, we must not automatically make that practice the permanent destination after Christ has come.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the schoolmaster and the word until show that divine appointment does not require permanent duration?

Personal Reflection

What has this clarified about a practice once being right without being required for all time? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

What does the appointed purpose of a former command mean for your own belief that it must always apply? State one specific conclusion you need to correct or confirm in the Bible, and how it will affect your conduct.

"Until" Establishes an Appointed Limit

Hebrews makes the appointed duration of former covenant ordinances even clearer. The writer not only describes their purpose but also gives a limit to how long they were imposed.

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."*

One word is especially important: *"until."* The outward ordinances were *"imposed on them until the time of reformation."*

The word until establishes an appointed limit. The practices had real authority, but Scripture itself tells us that they were not intended to continue unchanged forever.

The writer of Hebrews immediately tells us what came after that appointed period. He moves from the former outward order to the greater reality found in Jesus Christ.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:11-12**:

> *"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."*

The sequence is clear. The former ordinances were imposed *"until the time of reformation,"* and then comes the turning point: *"But Christ being come."*

The former order pointed forward, while Jesus Christ brought the greater reality. He was not another addition to the former system but the fulfilment towards which it had been pointing.

This contrast becomes even clearer when Hebrews describes what Jesus Christ accomplished. The writer speaks of *"a greater and more perfect tabernacle"* and declares that Jesus Christ had *"obtained eternal redemption for us."*

The former covenant could represent redemption, sacrifice, cleansing and access to God. Jesus Christ brought the spiritual reality to which those outward forms had pointed.

Therefore, an outward representation cannot be made necessary to complete what has already been obtained in Him. The representation must remain beneath the reality.

The expression *"eternal redemption"* confirms that this was a completed spiritual work. The writer does not say that Jesus Christ obtained part of redemption and left another part to be supplied by ceremony.

He says that Jesus Christ had *"obtained eternal redemption for us."* Therefore, no outward ordinance can be made a missing portion of redemption.

Water cannot complete redemption, bread and a cup cannot complete redemption, and feet washing cannot add something spiritually necessary to the redemption already obtained in Jesus Christ. The completeness of Christ's work must govern every ordinance question.

The Priesthood Itself Was Changed

The writer of Hebrews gives another clear example of something genuinely appointed by God that later changed. The Levitical priesthood had divine authority, yet Scripture shows that its appointed role was not permanent.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 7:11-12**:

> *"If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, for under it the people received the law, what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law."*

The Levitical priesthood had genuinely been appointed by God, yet Scripture says *"the priesthood being changed."* Something can therefore genuinely come from God and still belong to an order that God later brings to fulfilment.

Divine appointment does not require permanent duration. The purpose of the priesthood had to be understood in the light of the greater Priest who had come.

These changes do not mean that God made a mistake. When Scripture speaks of a changed priesthood, the end of the schoolmaster's role or a time of reformation, the former order had accomplished the purpose for which God gave it.

A mistake requires correction, but a shadow requires fulfilment. Those are very different things.

Fulfilment does not dishonour what God formerly commanded. It reveals why He commanded it and where His purpose was leading.

The First Was Taken Away to Establish the Second

Hebrews makes the covenant change even clearer. The first covenant was not preserved beside the second with equal authority.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 10:8-10**:

> *"Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."*

Notice the words *"He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."* There was a definite movement from one covenant order to another.

The first had served its appointed purpose, and the second was established through Jesus Christ. New Covenant doctrine therefore cannot be formed by carrying former outward requirements forward without asking whether they belonged to the covenant Scripture says was taken away.

The same verses say that we are sanctified *"through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* The language again describes completeness.

The former sacrifices were repeated because they were figures. Jesus Christ accomplished the reality *"once for all."*

His work is not partial or waiting for an ordinance to complete it. An outward practice cannot add another necessary part to what Jesus Christ accomplished once for all.

A Jewish believer could correctly say that God had commanded the priesthood, sacrifices, washings and ordinances. Those statements were true within the covenant in which God gave them.

However, faithfulness could not mean using those former commands to resist what God had fulfilled in Jesus Christ. If the sanctuary pointed beyond itself, faithfulness meant receiving the greater reality, and if the priesthood pointed beyond itself, faithfulness meant recognising the greater Priest.

We honour what God formerly commanded by following its purpose to Jesus Christ. True faithfulness follows God's purpose forward rather than preserving the figure as though the fulfilment had never come.

Something may begin as obedience because God commands it. But when God brings the purpose of that command to fulfilment, insisting upon the former form as though fulfilment had never come can resist God's purpose.

The question therefore cannot stop with whether God once commanded something. We must also ask whether God has now fulfilled the purpose for which He gave it.

This distinction becomes especially important when we examine Christian ordinances. Every claim of command must be understood together with covenant setting, appointed purpose and fulfilment.

Why This Matters to the Ordinances

When someone says of communion, feet washing or water baptism, *"This was commanded,"* that statement must be examined carefully. It is important, but it does not settle the question.

We must also ask:

- When was it commanded?;
- To whom was it commanded?;
- Under what covenant setting?;
- For what purpose was it given?;
- What spiritual reality did it represent?;
- Has that reality now come in Jesus Christ?;
- Does Scripture establish the outward action as permanently binding after fulfilment?

Without these questions, a representation can be treated as permanently necessary even after the reality has come. The shadow can then be given an authority Scripture places in the fulfilment.

A Former Command Cannot Complete Christ

Paul says that believers are *"complete in him."* Hebrews says that Jesus Christ obtained *"eternal redemption"* and that His offering was *"once for all."*

These truths must govern every ordinance question. We cannot say that Christ plus a shadow equals completeness because that would make Jesus Christ insufficient by Himself.

If the believer is complete in Christ, the shadow cannot make that completeness more complete. If redemption is eternal, an ordinance cannot supply another portion of redemption.

This does not make obedience unimportant. It means that obedience must never be defined in a way that makes Jesus Christ insufficient.

We can therefore state the truth clearly: Something may genuinely be given by God and still have an appointed duration. The Law was a schoolmaster to bring people to Christ, the ordinances were imposed until the time of reformation, the priesthood was changed, and the first covenant was taken away so that the second could be established. Divine origin does not mean permanent duration.

This brings us back to the central question of the transition. If the former order had already reached fulfilment in Jesus Christ, did the people immediately understand everything that had changed? The answer is no. That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the changed priesthood and the taking away of the first covenant explain fulfilment?

Personal Reflection

What does this help you understand about honouring former commands by recognising their purpose in Christ? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

How could you keep obedience important without treating a fulfilled ceremony as necessary to complete Christ's work? Examine where you have placed your confidence. What will you change to keep that confidence in Jesus Christ?

