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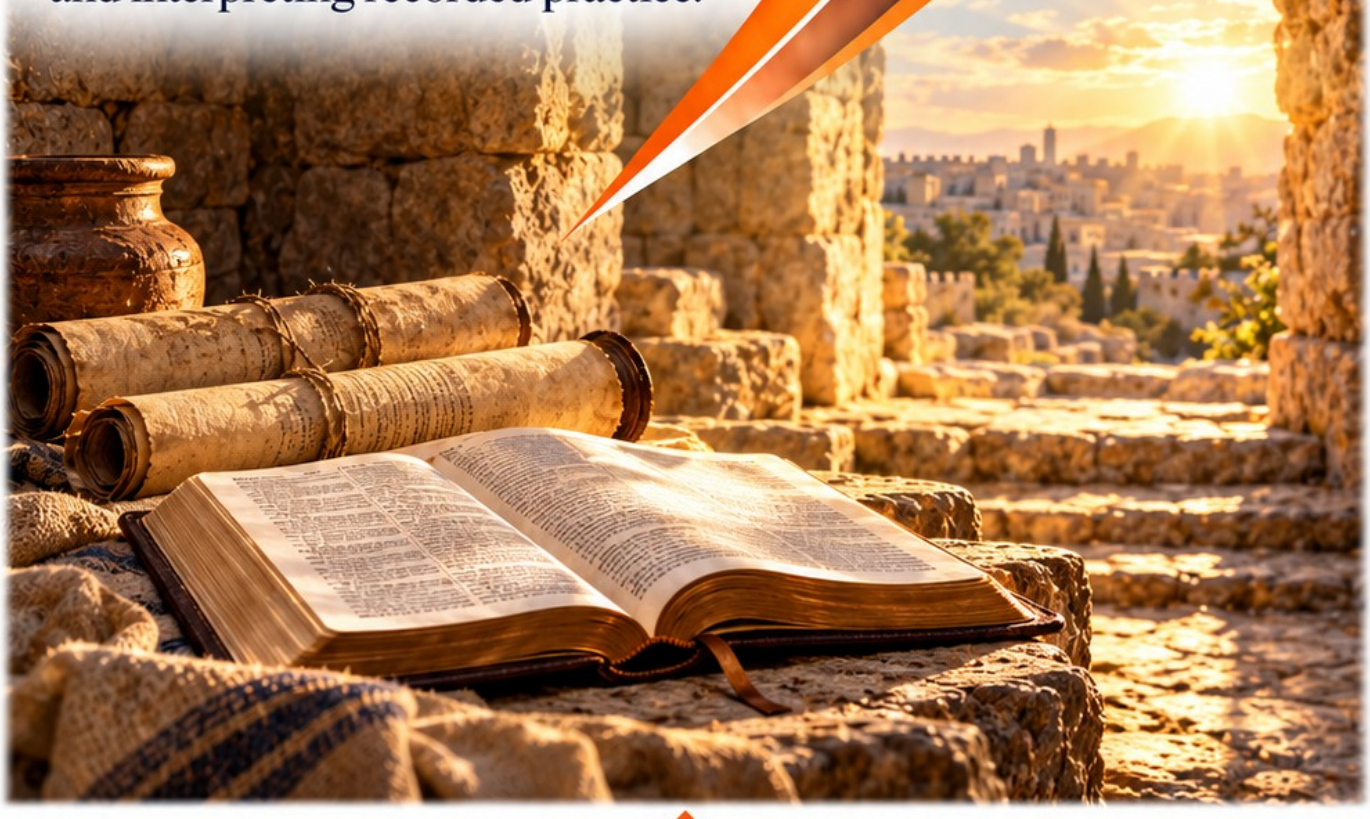
STUDY GUIDE 72

Ordinances Fulfilled in Jesus Christ

STUDY GUIDE 5 OF 12:

Acts Records The Transition

An overview of transitional Acts and interpreting recorded practice.



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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PREFACE

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God permitted a period of transition after Jesus Christ had fulfilled the former covenant order. The transition was not taking place in Jesus Christ, salvation or truth. The New Covenant reality had already come, eternal redemption had been obtained, and the born-again believer was complete in Jesus Christ.

The transition was taking place in people. Jewish believers whose lives had been formed under the Law, the Temple, circumcision, ceremonial distinctions and outward ordinances did not immediately understand every implication of what Jesus Christ had accomplished.

Acts records believers living through that period of developing understanding. It records the direct work of God, genuine obedience and the preaching of the Gospel, but it also records misunderstanding, inherited religious thinking, disagreement, actions taken out of consideration for others and conduct that sometimes required correction. This raises an important question: How should we interpret the actions recorded in Acts during the transition?

Acts is inspired Scripture, and Luke gives a truthful and authoritative record of what occurred. However, the inspiration of the record does not automatically make every recorded human action a permanent New Covenant command.

Therefore, this Study Guide will distinguish between what God had already established in Jesus Christ and how believers understood and responded to that reality during the transition. Historical action must be interpreted in the light of the completed New Covenant reality rather than being assumed automatically to establish permanent doctrine.

That distinction is essential as we prepare to examine the outward ordinances recorded in the New Testament. It gives us the Scriptural framework needed to distinguish between inspired historical record and permanent New Covenant truth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can Acts be fully inspired without making every recorded human action a permanent command?

Personal Reflection

How does separating Christ's completed work from developing human understanding change the way you read Acts? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

When you next read an action in Acts, what will you consider before accepting it as a command for your own life? Name one choice in your own life that should change because of this truth, and explain why.

INTRODUCTION

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The book of Acts begins after Jesus Christ had fulfilled the former covenant order and established the New Covenant reality. The truth was already complete, but the people who would carry the Gospel still had much to learn concerning the practical implications of what Jesus Christ had accomplished. Jesus had already made the direction of the Gospel clear.

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."*

Jesus also said in **Mark 16:15**:

> *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."*

The direction was unmistakable. The Gospel was to move beyond Jerusalem and beyond the former covenant boundaries of natural Israel.

However, Acts shows that clear revelation did not produce immediate complete understanding. The disciples had received the command, but their understanding and conduct still had to be brought into agreement with it.

This is the setting in which Acts must be read. The New Covenant reality was complete, while human understanding was still developing. God's purpose had already been established even though the people carrying the Gospel were still learning what that purpose required in practice. Therefore, when Acts records what believers did, we must distinguish between what God had already established in Jesus Christ and how people responded to that reality during the transition.

Historical conduct must be interpreted in the light of completed New Covenant truth rather than being assumed automatically to define it. That distinction will govern the remainder of this Study Guide and provide the foundation for understanding the inspired record of Acts.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Jesus' words about taking the Gospel to all people help explain the transition recorded in Acts?

Personal Reflection

What does the disciples' need for further understanding show you about your own response to familiar Bible truths?

Action Step

What does Christ's completed work mean for your own beliefs as you read Acts? Explain how you want to respond. What assumption will you examine, and how will your response change if it does not agree with the Bible?