FULFILMENT CAME BEFORE UNDERSTANDING

We have established that the former covenant genuinely came from God, but that it also had an appointed purpose and an appointed end. This brings us back to the central question of the transition: if the change had already taken place in Jesus Christ, why did people continue for a time to think and act according to the former order?

The answer is fundamental: Fulfilment came before understanding. What God had accomplished was already true before people fully understood all that had changed.

Jesus Christ Had Already Fulfilled What Was Written

After His resurrection, Jesus spoke directly to His disciples concerning fulfilment. His words show that the fulfilment had already taken place before their understanding was complete.

Luke recorded the words of Jesus in **Luke 24:44-45**:

> *"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. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,"*

Notice the order. Jesus first spoke of what had to be fulfilled, and then Luke says that He *"opened their understanding."*

The disciples did not make Jesus Christ the fulfilment by understanding Him correctly. He was already the fulfilment, and their understanding had to come into agreement with what God had already accomplished.

The New Covenant did not become true gradually as the apostles learned more. Jesus Christ did not become the fulfilment little by little, and the former covenant did not remain equally binding until every believer finally understood what had changed.

What God had accomplished in Jesus Christ was already true. The difficulty was not in the truth; the difficulty was in human understanding.

People may misunderstand a completed work, but their misunderstanding cannot make that work incomplete. In the same way, continued human conduct cannot restore covenant authority to something Jesus Christ has already fulfilled.

This gives us an important principle: Understanding enables people to recognise fulfilment; it does not create fulfilment. Incomplete human understanding must therefore never become evidence that Christ's work was incomplete.

Neither can a continuing outward practice prove that the spiritual reality represented by that practice had not yet arrived. The reality rests upon what Jesus Christ accomplished, not upon how quickly people understood every consequence of His work.

The disciples in Luke 24 were genuine followers of Jesus Christ. They had heard His teaching, witnessed His works and walked with Him, yet even they still needed their understanding opened.

This shows that a believer may genuinely belong to Christ while still needing further understanding concerning what He has fulfilled. That principle becomes especially important

in Acts because Jewish believers could sincerely continue former practices while still learning the full implications of the New Covenant.

That continued practice did not necessarily prove rebellion, but neither did it make the practice permanently binding. It showed that understanding and conduct were still being brought into agreement with the reality already established in Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did the disciples' need for understanding not make Christ's fulfilment incomplete?

Personal Reflection

What does the order in Luke 24 help you see about truth being established before you understand it fully? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

How could you respond when the Bible challenges an understanding you have held for a long time? Identify one conviction or attitude that this teaching challenges. What specific response will you make?

Covenant Reality Changed Before Conduct Fully Changed

The New Covenant had already been established, yet people's habits and conduct did not necessarily change at exactly the same moment. The covenant reality had changed before all human conduct had fully changed.

This does not mean that God maintained two equally valid covenant systems. It means that people were learning to live consistently with the one New Covenant reality already established in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, when Acts records believers continuing practices connected with the former order, those actions must be understood within the transition. Historical conduct cannot be allowed to redefine the covenant reality already established in Christ.

For generations, Jewish people had understood worship through an outward covenant structure that included the Temple, priesthood, sacrifices, circumcision, washings, feast days and ordinances. That framework had shaped their understanding of obedience, cleansing, worship and covenant life.

Jesus Christ did not simply add Himself to that framework as another part of it. He fulfilled it.

The people therefore had to learn to interpret the former order through Jesus Christ rather than interpret Jesus Christ through the former order. Sacrifice, cleansing, worship, covenant identity and the ordinances all had to be understood through the reality that had come in Him.

This explains why former practices could remain visible after fulfilment. The Temple could still stand, priests could still minister, and Jewish customs could still continue for a time.

However, continued visibility did not prove continuing covenant authority. Something could remain historically present even after its appointed spiritual purpose had reached fulfilment.

The statement *"it still happened"* therefore does not answer the question *"was it still permanently required?"* Those are different questions and must not be confused.

Human Conduct Must Not Interpret Christ's Work

This is one of the most important principles in this Study Guide: Christ's completed work must interpret transitional human conduct. Transitional human conduct must not be allowed to redefine Christ's completed work.

If Jesus Christ had already fulfilled the shadow, continued practice could not undo that fulfilment. If eternal redemption had already been obtained, human conduct could not make redemption partial again.

This principle must govern our later examination of the ordinances. What believers did during the transition must be interpreted in the light of what Jesus Christ had already accomplished.

The transition was not a period in which salvation itself was gradually becoming complete. Jesus Christ had already accomplished the work, and the believer's completeness was already found in Him.

Therefore, the transition was not partial salvation becoming complete. It was complete salvation becoming more fully understood.

This distinction is important to the ordinance question. An outward action cannot be assigned the task of completing a salvation already complete in Jesus Christ.

The spiritual reality was not still waiting for another future event. Jesus Christ had come to His people as Spirit and now dwells within those who are born again.

The believer has the Person, not only an outward representation of Him. Therefore, the shadows cannot be preserved on the basis that the reality to which they point is still future.

The reality has come in Jesus Christ. The continued presence of a shadow cannot make that reality absent again.

If a believer did not yet understand the full implications of fulfilment, that ignorance did not create another valid covenant position. God could patiently deal with people whose understanding was still developing without declaring their earlier understanding to be permanent New Covenant truth.

This distinction between patience and authority is essential. God's patience with incomplete understanding does not give permanent authority to everything people continued to practise during that period.

Understanding Had to Produce a Response

God's patience was not intended to leave people permanently within their former understanding. As truth became clear, people had to respond by faith, repentance where necessary, and by bringing their conduct into agreement with New Covenant truth.

The purpose of understanding was movement towards Jesus Christ. God was bringing people into agreement with the reality already established in Him.

Understanding therefore carried responsibility. As people recognised fulfilment, their confidence and conduct had to change accordingly.

The direction of the transition remained clear:

- From the Law to Christ;
- From representation to reality;
- From outward confidence to confidence in Jesus Christ.

God was not bringing people from Christ back to the Law or from the reality back to the shadow. The direction was always forward towards Jesus Christ and the reality found in Him.

This direction becomes an important test when examining outward ordinances. We must not interpret a transitional practice in a way that reverses the movement God Himself established.

Why This Matters to the Ordinances

When we later encounter communion, feet washing or water baptism during the transition, we cannot reason that because believers performed the action, it must therefore be the permanent New Covenant order. Historical performance establishes that the action occurred, but it does not by itself establish permanent authority. We must ask what Jesus Christ had already fulfilled, what the people understood at that time, whether the action belonged to an earlier covenant framework, and whether Scripture establishes the practice as continuing after fulfilment.

This will be particularly important when we examine water baptism in Acts. Its historical presence must be acknowledged honestly, while its permanent New Covenant authority must still be established from Scripture.

We can therefore state the truth clearly: The work of Jesus Christ was complete before human understanding was complete. The covenant reality had already changed, but people still had to understand what God had accomplished and bring their conduct into agreement with it.

This explains how a transition could exist without making Christ's work partial or unfinished. It also leads naturally to the next question: if sincere people could continue former practices while their understanding developed, does sincerity make those practices permanently correct? That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must Christ's completed work guide the interpretation of transitional conduct in Acts?

Personal Reflection

What does the difference between recognising fulfilment and creating it clarify for you? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

How could completed fulfilment guide your own response to a practice in Acts without making salvation depend on developing human understanding? Name one inherited expectation you will reconsider and explain how Christ's fulfilment changes your response.

SINCERITY AND RELIGIOUS ZEAL DO NOT DETERMINE PRESENT TRUTH

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The previous section established that fulfilment came before understanding. Sincere believers could therefore continue practices associated with an earlier religious framework while still learning the full implications of what Jesus Christ had accomplished.

This raises another important question: Does sincerity make a religious practice correct or permanently binding? Scripture answers no. Sincerity may be genuine, but it does not determine whether a belief or practice agrees with the Word of God.

Israel Had Zeal, but Not According to Knowledge

Paul addressed this distinction directly. He did not deny Israel's zeal, but he showed that zeal alone could not establish truth.

Paul wrote in **Romans 10:1-4**:

> *"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."*

Paul said plainly that *"they have a zeal of God,"* but immediately added *"but not according to knowledge."* A person can therefore be sincere and still misunderstand what God has revealed.

Zeal may explain why someone holds a belief, but it cannot determine whether that belief agrees with Scripture. The final test must remain the Word of God.

Sincerity tells us something about the person, but it does not determine whether the doctrine itself is true. A believer may sincerely think that God requires a particular ceremony, and a congregation may sincerely preserve a practice followed for generations.

Those people should not automatically be regarded as rebellious or dishonest. However, sincerity cannot transform misunderstanding into truth.

This is especially important when we later examine communion, feet washing and water baptism. Sincere practice does not, by itself, establish permanent New Covenant authority.

Paul says that Israel was *"ignorant of God's righteousness."* Their ignorance did not create another valid way of righteousness.

Instead, Paul directs them to Jesus Christ when he says, *"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."* There was not one righteousness for those who understood fulfilment and another for those who remained attached to the former order.

There was one righteousness, and it was found in Jesus Christ. This has a direct bearing upon the ordinances: If righteousness is already found in Christ, an outward ordinance cannot supply another portion of righteousness that is missing from Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What do Israel's zeal and Paul's former life show about sincerity and biblical truth?

Personal Reflection

How does Paul's change of confidence challenge or strengthen your own understanding of righteousness?

Action Step

Is there a sincere conviction about religious performance you need to test again by God's Word? Explain. What assumption will you examine, and how will your response change if it does not agree with the Bible?

Zeal Must Be Directed Towards Jesus Christ

Israel's problem was not insufficient zeal because they already had zeal. The problem was misplaced confidence.

Therefore, the answer was not a more earnest performance of the former order. The answer was Jesus Christ.

This gives us an important principle: The answer to an outward shadow is not a better performance of the shadow. The answer is the reality found in Jesus Christ.

When confidence shifts from Christ to an outward action, the action has been given a place that belongs to the Person. The outward act must never become the object of spiritual confidence.

Paul understood this personally because his own earlier life had been marked by intense religious zeal. His conviction was strong, but the strength of that conviction did not make his understanding correct.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 1:13-14**:

> *"For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers."*

Paul had been *"more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers."* Yet his zeal had led him to persecute the Church of God.

His experience gives us a serious warning: Strong conviction is not the same as Scriptural correctness. Every belief must still be tested by the Word of God.

Paul Had to Move His Confidence

Paul later described the change that took place when his understanding came into agreement with Jesus Christ. He looked back upon the things that had once given him confidence and saw that his spiritual standing had to be found somewhere else.

Paul wrote in **Philippians 3:4-9**:

> *"Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:"*

Paul had circumcision, natural Israelite identity, Pharisaic standing, zeal and outward righteousness according to the Law. Yet he said that the things which had once been gain to him were counted loss for Christ.

His confidence had moved. What had once defined his religious standing no longer occupied that place.

Paul expresses the heart of that change in the words *"be found in him."* He no longer wanted his standing before God to rest in circumcision, natural descent or religious performance.

His righteousness was to be found in Jesus Christ. This is the direction of the New Covenant: from confidence in outward performance to confidence in the Person.

That movement is directly relevant to the ordinances. If an outward act becomes something upon which a believer relies for righteousness, salvation or completeness, that act has begun to occupy a place Scripture gives to Jesus Christ.

A person may say that he has been water baptised, another that he receives communion, and another that he practises feet washing. Those statements may describe sincere religious practice, but they do not answer the deeper question of where righteousness, salvation and completeness are found.

If confidence begins to rest in the ordinance, the outward act has been given a place Scripture assigns to Jesus Christ. This is why every ordinance must be examined by what Scripture actually says it accomplishes.

Sincerity cannot give an outward act spiritual authority that Scripture does not give it. The authority must come from the Word of God.

Paul did not teach that Christ plus circumcision equals righteousness. In the same way, we cannot assume that Christ plus water baptism, communion or feet washing supplies another portion of righteousness.

Our righteousness is found in Jesus Christ. It is not divided between the Person and the ceremony. Any doctrine that makes the ceremony necessary to complete righteousness gives the outward act too great a place.

This does not make obedience unimportant. It means that obedience must never be defined in a way that makes Jesus Christ insufficient.

Widespread Practice Does Not Establish Scriptural Authority

A practice does not become Scriptural because many churches observe it. Widespread acceptance may explain why a belief feels established, but it cannot give that belief divine authority.

The final standard remains Scripture. This is important because the ordinances have been practised widely throughout Christian history.

Their widespread use cannot remove the need to determine what Scripture actually establishes. Majority agreement cannot replace Scriptural authority.

Faithful believers may have practised something for generations, but history does not settle New Covenant authority. Long practice may explain why a tradition is deeply rooted, but it cannot make an outward action permanently binding.

We must still ask what Scripture establishes for the believer who is already complete in Jesus Christ. Time cannot turn human assumption into divine command.