ACTS IS AN INSPIRED AND TRUTHFUL RECORD

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The book of Acts is an inspired and truthful record. Luke faithfully tells us what happened as the Gospel spread and believers lived through the period of transition.

This raises an important question: If the record is inspired, does that mean every human action recorded within it was spiritually correct? The answer is no.

The inspiration of the record guarantees the truthfulness of what Scripture records. It does not make every human action within that record a command from God.

The Bible does not hide the mistakes, misunderstandings or failures of God's people. Scripture records faithful obedience, but it also records conduct that required correction.

When Scripture records someone acting wrongly, the inspired record gives us a truthful account of the wrong action. The inspiration belongs to the record. It does not transform the wrong action into a right action. This principle applies throughout Scripture, including to the apostles.

An Apostle Could Perform An Action That Required Correction

The apostles were genuinely called and used by Jesus Christ, and their inspired teaching carries Scriptural authority. However, Scripture does not teach that every personal action performed by an apostle was automatically correct.

Peter provides a clear example. His conduct at Antioch was performed by an apostle and followed by other believers, yet Scripture tells us that it required correction.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:11–14**:

> *"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"*

Paul tells us directly that Peter *"was to be blamed"* and that those involved *"walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel."* The action occurred, an apostle performed it, and Scripture faithfully records it. Yet Scripture also tells us that the action was wrong.

This gives us an important principle for interpreting Acts. The fact that an apostle performed an action cannot, by itself, make that action permanent New Covenant practice.

Peter withdrew from Gentile believers, yet Paul tells us that Peter was wrong to do so. Therefore, there must be a greater standard, and Paul identifies that standard as *"the truth of the gospel."*

Peter's conduct had to agree with the Gospel. The Gospel did not have to agree with Peter's conduct.

Human conduct does not establish divine truth. Divine truth establishes the standard by which human conduct must be understood.

Therefore, when Scripture records an apostle acting, we must ask what kind of action is being recorded.

An action may be:

- Direct obedience to Jesus Christ;
- Direction from the Holy Ghost;
- An expression of established New Covenant truth;
- A response to particular circumstances;
- An action taken out of consideration for others;
- An action influenced by former religious understanding;
- An action arising from fear or pressure;
- An action that Scripture later corrects.

The fact that an apostle performed the action does not remove the need to interpret it. Scripture itself must determine its meaning and authority.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Paul's correction of Peter show the difference between an inspired record and correct human conduct?

Personal Reflection

How willing are you to test a respected leader's conduct by the truth of the Gospel? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

If a respected believer's example differs in the Bible, how would you decide what to follow in your own life? Identify one personal response you will make, trusting in Jesus Christ rather than your own religious effort.

Inspired Teaching And Recorded Human Conduct Must Be Distinguished

We must also avoid the opposite error. If an apostle sometimes required correction, this does not mean that inspired apostolic teaching cannot be trusted. When God inspired the apostles to teach truth in Scripture, that teaching carries the authority of the Word of God.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 2:13**:

> *"Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."*

We must therefore distinguish between inspired apostolic teaching and recorded apostolic conduct. The first is received as the Word of God, while the second must be understood according to what the inspired record says about it.

Sometimes Scripture commends the conduct, sometimes it records it without direct comment, and sometimes it shows that the conduct required correction. We must allow Scripture itself to make that distinction.

Peter held an important place among the apostles, but his position did not make his conduct at Antioch correct. Paul did not reason that because Peter was an apostle, his action must automatically be accepted.

Instead, Paul compared Peter's conduct with *"the truth of the gospel."* The truth of the Gospel is greater than the human conduct of the person proclaiming it.

Why This Matters To The Ordinances

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This distinction becomes important when we later examine communion, feet washing and water baptism. It is not enough to argue that because an apostle performed an action, the Church must continue it.

We must ask:

- Was the action commanded by Jesus Christ;
- Was it directed by the Holy Ghost;
- Does Scripture teach it as permanent New Covenant practice;
- Did it arise from the circumstances of the transition;
- Was former covenant thinking still influencing the action;
- Does later Scripture confirm, explain or correct it;
- Does it agree with the completed reality already found in Jesus Christ.

We must also distinguish between an action that is simply recorded and an action expressly commanded by an apostle. For example, **Acts 10:48** records Peter commanding water baptism. That command must be acknowledged as part of the inspired record, while its setting, purpose and continuing New Covenant authority must still be examined through the full testimony of Scripture.

These questions do not dishonour the apostles. They follow the method Scripture itself gives us for distinguishing inspired truth from recorded human conduct.

An inspired record can faithfully record imperfect human conduct. The fact that an apostle performed an action does not automatically make that action a permanent New Covenant command. Human conduct must always be measured by the truth God has revealed.

This leads naturally to another important distinction. Scripture can faithfully describe an action without commanding the Church to repeat it.

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can inspired apostolic teaching be trusted even though an apostle's conduct sometimes needed correction?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated an apostle's outward action as sufficient proof that a practice must continue? Explain what you now understand.

Action Step

Before accepting an outward practice as necessary for you, what would you need to understand from the full teaching of the Bible? Identify one practice or belief you will test against the Bible, and explain what you are prepared to change.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMAND ARE NOT THE SAME

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The previous section established that an inspired record can faithfully record imperfect human conduct. This leads to another important distinction: Scripture can describe what someone did without commanding the Church to repeat it.

Acts contains many historical descriptions. Luke tells us where people travelled, what they said, what customs they followed, what disputes arose and what actions they performed. Those descriptions are inspired and trustworthy, but description and command are not the same thing.

When Acts records an action, we can confidently say that the action occurred. However, another question must still be asked: Does Scripture establish that action as permanent New Covenant practice?

The statement *"They did this"* does not automatically mean *"Therefore, God commands the Church to continue doing this."* Historical occurrence establishes what happened, but permanent doctrine requires further Scriptural evidence.

A Direct Command Is Different From A Recorded Action

When Jesus Christ directly commands something, Scripture gives us a clear statement of what He required.

Jesus said in **Mark 16:15**:

> *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."*

This is a direct command. Jesus plainly told His disciples what they were to do.

By contrast, when Acts records that a believer performed an action, we have an historical event that must be interpreted within its context. A direct command tells us what Jesus required; a recorded action tells us what someone did.

An action recorded in Acts may belong to very different categories. It may be:

- Obedience to a direct command;
- Direction from the Holy Ghost;

- An expression of New Covenant truth;
- An inherited religious practice;
- An adjustment made for particular circumstances;
- An action arising from incomplete understanding;
- An action influenced by religious pressure;
- Something later corrected or clarified.

Therefore, the presence of an action in Acts does not tell us by itself which category it belongs to. The action must be interpreted.

Acts and the wider New Testament give us clear examples. Peter hesitated concerning Gentiles, but the Church is not commanded to imitate that hesitation. Jewish believers objected when Peter entered the house of uncircumcised Gentiles, but the Church is not commanded to preserve that objection.