Every practice must therefore remain subject to Scripture. History may explain a practice, but Scripture must establish its authority.

We Must Examine What We Have Inherited

This principle applies to us as surely as it applied to first-century believers. We also receive religious teaching and practices from previous generations, and familiar forms can become deeply connected with our understanding of worship.

Everything we inherit must therefore remain subject to Scripture, including practices we deeply respect. Respect for previous generations must never become a reason to place inherited practice above the Word of God.

The question is not simply how long Christians have done something. The question is whether Scripture establishes it as permanent New Covenant truth.

Sincerity Should Produce Humility

Recognising that sincere people can misunderstand truth should make us humble rather than harsh. If a believer practises an ordinance because that is what he or she has sincerely been taught, the issue may be understanding rather than rebellion.

At the same time, humility towards people must not prevent faithfulness to Scripture. If Scripture establishes that an outward form has reached fulfilment, sincerity cannot make that form permanently binding.

We should therefore deal patiently with people while remaining firm concerning the authority of Scripture. Humility towards people and faithfulness to truth belong together.

When truth becomes clear, it requires a response. Paul said that Israel had *"not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."*

Understanding therefore carries responsibility. When Scripture reveals fulfilment, we must receive the fulfilment. When Scripture reveals the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, we must not continue placing spiritual confidence in what represented Him.

Truth is not given only to increase knowledge. It must bring our confidence and conduct into agreement with Jesus Christ.

Why This Matters to the Ordinances

When we later examine communion, feet washing and water baptism, we must not ask only whether sincere Christians practise these things. We must ask whether Scripture establishes each outward action as a continuing New Covenant requirement after the spiritual reality has come in Jesus Christ.

Likewise, sincere actions recorded during the transition do not automatically establish permanence. The sincerity of the people involved cannot replace the need to determine what Scripture establishes as permanent New Covenant truth.

We can respect sincere believers while still keeping the Word of God as the final authority. That balance is essential to a careful examination of the ordinances.

We can therefore state the truth clearly: Sincerity deserves respect, but sincerity does not determine present truth. Religious zeal may be genuine, but the final authority remains the Word of God. Our confidence, righteousness and completeness must remain in Jesus Christ.

This leads naturally to the next question. If sincere people needed time to understand what Jesus Christ had fulfilled, how should we understand God's patience during that period? That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must respect for sincere believers be joined with faithfulness to the Bible?

Personal Reflection

What does recognising the possibility of sincere misunderstanding help you see about your own attitude to others?

Action Step

How could you show patience in your own conversation of an inherited ordinance while testing its authority by God's Word? Examine where you have placed your confidence. What will you change to keep that confidence in Jesus Christ?

GOD'S PATIENCE WAS MERCY, NOT UNCERTAINTY

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We have established that Jesus Christ had already brought the greater reality, while human understanding still had to come into agreement with what God had accomplished. This raises another important question: Why did God permit time for that understanding to develop?

The answer is found in His mercy, patience and longsuffering. God was dealing patiently with people whose understanding still had to come into agreement with the truth already established in Jesus Christ.

God's Patience Did Not Mean Uncertainty

God was not uncertain about what Jesus Christ had accomplished. He was not deciding whether the former covenant should continue or waiting to see whether the New Covenant would succeed.

The truth had already been established in Jesus Christ. Human understanding needed time, but salvation and fulfilment did not.

God's patience with people who continued former practices must therefore not be interpreted as permanent approval of those practices. His patience was directed towards people whose understanding was still developing.

Paul explains that God desires people to come to the knowledge of the truth. His words show that truth can already be established while people still need to understand it.

Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 2:3-4**:

> *"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."*

People had to *"come unto the knowledge of the truth."* The truth already existed, but people still had to come to understand it.

This was the situation during the transition. Jesus Christ had fulfilled what the former order represented, while people still needed to recognise that fulfilment and bring their understanding into agreement with it.

Paul also explains that God's patience has a purpose. His goodness, forbearance and longsuffering were intended to lead people towards repentance and truth.

Paul wrote in **Romans 2:4**:

> *"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"*

God's patience was therefore not permission to remain indefinitely within an earlier understanding. Patience does not preserve error. It gives people opportunity to respond to truth.

God's patience had both mercy and direction. He gave people opportunity to understand what He had already accomplished and to bring their lives into agreement with it.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do **1 Timothy 2:3-4** *and* **Romans 2:4** *explain the purpose of God's patience?*

Personal Reflection

What does patience directed towards understanding and response mean to you personally?

Action Step

As you begin to understand God's truth more clearly, what does His patience mean for your own response? Explain what you are considering. Identify one conviction or attitude that this teaching challenges. What specific response will you make?

Ignorance Did Not Change What Christ Had Fulfilled

Peter gives us a clear example of how God dealt with people whose understanding was incomplete. He acknowledged their ignorance without allowing that ignorance to change what God had already fulfilled.

Peter said in **Acts 3:17-19**:

> *"And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;"*

Peter acknowledged their ignorance, but he also declared that Christ *"hath so fulfilled"* what God had spoken. He then called the people to repentance and response.

The pattern is clear:

- Ignorance was recognised;
- Fulfilment was already accomplished;
- A response was required.

God dealt patiently with people, but He did not alter the truth to accommodate their incomplete understanding. Their ignorance explained their condition, but it did not change fulfilment.

This distinction is essential when we read Acts. A believer may continue an inherited practice while understanding is still developing.

That practice may show where the person stood in the transition, but it cannot by itself establish permanent New Covenant doctrine. *"God allowed it"* is not the same as *"God established it permanently."*

This principle will be essential when we later examine outward practices recorded during the transition. Divine patience towards people must not be confused with permanent authority for every action they continued to perform.

God Gave Opportunity to Respond

God's patience gave people opportunity to hear the Gospel, understand the Scriptures, recognise Jesus Christ as the fulfilment and respond accordingly. His patience was therefore active and purposeful rather than directionless.

The transition can be understood through four connected ideas:

- Mercy;
- Opportunity;
- Understanding;
- Response.

Mercy gave people opportunity, and opportunity allowed truth to be heard. Truth brought understanding, while understanding required a response.

God was not preserving the former order indefinitely. He was patiently bringing people beyond it into the reality found in Jesus Christ.

The Gospel Came to the Jew First

God's patience can also be seen in the order in which the Gospel was proclaimed. Those who had received the former revelation were among the first to hear that its fulfilment had come.

Paul wrote in **Romans 1:16**:

> *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."*

The Gospel came *"to the Jew first."* This did not establish a different way of salvation for Jewish people.