Many thousands of Jewish believers remained zealous for the Law, but the Church is not therefore placed permanently under the Law of Moses. Peter later withdrew from Gentile fellowship, and Paul tells us that Peter *"was to be blamed."*

These examples show plainly that a recorded action and a permanent command are not automatically the same thing. This distinction remains true even when the person performing the action is an apostle. The statement *"An apostle did it"* does not remove the need to interpret the action.

Scripture itself shows that apostolic conduct could sometimes require correction. Therefore, the authority does not come simply from the identity of the person performing the action. The authority comes from the truth of God.

If we are going to say that an action belongs to the permanent practice of the New Covenant Church, there should be clear Scriptural reason for doing so. We should ask:

- Did Jesus Christ command it for the New Covenant Church;
- Did the apostles teach it as continuing doctrine;
- Is it confirmed by the wider New Testament;
- Does it agree with what Jesus Christ has already fulfilled;
- Does it belong to the spiritual reality of the New Covenant rather than to the period of transition;
- Is Scripture presenting it as necessary, or simply recording that it occurred.

Historical Narrative Must Be Interpreted

These questions protect us from building permanent doctrine upon historical action alone. Historical narrative is not less inspired than doctrinal teaching. However, historical narrative often tells us what happened, while doctrinal teaching helps explain the spiritual meaning of what happened.

Therefore, we must not isolate an historical action and treat the action itself as the whole doctrine. The full Scriptural context must speak.

One event may demonstrate obedience, while another may reveal misunderstanding, consideration for others or the continuing influence of former covenant thinking. Historical narrative must therefore be interpreted rather than simply repeated.

Why This Matters To The Ordinances

This distinction becomes especially important when we later examine communion, feet washing and water baptism. It is not enough to say that believers performed an action in Acts.

We must also ask:

- Was the action commanded;
- Why was it performed;
- What did it represent;
- What covenant setting surrounded it;
- Was it connected with the period of transition;
- Does the wider New Testament establish it as permanent;
- Does it agree with the completed reality found in Jesus Christ.

Historical occurrence alone cannot establish permanent New Covenant obligation. The ordinance question must be settled by the full testimony of Scripture.

Description and command are not the same. Acts truthfully records what believers did, but a recorded action does not become a permanent New Covenant command simply because it occurred. Permanent practice must be established by the full testimony of Scripture.

This raises another important question. If the apostles themselves could perform actions that required interpretation, how should we understand their place within this period of transition?

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

What distinguishes a direct command from an action that the Bible describes?

Personal Reflection

How does that distinction challenge or confirm the way you decide which religious practices to follow? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

Choose an action recorded in Acts that you want to understand. What will you examine before deciding whether it is a continuing command? Name one choice in your own life that should change because of this truth, and explain why.

THE APOSTLES WERE GENUINE BELIEVERS AND STILL LEARNERS

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The previous section established that description and command are not the same. An action may be faithfully recorded in Scripture without becoming a permanent New Covenant requirement.

This becomes even more important when we recognise something Scripture itself makes clear: The apostles were genuine believers and servants of Jesus Christ, but they were still learners. They had walked with Jesus, heard His teaching, witnessed His works and received His commission, yet they did not immediately understand every implication of what He had accomplished.

Jesus Had to Open Their Understanding

Even after the resurrection, Jesus continued to teach His disciples concerning the fulfilment of Scripture. They had already heard the Law, the prophets and the psalms, but their understanding still needed to be opened.

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,"*

Luke says that Jesus *"opened their understanding."* The truth had already been present in the Scriptures, but the disciples still needed to understand what those Scriptures meant concerning Him.

This gives us an important principle for reading Acts: Possessing revelation and fully understanding its implications are not always the same thing. God may already have revealed the truth while people still need time to understand what that truth requires.

The apostles occupied an important place in the early Church. Jesus had personally called them and entrusted them with the Gospel.

However, Scripture does not present them as men who understood every consequence of the New Covenant immediately. They remained learners whose understanding was still being brought into agreement with what Jesus Christ had accomplished.

This does not diminish their calling or the authority of the inspired teaching God later gave through them. It simply allows Scripture to present them truthfully as genuine servants of Jesus Christ who continued to grow in understanding.

The apostles had been raised within the Jewish covenant world. The Law of Moses, the Temple, circumcision, ceremonial distinctions and separation from Gentiles had formed part of their religious understanding from childhood.

These things had not been invented by them. They belonged to the former covenant order that God had given to Israel.

Therefore, when Jesus Christ fulfilled that order, the apostles did not instantly understand every consequence of that fulfilment. The covenant reality had changed because of what Jesus Christ had accomplished, while their understanding still had to catch up with that reality.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did the apostles still need Jesus to open their understanding after His resurrection?

Personal Reflection

What does their continuing need to learn help you recognise about your own understanding of the Bible?

Action Step

Is there a familiar truth about Christ's fulfilment that you want to understand more clearly? Explain why it matters to you. What assumption will you examine, and how will your response change if it does not agree with the Bible?

Genuine Believers Could Still Carry Former Ideas

This principle did not apply only to the apostles. Acts also records many Jewish people who genuinely believed in Jesus Christ while former covenant thinking still influenced them.

Luke wrote in **Acts 21:20**:

> *"And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:"*

Notice the two statements together. There were *"many thousands"* who believed, yet they were also *"zealous of the law."*

These were genuine believers, but their former religious framework continued to influence their understanding and conduct. Therefore, a person could genuinely belong to Jesus Christ while still carrying ideas formed under the former covenant order.

This is one of the reasons the transition must be taken seriously when interpreting Acts. Genuine faith and developing understanding can exist at the same time.

We must keep the order clear. The apostles were learning, but the Gospel was not changing.

Their understanding was developing, but Jesus Christ was not becoming more complete. The truth did not gradually become true as the apostles understood it.

The truth was already established in Jesus Christ. The people were being brought into agreement with that truth.

This distinction protects us from treating the transition as though God Himself were uncertain about the New Covenant. God knew what He had accomplished, while believers still had to learn what that accomplishment meant.

This Protects Us From Two Errors

There are two opposite mistakes we must avoid. The first is to say that because an apostle performed an action, the action must always have been correct and permanently binding.

The second is to say that because an apostle still had things to learn, apostolic teaching cannot be trusted. Both conclusions are wrong.

When the apostles taught by divine revelation, that teaching carries Scriptural authority. When Scripture records their human conduct, that conduct must be understood according to what the inspired record reveals about it.

Sometimes Scripture commends the action, sometimes it records the action without direct comment, and sometimes it shows that the action required correction. The fact that the apostles were learners does not weaken Scripture; it helps us understand why Acts records movement, development and correction.

This distinction becomes important when we later encounter outward practices performed by apostles or other early believers. We cannot reason only that because an apostle performed the action, the Church must continue it permanently.

We must also ask:

- What did the apostle understand at that point?
- What former covenant influences were still present?
- Was the action directly commanded by Jesus Christ?
- Does later Scripture establish it as permanent New Covenant practice?
- Was the action connected with the period of transition?
- Does it agree with what Jesus Christ had already fulfilled?

These questions do not dishonour the apostles. They recognise exactly what Acts records: genuine believers whose understanding was still developing.