They had received the former revelation that pointed towards Jesus Christ and were therefore among the first to hear that its fulfilment had come. Their former privilege explained the order of proclamation, but it did not create another Gospel.

Paul explains further why the Jewish people occupied this place in the transition. They had been entrusted with God's revelation and had received the Law, the prophets and the promises that pointed forward to Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 3:1-2**:

> *"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God."*

The Jewish people had received *"the oracles of God."* This helps explain God's patient dealings with them because their lives had been formed by revelation God Himself had given.

They were not being called to despise what God had formerly revealed. They were being called to understand that its fulfilment had come and to recognise the One to whom that revelation had always pointed.

Jesus made clear where the former revelation was leading. The Scriptures themselves testified of Him and therefore directed people beyond the written figures and promises towards the Person in whom they were fulfilled.

Jesus said in **John 5:39-40**:

> *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."*

The Scriptures testified of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the former revelation was not the final destination because its purpose was to lead people to the Person in whom its promises, figures and shadows found fulfilment.

Jewish believers were not being asked to reject the Scriptures they had received. They were being called to follow those Scriptures to Jesus Christ.

One Gospel for Both Jew and Gentile

The Gospel began among those who had received the former revelation, but God's purpose did not remain confined there. Jesus had already established that the witness would move outward beyond Jerusalem and natural Israel.

Jesus said in **Acts 1:8**:

> *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

The direction was clear. The Gospel would begin in Jerusalem and move outward towards *"the uttermost part of the earth."*

God's patience with Jewish people did not mean that He was preserving the former covenant indefinitely. He was bringing people forward into the reality found in Jesus Christ. The Gospel's movement to the Gentiles further demonstrates that God's purpose was not confined to natural Israel.

God's patience was not creating a permanent transitional condition in which the former covenant continued beside the New Covenant with equal authority. The movement remained towards Jesus Christ.

The Jew needed Jesus Christ, and the Gentile needed Jesus Christ. There was one Gospel centred in Him.

God's patience was moving both Jew and Gentile towards the one spiritual reality found in Jesus Christ.

Mercy Did Not Preserve Two Covenants

God's mercy towards those who had not yet understood fulfilment did not restore the former covenant to continuing authority. Patience towards people did not create another valid way of righteousness.

Paul wrote in **Romans 10:3-4**:

> *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."*

Ignorance did not create another valid righteousness. There was one righteousness, and it was found in Jesus Christ.

God could deal patiently with people whose understanding had not yet come into agreement with that truth without preserving the former covenant as another continuing way of righteousness. Patience towards people did not reverse fulfilment.

God was not waiting for Jesus Christ to finish His work. Salvation was already complete, and the believer's completeness was already found in Him.

Therefore, the transition was in human understanding, not in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. God's patience gave people time to understand and respond to what Christ had already accomplished.

This distinction is important to the ordinance question. If salvation was already complete in Jesus Christ, an outward ordinance cannot be made necessary to complete what He had already completed.

The Temple could remain standing, priests could continue to minister, and Jewish customs could remain visible after Jesus Christ had fulfilled the former order. This outward continuation helps us understand why the transition could remain visible for a period.

However, visibility did not equal continuing covenant authority. The fact that something remained outwardly present did not mean that its former covenant purpose remained spiritually necessary.

The people had to learn to distinguish between what was still historically visible and what Jesus Christ had already fulfilled. Historical presence could continue after spiritual purpose had reached completion.

God's Patience Had a Direction

God's patience was not passive. It had a purpose and a destination because He was bringing people from the former order towards Jesus Christ.

He was moving them from confidence in outward forms towards confidence in the Person, and from what had pointed forward towards the reality that had now come. The purpose of patience was therefore movement rather than preservation.

God was not patiently maintaining the former order as a permanent companion to Jesus Christ. He was giving people opportunity to understand why that order had existed and where it had been leading.

God's patience did not preserve former shadows as permanent requirements. A practice could remain visible while people were still learning what Jesus Christ had fulfilled, but that continued visibility did not give the practice independent authority to continue forever.

The patience of God must therefore never be used to make the shadow permanent. Mercy towards developing understanding did not change the purpose or fulfilment of the outward form.

This distinction must remain firm. God's patience concerned the people who were learning, not the permanence of the shadow they were leaving behind.

Why This Matters to the Ordinances

This principle prepares us for the later examination of communion, feet washing and water baptism. If an outward practice remained visible during the transition, its continued presence must be understood in the light of what Jesus Christ had already fulfilled.

However, actions recorded during the transition must be examined carefully. The fact that an action is recorded in the book of Acts does not automatically establish it as a permanent New Covenant practice.

The spiritual reality was already complete in Jesus Christ, while people still needed time to understand and respond to what God had accomplished.

We can therefore state the truth clearly: God's patience during the transition was mercy towards people, not uncertainty about His truth. Jesus Christ had already come, the New Covenant had already been established, and salvation was complete. God permitted time because people whose lives had been formed under the former covenant needed to understand and respond to what He had already accomplished.

His patience had a clear direction. God was bringing people from the former order towards the completed reality found in Jesus Christ.

The truth was not changing. The people were being brought into agreement with the truth. That brings us to the next major section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did God's mercy towards Jewish people not preserve two equally valid ways of righteousness?

Personal Reflection

What does the one Gospel for Jew and Gentile help you recognise about God's purpose? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

How could you show patience towards someone learning about fulfilment while still directing confidence to Jesus Christ? Name one choice in your own life that should change because of this truth, and explain why.

THE TRANSITION HAD A DIRECTION

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God's patience during the transition was not without purpose. He was not allowing two covenant systems to continue beside one another while people chose whichever they preferred. The New Covenant had already been established in Jesus Christ, and God's patient dealings were bringing people into agreement with that completed reality.

Therefore, the transition had a clear direction. It moved from the former order towards Jesus Christ, because He was the fulfilment to which that former order had pointed.

From the Shadow to the Reality

The former covenant contained figures, shadows, sacrifices, washings, ordinances and an earthly sanctuary. These things served the purpose for which God gave them, but they were never intended to become the final spiritual destination of His people.

When Jesus Christ came, the direction did not reverse. God did not bring people to Christ and then send them back to the shadows so that those shadows could complete what they had received in Him.

The movement remained:

- From the shadow to the reality;
- From the figure to the fulfilment;
- From outward confidence to confidence in Jesus Christ;

- From the former covenant order to the New Covenant reality.

This direction is essential to understanding the ordinances. If an outward practice belonged to the movement towards Christ, we must be careful not to make that practice permanently necessary after Christ has come.