We can therefore state the truth of this section clearly: The apostles were genuine believers and servants of Jesus Christ, but they were still learners. Their developing understanding did not change the truth of the New Covenant; their understanding had to be brought into agreement with what Jesus Christ had already accomplished.

This leads naturally to another important principle. The truth could already have been revealed even though its full implications had not yet been understood.

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How could Jewish believers genuinely believe in Christ while remaining zealous for the Law?

Personal Reflection

How might a familiar religious expectation influence your understanding even when you sincerely want to learn? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

How can you remain willing to learn without losing confidence in the apostles' inspired teaching? Identify a conclusion you will reconsider, and explain why the wider teaching of the Bible must govern it.

REVELATION COULD COME BEFORE FULL UNDERSTANDING

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The previous section established that the apostles were genuine believers and servants of Jesus Christ who were still learning the full implications of the New Covenant. This gives us another important principle for understanding the book of Acts.

God could reveal truth before the people who received that revelation fully understood what it meant in practice. The revelation was not incomplete, but the understanding was.

Before the events recorded in Acts unfolded, Jesus had already told His disciples where the Gospel was to go. His words established the direction before the disciples fully understood all that the direction required.

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. Their witness would begin in Jerusalem, move through Judaea and Samaria, and continue *"unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

Jesus had therefore revealed that the Gospel would not remain within the boundaries of natural Israel. The revelation had been given, yet Acts shows that the disciples did not immediately understand everything this required.

Peter Still Needed God to Show Him

Peter later acknowledged that his former Jewish understanding had still affected the way he regarded Gentiles. He had received the worldwide commission, yet his thinking still needed to be brought into agreement with it.

Peter said in **Acts 10:28**:

> *"And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."*

Notice Peter's words *"God hath shewed me."* Jesus had already said that the witness would go *"unto the uttermost part of the earth,"* yet Peter still needed God to show him what that meant in relation to Gentiles.

The problem was not that Jesus had failed to reveal His purpose. The problem was that Peter had not yet understood the full implications of what had already been revealed.

God did not establish a new purpose when He dealt with Peter concerning Cornelius. Jesus had already commanded the Gospel to go beyond Israel.

Therefore, Acts 10 did not change God's purpose. It changed Peter's understanding of God's purpose.

The divine revelation came first, and human understanding followed. This is one of the clearest examples of the transition taking place in people rather than in the truth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Peter's experience with Cornelius show that revelation can come before full understanding?

Personal Reflection

What difference does it make to you that God's purpose did not change when Peter understood it more fully? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

Is there a belief about whom God accepts that you need to reconsider in the light of Peter's experience? Explain. Identify one conviction or attitude that this teaching challenges. What specific response will you make?

Former Understanding Could Limit the Application of Revealed Truth

Peter's difficulty helps us understand how sincere believers can possess true revelation while still applying it through an older framework. Peter knew the Gospel was to go into all the world, yet his inherited understanding concerning Jew and Gentile still affected how he imagined that command should operate.

The words of Jesus had not changed. What had to change was Peter's understanding.

This gives us an important principle: A person may know a statement of truth without yet understanding all that the truth requires. That distinction helps explain several events recorded in Acts.

God's purpose did not depend upon the apostles first understanding everything perfectly. The truth was already established, and God continued to act according to what He had revealed.

The apostles then had to learn from what God was doing. This protects us from imagining that the New Covenant itself developed gradually as the apostles learned.

The New Covenant did not become more complete when Peter's understanding increased. Jesus Christ had already accomplished the reality, while Peter was being brought into agreement with it.

This is an important way to understand the transition. The truth was not waiting for the apostles to create it through their understanding.

Jesus Christ had fulfilled the former order, the Gospel had been commissioned to all people, and the New Covenant reality had already been established. The apostles then had to understand what those truths meant for their conduct.

Therefore, when Acts records hesitation, delay or former covenant thinking, we must not assume that God's revelation was uncertain. Human understanding could lag behind divine revelation.

This Helps Us Read Acts More Carefully

This principle gives us an important safeguard when interpreting historical actions in Acts. If the apostles did not immediately understand every implication of a command Jesus had

already clearly given, then we cannot assume that every practice recorded during the same transitional period represents the final and permanent New Covenant pattern.

We must ask:

- What had already been revealed?
- What did the believers understand at that point?
- Was their conduct fully consistent with what had been revealed?
- Was former covenant thinking still affecting their response?
- Does later Scripture clarify the meaning of the action?

These questions allow Acts to speak honestly about the process through which believers were being brought into fuller understanding. They also protect us from turning developing human understanding into permanent doctrine.

This distinction will become especially important when we later examine outward practices recorded in Acts. It is possible for believers to continue an action even though they have not yet understood every implication of what Jesus Christ has fulfilled.

Therefore, the continued appearance of a practice does not by itself prove that the practice possesses permanent New Covenant authority. We must first ask what God had already revealed concerning Jesus Christ and the New Covenant reality.

The order must remain revelation first, human understanding following. We must never reverse that order and allow developing human understanding to determine the meaning of divine revelation.

We can therefore state the truth of this section clearly: Revelation could come before full understanding. God had already revealed His purpose, while the apostles were still learning what that purpose meant in practice. The truth did not change as their understanding developed; their understanding had to come into agreement with the truth.

However, Acts reveals another important distinction. Sometimes a believer may understand the truth and still fail to act consistently with what he knows.

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must developing human understanding be measured by God's revelation rather than used to redefine it?

Personal Reflection

How could your religious background limit the way you understand a truth you already know? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

What would help you examine your own assumptions when reading practices recorded during the Acts transition? Name one choice in your own life that should change because of this truth, and explain why.

KNOWLEDGE AND CONDUCT ARE ALSO DIFFERENT

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The previous section established that revelation could come before full understanding. Peter had received the words of Jesus, yet his understanding still had to be brought into agreement with what had already been revealed.

Acts and the Epistles show another possibility. A believer may understand the truth and yet fail to act consistently with what he knows.

This distinction is important because not every questionable action recorded during the transition resulted from lack of understanding. Sometimes the truth was already known, but human conduct did not agree with it.

Peter Had Already Learned the Truth

Peter's experience with Cornelius had taught him that the former Jewish separation could no longer determine fellowship in the New Covenant. He had already said that God had shown him not to call any man common or unclean.

Peter therefore possessed greater understanding than he had possessed earlier. Yet his later conduct at Antioch did not agree with what he had already learned.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:11-14**:

> *"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"*

Peter's difficulty at Antioch was different from his earlier difficulty concerning Cornelius. With Cornelius, Peter was still learning, but at Antioch he already knew better.

Paul tells us why Peter withdrew. He was *"fearing them which were of the circumcision."*

Peter had been eating with Gentile believers, so he already understood that such fellowship was permissible. However, when certain men arrived, religious pressure affected his conduct.

The truth had not changed, and Peter's knowledge had not disappeared. His conduct became inconsistent with what he already knew.

This gives us another important principle for interpreting the New Testament record. An action may reflect not only incomplete understanding, but also fear, pressure, concern for others or inconsistency.

Peter's action did not affect him alone. Paul says that the other Jews followed him and that Barnabas was also carried away with their dissimulation.

One person's inconsistent conduct therefore influenced others. This shows how powerful inherited religious expectations could remain during the transition.

Even believers who understood something of the New Covenant reality could still be affected by the expectations of those around them. Therefore, repeated or widespread conduct does not automatically prove that the conduct represents permanent New Covenant truth.

Several people may participate in the same action and still be acting under the same religious pressure. Numbers do not make inconsistent conduct correct.

Peter's withdrawal did not make Jewish and Gentile separation spiritually valid again. His conduct could not reverse what God had already established.

Therefore, human conduct cannot change divine reality. If a believer acts inconsistently with truth, the truth remains true.

If an apostle acts under religious pressure, his action does not acquire greater authority than the truth against which Scripture measures it. This is why historical conduct must never be allowed to become the final standard.

Understanding and Practice Must Be Distinguished

We can therefore identify two different situations within the transition. A believer may not yet fully understand what God has revealed, or a believer may understand the truth and still fail to act consistently with it.

Peter illustrates both situations. Earlier, he still needed God to correct his understanding concerning Gentiles, while later he possessed that understanding but withdrew from Gentile fellowship because of fear. These are different problems, but they lead to the same interpretive safeguard: Recorded conduct must be tested by revealed truth.

Why This Matters to the Ordinances

This distinction will become important when we later examine outward practices that continued during the transition. The continuation of a practice does not automatically tell us why it continued.

People may continue an action because:

- They believe it is still required;
- They have not yet understood its fulfilment;
- Other believers expect it;
- They wish to avoid offence;
- Religious pressure influences them;
- They are adjusting their conduct out of consideration for others.

Therefore, the statement *"They continued doing it"* does not by itself establish permanent New Covenant authority. We must determine whether their conduct agreed with what God had already established in Jesus Christ.

This is especially important when repeated outward practices are used as evidence of permanent doctrine. Continued performance must still be interpreted by Scripture.

We can therefore state the truth of this section clearly: Knowledge and conduct are not always the same. A believer may understand revealed truth and yet fail to walk consistently with that

truth because of fear, pressure or human weakness. Therefore, recorded conduct must never become a greater authority than the truth by which Scripture itself judges that conduct.

Paul gives us the standard very clearly. Peter's action was not judged by Peter's position as an apostle but according to *"the truth of the gospel."*

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did Peter's difficulty at Antioch differ from his earlier difficulty concerning Cornelius?

Personal Reflection

What does Peter's fear of other people help you recognise about the difference between knowing truth and following it? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

What response do you want to make in your own life when others expect you to act against a truth you understand? What assumption will you examine, and how will your response change if it does not agree with the Bible?

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL MUST INTERPRET HUMAN CONDUCT

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous section established that knowledge and conduct are not always the same. Peter already knew that God had accepted Gentile believers, yet fear caused him to act inconsistently with what he knew.

Paul therefore measured Peter's conduct against something greater than Peter himself: *"the truth of the gospel."* This gives us one of the most important principles for interpreting Acts and the wider New Testament record.

Human conduct must be interpreted by revealed truth. Revealed truth must never be interpreted by inconsistent human conduct.

Peter's Conduct Was Judged By The Gospel

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:11–14**:

> *"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"*

Paul did not say that Peter's action was correct because Peter was an apostle. He said Peter *"was to be blamed"* because his conduct did not agree with *"the truth of the gospel."*

The Gospel was the standard. Peter's conduct had to be measured by that standard rather than becoming the standard itself.

Peter's position did not give his personal conduct greater authority than the Gospel. The Gospel was already true, and Peter's conduct was either in agreement with that truth or contrary to it.

Therefore, the truth of the Gospel is greater than the conduct of the person proclaiming it. God's truth is the authority, and human conduct must agree with it.

When Acts records what believers did, we must apply the same principle. We cannot take a human action and use it to redefine what Scripture has already established concerning Jesus Christ and the New Covenant.

Scripture has already established that:

- Jesus Christ has fulfilled the former order;
- Eternal redemption has been obtained;
- Salvation is complete;
- The believer is complete in Him;
- Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit.

No human action recorded during the transition can reverse those truths. Transitional conduct must be interpreted in the light of completed New Covenant truth.

Human conduct cannot restore covenant authority to something God has fulfilled, make salvation incomplete when Scripture declares it complete, or give permanent authority to a practice simply because believers continued it. What people do cannot undo what God has accomplished.

The Completed Work Of Christ Must Remain The Foundation

Scripture establishes the New Covenant foundation. Jesus Christ is the reality, and the shadows pointed forward to Him. The believer does not possess only an outward representation because the believer has the Person.

Therefore, when we encounter an outward practice during the transition, our first question cannot simply be whether believers performed it. We must first ask what Jesus Christ had already accomplished.

When we encounter an action in Acts, we should ask:

- Was the action commanded by Jesus Christ;
- Was it directed by the Holy Ghost;
- Does Scripture commend the action;
- Does later New Testament teaching confirm it;
- Does it agree with the completed work of Jesus Christ;
- Was it influenced by fear, pressure, consideration for others or incomplete understanding.

Why This Matters To The Ordinances

These questions allow the truth to interpret the action rather than turning human conduct into the source of doctrine. This principle becomes especially important when we later examine communion, feet washing and water baptism. The fact that an apostle performed an outward action must be acknowledged honestly, but that fact alone does not make the action permanently binding.

We must ask what Christ had already fulfilled, what spiritual reality had already been established, whether God had already performed the inward work, and whether the wider New Testament preserves the outward action as permanently necessary. The ordinance must be interpreted in the light of the truth of the Gospel rather than being allowed to redefine it.

The truth of the Gospel must interpret human conduct. Human conduct, even apostolic conduct, cannot redefine the truth of the Gospel. Every recorded action must be measured against what God has already revealed and accomplished in Jesus Christ.

This leads naturally to the next safeguard. Acts records the historical events, while the Epistles often explain the truth by which those events are understood.

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why was the truth of the Gospel the standard for judging Peter's conduct?

Personal Reflection

How does Christ's completed work help you assess claims that an outward practice must complete a believer? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

When considering an outward religious requirement for yourself, how will you keep Christ's completed work as the standard? Examine where you have placed your confidence. What will you change to keep that confidence in Jesus Christ?

ACTS AND THE EPISTLES MUST BE READ TOGETHER

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous section established that the truth of the Gospel must interpret human conduct. That principle leads naturally to another important safeguard.

The book of Acts must not be interpreted in isolation from the rest of the New Testament. Acts records the historical movement of the early Church, while the Epistles often explain the doctrine involved in the events and circumstances Acts records.

Therefore, both must be allowed to speak. Historical record and doctrinal teaching belong together.

Acts tells us what believers did as the Gospel spread. It records the preaching of the apostles, the movement of the Gospel, the response of believers, questions concerning Jew and Gentile, continued Jewish practices, disputes, correction and actions taken in particular circumstances.