From Outward Confidence to Jesus Christ

The transition also involved a change in where people placed their confidence. Under the former covenant, the Temple, priesthood, sacrifices, circumcision and other covenant signs had occupied an important place in Israel's religious life.

The Gospel, however, directed people to Jesus Christ Himself. Righteousness, salvation, redemption, spiritual life and completeness were found in Him.

God's purpose was therefore greater than persuading people to stop certain ceremonies. He was bringing their confidence away from the outward order and placing it in Jesus Christ.

The true movement was from confidence in the outward act to confidence in the Person. The goal was not to replace one outward dependence with another, but to bring people into the reality already found in Christ.

Salvation was not gradually becoming complete during the transition. Jesus Christ had already obtained eternal redemption, the believer was already complete in Him, and He had come to dwell within His people as Spirit.

The transition was therefore not partial salvation becoming complete. It was complete salvation becoming more fully understood.

This distinction is important to the ordinance question. If salvation was already complete in Christ, an outward act cannot later be assigned the task of supplying something spiritually missing.

God's patience did not preserve the former covenant as another continuing path beside Jesus Christ. There was not one way of righteousness for Jewish believers and another for Gentiles.

The Jew needed Jesus Christ, and the Gentile needed Jesus Christ. The former revelation had pointed towards Him, and the Gospel proclaimed that its fulfilment had arrived.

The transition therefore had one destination: Jesus Christ. God's patience was bringing people into one spiritual reality rather than maintaining separate covenant paths.

We Must Not Reverse the Direction

This gives us an important safeguard when examining the ordinances. If the former order moved from outward representation towards spiritual reality, we should not take the spiritual reality and make it dependent again upon outward representation.

If cleansing has come in Christ, physical water cannot be made necessary to complete spiritual cleansing. If fellowship is found in Christ, bread and a cup cannot be made necessary to create that fellowship. If humility and service flow from the life of Christ within, an outward washing cannot be made the source of those qualities.

The question is not whether an outward action can illustrate truth. The deeper question is whether the believer who possesses the reality must remain dependent upon the representation.

God was bringing people away from confidence in the former covenant order and towards the reality found in Jesus Christ. He was not preserving the shadows as the final order.

He was bringing people beyond those shadows into what they had anticipated. The purpose of patience was movement, and that movement was always towards the reality found in Christ.

Why This Matters to the Ordinances

When we later encounter water baptism, communion or feet washing in the New Testament, we must ask where each practice stands within this movement. Does the action point towards a spiritual reality that has now come, and is it being performed during the transition?

We must also ask whether later New Covenant teaching directs us towards the outward action itself or towards the reality found in Jesus Christ. These questions are necessary because an action performed during a transition can belong to the journey without being the destination.

The fact that people continued an outward practice does not prove that God's purpose was to preserve it permanently. Throughout the transition, the direction remained the same: towards Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What was the direction of the transition from former covenant forms to Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

What does moving confidence from the outward act to the Person clarify in your own understanding?

Action Step

How could this direction guide you when an outward practice is presented as supplying something missing from Christ? State one specific conclusion you need to correct or confirm in the Bible, and how it will affect your conduct.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE ORDINANCES

We have established why God permitted the transition. Jesus Christ had brought the greater reality, while people whose lives had been formed under the former covenant needed time for their understanding and conduct to come into agreement with what God had accomplished.

This truth must now be carried forward into every later study concerning the ordinances. The starting point must always be Jesus Christ and the completed spiritual reality found in Him.

We Must Begin With What Christ Accomplished

The correct starting point is not the outward ceremony. The correct starting point is what Scripture has already established concerning Jesus Christ and the born-again believer.

Scripture establishes these foundational truths:

- Jesus Christ has come;
- Salvation is complete in Him;
- The believer is complete in Him;
- Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit;
- The believer has the Person.

Every later claim made for an outward ordinance must agree with those truths. An interpretation of water baptism, communion or feet washing cannot be accepted if it makes Jesus Christ insufficient or makes the born-again believer spiritually incomplete without the ceremony.

"Ye Are Complete in Him"

Paul states the believer's spiritual position plainly. His words must remain central whenever an outward ordinance is examined.

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:"*

Paul does not say that the believer will become complete after an outward ceremony has been performed. He says plainly, *"Ye are complete in him."*

That statement must govern every later ordinance question. Whatever purpose an outward action may have served, it cannot be given a spiritual function that makes Jesus Christ insufficient or the believer incomplete without it.

If Jesus Christ has already provided complete salvation, an outward action cannot supply another necessary portion of salvation. If the believer is already complete in Him, an ordinance cannot make that completeness more complete.

This does not mean that obedience is unimportant. It means that obedience must never be defined in a way that makes Jesus Christ insufficient.

The outward act must remain beneath the spiritual reality. The representation cannot supply something spiritually missing from the Person in whom the believer is already complete.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the believer's completeness in Christ govern every claim made for an ordinance?

Personal Reflection

What does eternal redemption already obtained help you understand about your own confidence before God?

Action Step

How could you respond to a claim that a ceremony provides a missing part of salvation while keeping obedience important in your own life? Examine where you have placed your confidence. What will you change to keep that confidence in Jesus Christ?

Salvation Is Not Partial

The writer of Hebrews describes redemption as already obtained. His words show that redemption is not waiting for an outward action to finish it.

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

> *"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."*

Jesus Christ had *"obtained eternal redemption for us."* Redemption is therefore not divided between what Jesus Christ accomplished and something the believer must later perform.

An outward ordinance cannot become a missing portion of a redemption Scripture calls *"eternal."* The transition was not a period during which salvation itself was gradually becoming complete.

Salvation was complete while human understanding was still developing. The people needed time to understand the completed work, but the work itself did not need time to become complete.

Neither is the believer waiting for a future physical return of Jesus Christ before the spiritual reality can finally arrive. Jesus Christ has come to His people as Spirit and now dwells within those who are born again.

The reality is present because the Person is present. Therefore, an outward shadow cannot remain spiritually necessary on the basis that the reality to which it pointed is still future.

The Person has come, and the believer possesses the reality in Him. The shadow must therefore remain beneath the fulfilment to which it pointed.

Jesus Christ Is The Fulness Of God

This brings us to another foundational truth that must govern everything we later say concerning ordinances. The One who has come to dwell within the born-again believer is not one part of God, nor does the believer receive only a portion of the divine reality. Jesus Christ is the fulness of God revealed bodily.

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 how these two statements belong together. First, *“In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”* Then, *“Ye are complete in him.”*

All the fulness is in Jesus Christ, and the believer is complete in Him. Therefore, Jesus Christ cannot be treated as though He supplies only part of what the believer needs while an outward ordinance supplies another necessary spiritual part.