This historical record is inspired and essential. However, Acts is not the only New Testament witness concerning those events and issues.

The Epistles often explain the spiritual meaning of what was happening. They help us understand how particular actions and controversies relate to the permanent New Covenant reality.

The Epistles Help Explain the Doctrine

Paul's correction of Peter provides a clear example. Peter's conduct belonged to the same transitional world recorded in Acts, but the doctrinal issue is explained in Galatians.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:16**:

> *"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."*

This doctrinal teaching helps us understand why returning to former covenant distinctions could not become the permanent pattern of the Church. Acts may show believers still influenced by the Law, while the Epistles explain that justification is not found in the works of the Law.

Therefore, historical practice and doctrinal teaching must be read together. The action must be understood in the light of the truth Scripture explains.

An action recorded earlier in Acts may be understandable within the transition, while later New Testament teaching helps us determine whether that action belongs to the permanent New Covenant order. This does not mean that later Scripture contradicts earlier Scripture.

It means that the New Testament must be allowed to interpret itself. We should not freeze one moment in Acts and treat it as though nothing else in Scripture can explain it.

Acts records movement, while the Epistles help us understand the spiritual reality towards which that movement was leading. The full New Testament witness must therefore remain together.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Galatians help explain the doctrinal problem in Peter's withdrawal from Gentile believers?

Personal Reflection

How could reading Acts with the Epistles correct an understanding you formed from one historical event? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

Which question about an action in Acts would you like to examine alongside the teaching of the Epistles? Explain why. Identify one conviction or attitude that this teaching challenges. What specific response will you make?

Narrative Alone Does Not Establish Permanent Doctrine

Historical narrative is important, but narrative must be interpreted. If Acts records an action without a direct command, we must examine the wider New Testament before declaring that action permanently binding.

We must ask:

- Does Jesus Christ directly command it?
- Do the Epistles establish it doctrinally?
- Is it consistent with the completed work of Christ?
- Does it belong to the permanent New Covenant reality?
- Or does it belong to the circumstances of the transition?

These questions are especially necessary when Jewish practices remained visible and believers were still learning. Historical occurrence alone cannot carry the whole doctrinal argument.

Permanent New Covenant doctrine must rest upon the full testimony of Scripture. No single historical action should be isolated from the larger Scriptural framework.

We must consider:

- The words of Jesus Christ;
- The historical record of Acts;
- The doctrinal teaching of the Epistles;
- The new birth;
- The indwelling Spirit;
- The believer's completeness in Christ;
- The fulfilment of the former covenant order.

These truths must be allowed to interpret one another. The authority comes from the full witness of Scripture rather than from an isolated event.

The wider New Testament continually brings us back to Jesus Christ. His completed work remains the standard by which outward actions must be understood.

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 words *"ye are complete in him"* must remain before us when Acts records outward practices. No interpretation of a historical action can legitimately make the born-again believer spiritually incomplete until an outward ceremony is added.

The Epistles therefore help protect us from giving historical practice a spiritual role that contradicts the completed reality in Christ. Narrative and doctrine must remain in agreement.

Acts and the Epistles Complement One Another

We do not set Acts against the Epistles, nor do we use the Epistles to dismiss Acts. We allow each part of Scripture to perform its proper function.

Acts shows us the historical transition, while the Epistles explain New Covenant truth within and beyond that historical setting. Together they give us a fuller understanding.

This approach honours the authority of all Scripture. It allows the historical record to remain historical while allowing doctrinal teaching to explain what that history means for the Church.

This principle is essential when we later examine communion, feet washing and water baptism. Suppose an outward action appears in Acts.

We must acknowledge that it occurred, but we must also ask:

- Does Jesus command the practice as permanent?
- Do the Epistles preserve it as continuing doctrine?
- What spiritual reality does the action represent?
- Had that reality already been accomplished in Christ?
- Does the practice agree with the believer's completeness in Him?

We cannot build permanent doctrine from narrative alone while ignoring the doctrinal teaching of the rest of the New Testament. The ordinance question must rest upon the full Scriptural witness.

We can therefore state the truth of this section clearly: Acts and the Epistles must be read together. Acts faithfully records what happened during the transition, while the Epistles often explain the New Covenant truth by which those events and actions must be understood. Permanent doctrine must therefore rest upon the full testimony of Scripture.

This leads to another important safeguard. A practice may appear repeatedly in Acts, but repetition itself does not prove that God intended the practice to continue permanently.

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Acts and the Epistles work together without contradicting one another?

Personal Reflection

What does being complete in Christ mean for the way you assess an outward ceremony? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

How would you test a claim that you need an outward ceremony to complete what Christ has done? Name one inherited expectation you will reconsider and explain how Christ's fulfilment changes your response.

REPETITION DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY ESTABLISH PERMANENCE

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous section established that Acts and the Epistles must be read together. Historical practice must be interpreted in the light of the full New Testament and the completed reality found in Jesus Christ.

This leads to another important principle: The repetition of a practice does not automatically prove that God intended that practice to continue permanently. A practice may appear many times in Acts, and that proves that the practice occurred repeatedly. It does not, by itself, establish permanent New Covenant authority.

Repetition Proves Occurrence, Not Permanence

When an action appears more than once in Acts, we can confidently say that it was repeated. However, the fact that something happened repeatedly does not answer the larger doctrinal question of why it was repeated and whether God intended it to continue permanently.

A practice may continue because:

- The same people remained within the same religious culture;
- Former covenant habits were still deeply established;
- Understanding had not yet fully developed;
- Religious expectations remained strong;
- Believers were adjusting their conduct out of consideration for others;
- The transition continued for many years.

Therefore, repetition itself cannot become the final authority. The reason for the repeated practice must still be understood from Scripture.

If an action appears once, it must be interpreted. If it appears many times, it must still be interpreted.

The number of occurrences does not remove the need for context. Doctrine is not created by counting examples. Doctrine is established by understanding what Scripture teaches through those examples.

This distinction is especially important in Acts because the book records a period during which former covenant practices could remain visible while believers were still learning the full implications of the New Covenant. Repetition may therefore reveal continuity of practice without proving permanent authority.

The same principle applies when a Christian practice has continued for generations. Long history, widespread acceptance and sincere participation may show how deeply a practice has become established, but none of these can replace Scriptural authority.

A practice does not become a permanent New Covenant requirement simply because many believers have continued it for a long time. It must still be tested by the full testimony of Scripture and the completed reality found in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the repeated appearance of a practice in Acts establish occurrence without establishing permanence?

Personal Reflection

How much has a practice's long history influenced your confidence that it is required by God? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

What would help you test a familiar repeated practice by God's Word before treating it as necessary for yourself? State one specific conclusion you need to correct or confirm in the Bible, and how it will affect your conduct.

The Early Church Was Still in Transition

We must remember the setting in which the repeated practices occurred. The early Jewish believers had lived under the Law of Moses, the Temple still stood, Jewish customs remained deeply established, and circumcision and ceremonial practices still shaped the religious world around them.

Therefore, a repeated action may reveal the persistence of that former religious framework rather than the establishment of a permanent New Covenant requirement. Acts itself gives us a clear example of how strongly that earlier framework remained.

Luke wrote in **Acts 21:20**:

> *"And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:"*

There were *"many thousands"* who believed, yet they were also *"zealous of the law."* Their number did not restore the Law to permanent covenant authority, and their zeal did not reverse what Jesus Christ had fulfilled.

Therefore, large numbers and repeated practice do not establish permanence. Human repetition cannot create authority that Scripture does not give.

Acts 21 shows that former covenant thinking did not disappear immediately. Those believers genuinely believed in Jesus Christ, but their religious background continued to influence them.

This helps explain how an outward practice could continue repeatedly during the transition. The continuation may tell us something about the people performing the action, their background and their level of understanding.

It does not necessarily tell us that God intended the action to remain permanently. Therefore, the statement *"The early Church repeatedly practised it"* must still be examined carefully.

Scripture establishes that Jesus Christ fulfilled the former covenant order. Repeated human action therefore cannot reverse divine fulfilment.

If Scripture says *"But Christ being come,"* repetition cannot make the reality future again. If Scripture says *"ye are complete in him,"* repetition cannot make the believer spiritually incomplete without an outward practice.

If eternal redemption has already been obtained, repeated ceremony cannot make redemption partial. Repetition cannot override fulfilment.

The completed work of Jesus Christ remains greater than the frequency of any outward practice. Human repetition must remain subject to divine reality.

The Permanent Church Must Reflect the Permanent Reality

The permanent pattern of the Church must reflect what God permanently established in Jesus Christ. That reality includes the new birth, the indwelling Spirit, complete salvation, righteousness in Christ, spiritual life and completeness in Him.

Therefore, the Church must not be permanently defined by practices that may have belonged to the circumstances of the transition. The permanent pattern must agree with the permanent reality.

What continues permanently must be established by Scripture as belonging to the New Covenant itself. Historical repetition during transition cannot create that permanence.

If an outward practice is to be treated as permanently binding upon the New Covenant Church, repetition alone is not enough. The wider Scriptural witness must establish its authority.

We must still ask:

- Did Jesus Christ command it as continuing practice?
- Do the Epistles establish it doctrinally?
- Does the wider New Testament preserve it?
- Does it agree with the completed work of Christ?
- Does it belong to the New Covenant reality rather than to the transitional setting?

Only then can permanence be established. Repetition may support the historical record, but it cannot replace Scriptural authority.

This principle becomes especially important when we later examine water baptism. Water baptism appears repeatedly in Acts, and that fact must be acknowledged honestly.

However, the question cannot end with how many times the practice appears. We must ask why it continued, what the water represented, what Jesus Christ had already fulfilled and what God had already done inwardly.

We must also ask whether repetition arose from permanent command or transitional practice, and whether the wider New Testament establishes water baptism as permanently necessary. The same principle applies to communion and feet washing.

Repeated appearance does not remove the need for interpretation. Historical frequency and permanent New Covenant authority are not automatically the same thing.

We can therefore state the truth of this section clearly: Repetition does not automatically establish permanence. A practice may occur many times during a period of transition without becoming a permanent New Covenant requirement. The full testimony of Scripture must determine whether the practice belongs to the completed reality found in Jesus Christ.

This leads naturally to another question. If repetition does not by itself establish permanence, could some recorded actions have continued because believers were adjusting their conduct to suit the circumstances or the understanding of others?

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the continued zeal for the Law in Acts 21 help explain repeated practices during the transition?

Personal Reflection

What difference should Christ's fulfilment make when you hear that many sincere believers followed a practice? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

How could you reconsider a widely accepted practice while remaining respectful towards those who follow it? Examine where you have placed your confidence. What will you change to keep that confidence in Jesus Christ?

CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS IS NOT THE SAME AS A COMMAND

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous section established that repetition does not automatically establish permanence. A practice may continue many times during a period of transition without becoming a permanent New Covenant requirement. This leads to another important distinction: An action may be performed out of consideration for others or because of particular circumstances without becoming a command for the whole Church.

The book of Acts records believers living within a world still strongly shaped by Jewish expectations, customs and religious sensitivities. Therefore, when an apostle participated in a familiar practice, we must ask whether he was establishing permanent doctrine or taking account of people who were still in transition.

An action may be appropriate within a particular circumstance without becoming universally binding. The reason for the action must therefore be considered carefully.

A believer may act in a certain way because of:

- Jewish sensitivities;
- Local circumstances;
- Concern about unnecessary offence;
- Missionary opportunity;
- Religious expectations;

- The understanding of the people involved.

These circumstances do not make the action meaningless, but they do affect how the action must be interpreted. Context matters because circumstance and command are not automatically the same thing.

Paul Adjusted His Conduct to Reach Others

Paul openly explained that he sometimes adjusted his conduct in order to reach people with the Gospel. His purpose was not to place himself permanently back under the former covenant but to remove unnecessary barriers to those he was trying to reach.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**:

> *"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you."*

Paul says plainly, *"unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews."* His purpose was evangelistic rather than doctrinal.

He was willing to adjust his conduct for others where doing so did not compromise the truth of the Gospel. Therefore, an outward action performed among Jewish people must be understood according to its purpose and setting.

Suppose Paul acted in a way familiar to Jewish believers. That action does not automatically mean that the former covenant requirement had regained authority.

Paul had already taught clearly concerning the believer's liberty in Christ. His decision to adjust his conduct therefore cannot be interpreted in a way that contradicts his own inspired teaching.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:1**:

> *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."*

Paul could act in a way familiar to Jewish people without teaching that believers were permanently bound again to the former covenant order. His decision to adjust his conduct could not restore covenant authority to something Jesus Christ has fulfilled. The action must therefore be interpreted according to both its immediate purpose and the wider Scriptural teaching concerning liberty in Christ.

When Acts records an apostle performing an action, we must ask why he was doing it. The outward action alone cannot tell us whether it was intended as permanent doctrine.

Was he obeying a permanent command from Jesus Christ? Was he acting under direct guidance of the Holy Ghost, or was he adjusting his conduct for others in order to avoid unnecessary offence and preserve an opportunity to preach the Gospel?

These are not the same kinds of actions. The context must determine which kind of action Scripture is recording.

Such an adjustment may be entirely appropriate within its setting. A believer may choose not to exercise a liberty because doing so would unnecessarily offend someone whose understanding is still developing.

Paul gives a clear example of this principle. His willingness to abstain arose from concern for another believer rather than from a universal prohibition against the thing itself.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 8:13**:

> *"Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."*

Paul's willingness to abstain does not create a permanent prohibition against eating meat. It reveals his concern for the spiritual welfare of another person.

The same principle helps us interpret actions during the transition. A temporary adjustment made out of consideration for others does not automatically create a permanent ordinance.

Consideration for Others Must Never Lead to Compromise

There is also an important limit to adjusting our conduct for others. Paul could adapt his conduct to reach people, but he would not surrender the truth of the Gospel.