Paul also shows that the Spirit who dwells within the believer is the Spirit of Christ. 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."*

Paul first says *"the Spirit of God,"* and then, in the same verse, *"the Spirit of Christ."* He is not describing two different Spirits. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ.

Paul makes the truth even more direct in **2 Corinthians 3:17**:

"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

The statement is plain: *"The Lord is that Spirit."* Therefore, when the born-again believer receives the Holy Ghost, the believer is not receiving something separate from Jesus Christ. The believer receives the Person.

This truth is fundamental to our understanding of fulfilment. Under the former covenant, outward things could point towards Jesus Christ and represent spiritual realities that were still to come.

But in the New Covenant, the believer possesses more than a representation of Christ. Jesus Christ Himself dwells within.

The shadow pointed towards the Person. The New Covenant gives us the Person.

If all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Jesus Christ, nothing spiritual is absent from Him. Therefore, whenever an outward ordinance is said to supply something spiritually necessary, we must ask: What can an ordinance add to Jesus Christ?

If water baptism is said to supply something spiritually missing, then something must have been lacking in Christ before the water. If bread and a cup are said to supply a spiritual fellowship not already possessed in Christ, then the believer's fellowship with Christ was incomplete before the ceremony. If feet washing is said to supply humility, cleansing or the servant life that Christ within cannot supply, then the ordinance has been given a place greater than the Person. But Scripture says *"In him dwelleth all the fulness,"* and *"Ye are complete in him."*

The Person Is Greater Than the Ordinance

This gives us an important principle that must remain with us throughout the remainder of this module. The Person is greater than the ordinance.

An ordinance may represent. An outward action may illustrate. A physical sign may point towards a spiritual truth. But none of these things can contain more spiritual reality than Jesus Christ Himself.

The born-again believer possesses the Person in whom all the fulness of God dwells. Therefore, no outward ordinance can supply a missing portion of God, a missing portion of salvation or a missing portion of spiritual life.

Jesus Christ is the fulness of God revealed bodily. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ, and the Lord is that Spirit. Therefore, when Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, the believer possesses the Person in whom all the fulness dwells. No outward ordinance can supply a spiritual reality that is absent from Christ, because nothing is absent from Him.

This truth must govern every ordinance we examine. If the believer has Jesus Christ, the believer has the reality.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the fulness of God in Christ and the identity of His Spirit explain why the Person is greater than an ordinance?

Personal Reflection

What has this clarified about receiving Christ rather than a portion of spiritual life? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

Is there anything you have expected a ceremony to supply that is already found in Christ? Explain what this means for your own trust in Him. Identify one practice or belief you will test against the Bible, and explain what you are prepared to change.

THE PERSON IS GREATER THAN THE REPRESENTATION

BACK TO CONTENTS

Outward actions may represent important spiritual truths. Water may represent cleansing, bread and a cup may represent fellowship and spiritual nourishment, and feet washing may represent humility and service.

However, the born-again believer has Jesus Christ Himself. The representation must never become greater than the Person it represents.

Jesus Christ is not one part of the believer's spiritual life. In Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and He dwells within His people as Spirit.

Therefore, an outward representation cannot supply something spiritually lacking in Jesus Christ. The representation must remain beneath the reality already found in Him.

An outward ordinance can easily become a test by which people decide whether someone truly belongs to God. Questions can begin to centre upon whether a person has been water baptised, receives communion or practises feet washing.

The New Covenant directs us first to the inward work of God. Has the person been born again? Does Jesus Christ dwell within, and does that person possess the Spirit of Christ?

An outward ceremony cannot place Jesus Christ within a person. Therefore, outward performance must never be given a place greater than the inward work of God.

The New Birth Comes Before Outward Practice

Jesus made clear that spiritual life comes through the work of God. The new birth is not created by ceremony.

Jesus said 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."*

A ceremony can be performed upon someone who has never been born again, while a born-again believer possesses spiritual life because God has made that person alive. Therefore, outward action and inward spiritual reality must not be confused.

An ordinance cannot create what only God can accomplish. The new birth must remain the spiritual reality by which a person receives life.

The Transition Prepares Us to Read Acts Carefully

The book of Acts records believers living during the transition examined in this Study Guide. Their understanding and conduct were still being brought into agreement with what Jesus Christ had already fulfilled.

Actions recorded during that period must be understood within their historical and covenant setting. We must distinguish between what Acts records and what Scripture establishes as permanent New Covenant practice.

One governing principle remains essential: Christ's completed work must interpret transitional human conduct. Transitional human conduct must never redefine Christ's completed work.

The born-again believer has Jesus Christ within. The believer does not possess only an outward symbol pointing towards Him.

The believer has the Person. Therefore, an outward ordinance cannot add Jesus Christ to the believer, make His indwelling more complete or supply a missing portion of spiritual life.

Whatever place an outward action may have held historically, it cannot improve upon the spiritual reality already found in Jesus Christ. The representation cannot add to the Person.

When communion, feet washing and water baptism are examined individually, each practice must be considered from the same foundation. We must ask what the outward action represented, what Jesus Christ has already fulfilled, and whether Scripture establishes the outward practice as a continuing New Covenant requirement after the reality has come.

Each ordinance must be examined according to the spiritual reality already established in Jesus Christ.

The reality already found in Jesus Christ cannot be made dependent upon the representation. Every outward practice must be examined beneath that controlling truth.

The continued visibility of outward practices during the transition cannot be used to make Jesus Christ incomplete. If salvation was already complete, continued practice could not make salvation partial.

If eternal redemption had already been obtained, continued ceremony could not make redemption incomplete again. If the believer was already complete in Christ, transitional conduct could not establish that another spiritual part was still missing.

Human understanding may have been developing, but Jesus Christ was not developing. His work was already complete.

The Central Ordinance Principle

We can therefore state the governing principle of the remaining ordinance studies. An outward ordinance cannot be made necessary to produce, complete or supply a spiritual reality that Scripture says God has already accomplished in the born-again believer through Jesus Christ.

Every later ordinance study must remain anchored to the foundation already established:

- Jesus Christ has come;
- Salvation is complete;
- The believer is complete in Him;
- Jesus Christ dwells within His people as Spirit;
- The believer has the Person.

These truths must remain greater than every outward representation. No interpretation of an ordinance can be allowed to make Jesus Christ insufficient or the born-again believer spiritually incomplete.

The transition explains why outward practices could remain visible while people were still learning the implications of what Jesus Christ had accomplished. It does not make the reality incomplete.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can an outward ceremony neither create the new birth nor complete Christ's indwelling presence?

Personal Reflection

What does this help you reconsider about using ceremonies as tests of belonging to God? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

How could the inward work of God guide your own decision about a recorded practice in Acts without making that practice a source of spiritual life? Name one inherited expectation you will reconsider and explain how Christ's fulfilment changes your response.

CONCLUSION - THE TRUTH WAS COMPLETE; PEOPLE HAD TO UNDERSTAND IT

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We began this Study Guide with one central question: Why did God permit a period of transition after Jesus Christ had already fulfilled the former covenant order? The answer is clear. God was dealing patiently with people whose lives and understanding had been formed under that former order. Jesus Christ had not left something unfinished; people had to understand what He had already accomplished.

Jesus Christ had come, the former order had reached its appointed fulfilment, and eternal redemption had been obtained. The believer's completeness was already found in Him.

The transition therefore did not take place in Jesus Christ. It took place in people whose understanding and conduct had to come into agreement with the reality already established in Him.

Christ did not become more complete as people understood more, and salvation did not become more complete as former practices disappeared. The spiritual reality was already complete.

Fulfilment Came Before Understanding

Jesus demonstrated this principle with His own disciples. His work had reached fulfilment, but they still needed their understanding opened so that they could recognise what God had accomplished.

Luke recorded the words of Jesus in **Luke 24:44-45**:

> *"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. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,"*

The order is important. Fulfilment came first, and understanding followed.
The disciples did not make Jesus Christ the fulfilment by understanding Him correctly. He was already the fulfilment, and their understanding had to come into agreement with what God had already accomplished. That principle explains the transition.

Continued Practice Does Not Prove Continuing Authority

Because people were still learning, former practices could remain visible for a time. Outward actions connected with the former order could continue even after their appointed purpose had reached fulfilment.
However, historical continuation and permanent New Covenant authority are not the same thing. What people continued to do must be interpreted in the light of what Jesus Christ had already fulfilled.
The continuation of a practice establishes that it occurred. It does not, by itself, establish that God intended the practice to remain permanently binding.
God's patience was mercy towards people whose understanding still had to change. It was not uncertainty about His truth or evidence that the former covenant still possessed equal authority.
He gave people opportunity to hear, understand and respond to what He had already accomplished. His patience therefore had purpose and direction.
God was not preserving the shadows as permanent requirements. He was bringing people beyond them into the reality found in Jesus Christ.
Sincerity and religious zeal may be genuine, but they cannot determine doctrine. A believer may sincerely practise an ordinance and desire to obey God, but sincerity cannot establish permanent New Covenant authority.
The final authority remains Scripture. Every outward practice must therefore be examined according to what God has revealed rather than according to its age, familiarity or the sincerity of those who practise it.
This allows us to respect sincere believers while remaining firm concerning truth. Sincerity may explain why a person follows a practice, but it cannot give that practice divine authority.

Christ's Work Must Remain the Standard

When we examine communion, feet washing and water baptism, we must begin with what Jesus Christ has already accomplished. Transitional conduct must not become the standard by which His completed work is judged.
If He fulfilled the shadow, continued practice cannot undo that fulfilment. If He obtained eternal redemption, ceremony cannot make redemption incomplete again.
If the believer is complete in Him, an outward ordinance cannot finish something Christ left unfinished. Therefore, Christ's completed work must interpret transitional conduct. Transitional conduct must never redefine Christ's completed work.

The Central Ordinance Principle

The governing principle for the remaining ordinance studies is clear. An outward ordinance cannot be made necessary to produce, complete or supply a spiritual reality that Scripture says God has already accomplished in the born-again believer through Jesus Christ.

We therefore examine every ordinance from the foundation already established:

- Jesus Christ has come;
- Salvation is complete;
- The believer is complete in Him;
- Jesus Christ dwells within His people as Spirit;
- The believer has the Person.

These truths must remain the controlling foundation of every later ordinance study. No interpretation of an outward practice can be allowed to make Jesus Christ insufficient or the born-again believer spiritually incomplete.

The Central Truth of This Study

We can therefore state the central truth of this Study Guide simply: God permitted the transition because people needed time to understand and respond to what He had already accomplished in Jesus Christ. The truth was complete; the people had to understand it.

The book of Acts records believers living during that transition. It records the work of God, apostolic preaching, human conduct, developing understanding, controversy and correction.

Therefore, the actions recorded in Acts must be understood according to their historical and covenant setting. An action being recorded does not, by itself, establish that it is a permanent New Covenant requirement.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why was the transition in people's understanding rather than in Christ's completed work?

Personal Reflection

Which inherited belief are you willing to reconsider in the light of Christ's fulfilment?

Action Step

Name one former practice you will examine in the Bible. What would you change while remaining patient with those who disagree?

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 did God permit a transition after Jesus Christ had fulfilled the former covenant? Explain what was changing in people and what remained complete in Christ, including the believer's possession of His indwelling life.

2. Understanding

How do the Law as a schoolmaster, the word until in Hebrews 9 and the changed priesthood show that something God gave can have an appointed end? Explain how these examples establish the direction of the transition towards Christ.

3. Personal Reflection

Religious practice can move in our thinking from something Christians have done to something Christians must do. What does this help you recognise about an inherited belief of your own, and how could the Bible test it?

4. Response to Truth

Fulfilment came before the disciples fully understood it. What response does this call for in you when the Bible challenges a familiar belief or practice? Explain without assuming that your understanding is already complete.

5. Action Step

Consider an inherited view of your own about water baptism, communion or feet washing. How could you examine its authority in the Bible while recognising that Christ's work is already complete? Explain what you personally need to consider.

6. Early Response

Have you already begun examining an inherited view about water baptism, communion or feet washing in the Bible while recognising Christ's completed work? If yes, explain what you examined or now understand. If not, explain what you are still considering or what has made it difficult for you to begin.

7. Ongoing Practice

As you continue examining inherited ordinances, how could you keep Christ's completed work as your standard while remaining willing to correct your understanding? Explain what might tempt you to make familiarity or repeated practice the final authority.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How can sincere believers continue a former practice without making it a permanent New Covenant requirement? Use the difference between fulfilment and understanding to explain why sincerity, zeal and visible conduct cannot establish doctrine or add to Christ's fulness.

9. Living the Truth

A sincere person is slow to understand what Christ has fulfilled. How could you show the patience described in God's dealings with people while still encouraging an honest response to the Bible? Explain why patience does not mean preserving two valid covenant paths.

10. Final Response

Bring together God's patience, the direction of the transition and the believer's completeness in Christ. What has become clearer to you about reading actions in Acts without allowing human conduct to redefine Christ's completed work, and what still needs your consideration?