When an adjustment threatened to bring people into bondage or to alter the Gospel, Paul resisted it. His concern for people never became permission to place believers under a requirement God had not imposed.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:4-5**:

> *"And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."*

Paul could adjust his conduct for others in matters of circumstance, but he would not allow those adjustments to become bondage or alter *"the truth of the gospel."* That distinction must remain clear.

Consideration for others must always remain subject to revealed truth. A believer may adjust behaviour for the sake of others, but that adjustment cannot be allowed to create false doctrine.

A person may take part in a practice out of consideration for others without declaring the practice necessary for salvation, righteousness or Church membership. A believer may also act graciously towards people in transition without teaching that their former religious expectations permanently define the New Covenant Church.

The truth determines the limits of such consideration. Human concern must remain beneath the authority of what God has revealed.

Why This Matters to the Ordinances

This distinction becomes especially important when outward practices appear in Acts. If an apostle participates in a practice familiar to Jewish believers, we cannot immediately conclude that the practice is therefore a permanent ordinance.

We must first ask:

- Was this directly commanded by Jesus Christ?
- Was the action necessary to salvation?
- Was it done out of consideration for others?
- Was it connected with Jewish expectations?
- Did later New Testament teaching preserve it permanently?
- Does it agree with the completed reality in Jesus Christ?

The possibility that someone acted out of consideration for others means that historical action must always be interpreted carefully. An outward act may be appropriate within one situation without becoming a universal command.

We can therefore state the truth of this section clearly: Consideration for others is not the same as a command. An apostle may participate in a practice because of the circumstances or understanding of the people involved without establishing that practice as a permanent New Covenant requirement. The context and the full teaching of Scripture must determine the meaning of the action.

We have now established several safeguards for interpreting Acts. The next step is to bring those safeguards together into a practical method that can be applied whenever we encounter an action in the historical record.

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How could Paul adjust his conduct for others without making that adjustment a command for the whole Church?

Personal Reflection

How do you distinguish considerate behaviour from surrendering the truth of the Gospel? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

In a religious disagreement, how could you show consideration without accepting a requirement that the Bible does not impose? Identify one conviction or attitude that this teaching challenges. What specific response will you make?

HOW WE SHOULD READ AN ACTION IN ACTS

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous section established that consideration for others is not the same as a command. An action may be performed because of particular circumstances without becoming a permanent requirement for the whole Church.

We can now bring the principles of this Study Guide together into a practical method. When Acts records an action, we must interpret that action before deciding what it establishes for the New Covenant Church.

The question is not only what believers did. We must also ask why they did it, what they understood, and what the full New Testament teaches concerning that action.

The first question should always concern what Jesus Christ had already accomplished. Scripture establishes that Jesus Christ had come, the former shadows had reached their fulfilment, eternal redemption had been obtained, salvation was complete, and the born-again believer was complete in Him.

Therefore, no action recorded in Acts can be interpreted in a way that reverses those truths. If Scripture declares the believer complete in Christ, a transitional action cannot make that believer spiritually incomplete until an outward ceremony is added.

The completed reality in Jesus Christ must remain the foundation. Historical action must be interpreted from that reality rather than being allowed to redefine it.

Was the Action Commanded?

The next question is whether Jesus Christ directly commanded the action. There is an important difference between a direct command from Jesus Christ and an action recorded later in historical narrative.

If Jesus commanded something, the command itself carries authority. If Acts records someone performing an action, we must determine whether that action was the fulfilment of a command or arose from some other circumstance.

Therefore, we must ask whether the action was actually commanded. Historical occurrence and direct command must not automatically be treated as the same kind of Scriptural evidence.

Acts also records occasions when the Holy Ghost directly directed believers. In such accounts, the source of the direction is stated clearly.

Luke wrote in **Acts 13:2**:

> *"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."*

Here the direction is explicit. The Holy Ghost said what was to be done.

That is different from Luke simply recording that someone chose to perform an action. Therefore, when reading Acts, we should ask whether the action was directed by the Holy Ghost or simply recorded as something a believer did.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do a direct command and the Holy Ghost's stated direction differ from an action that Luke simply records?

Personal Reflection

Why is that difference important when you decide what an account in Acts asks of you? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

When you next study an action in Acts, how will you examine the authority the Bible gives it? Name one choice in your own life that should change because of this truth, and explain why.

The Importance of Historical Context

We must also consider the understanding of the person involved. Acts records believers whose understanding was still developing.

Peter provides a clear example. His words show that God had to bring his understanding concerning Gentiles into agreement with New Covenant truth.

Peter said in **Acts 10:28**:

> *"And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."*

Peter's conduct before this understanding must therefore be read in the light of the fact that his thinking had not yet been fully corrected. This gives us an important question: What did the person understand at the time the action occurred?

The transition did not take place in a religious vacuum. Jewish believers had lived under the Law of Moses, the Temple system, circumcision, ceremonial distinctions and religious customs.

Acts shows that these influences could remain for many years. Therefore, when an action appears in Acts, we should ask whether former covenant thinking was still influencing the action.

This does not automatically make the action wrong. However, it means that the action must not be assumed to represent the final New Covenant pattern simply because it occurred.

An apostle could adapt his conduct because of the understanding or circumstances of others. Therefore, we must distinguish permanent doctrine from temporary adjustments made out of consideration for others.

We should ask whether the action was establishing permanent truth or adjusting his conduct for people within a particular situation. This becomes especially important when an action resembles something familiar from the former Jewish religious world.

Such adjustments may explain why an action occurred without giving that action permanent covenant authority. Context must determine the meaning of the action.

Transition Does Not Allow Us to Dismiss Scripture

Recognising that Acts records a period of transition does not give us permission to dismiss an action simply because it does not agree with a conclusion we prefer. Every account in Acts must still be examined honestly according to its context and the full testimony of Scripture.

The transition is not an excuse to avoid difficult Scriptures. It is part of the Scriptural setting by which those Scriptures must be understood.

The inspired record itself may tell us how an action should be understood. Sometimes Scripture commends what happened, sometimes it records the action without direct comment, and sometimes it clearly corrects the conduct. Paul's correction of Peter demonstrates this principle.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:14**:

> *"But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"*

Scripture does not leave us to guess whether Peter's conduct should be imitated. It tells us that he *"walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel."*

Therefore, we must ask whether Scripture commends the action, corrects it, or leaves it to be interpreted by the wider New Testament. The record itself must guide our understanding.

Does the Wider New Testament Confirm It?

No action in Acts should be isolated from the rest of the New Testament. We must ask whether the words of Jesus and the Epistles confirm the action as permanent New Covenant practice.

An historical action may occur once or many times, but permanent doctrine requires the full testimony of Scripture. Repetition cannot replace doctrinal authority.

Therefore, we should ask whether the wider New Testament establishes the practice as continuing doctrine. The full Scriptural witness must determine permanence.

This is the final and controlling test. Every action must agree with what God has already established in Jesus Christ.

We must ask whether the action agrees with:

- Complete salvation in Jesus Christ;
- The believer's completeness in Him;
- The indwelling Spirit;
- New birth;
- The completed work of Christ;
- The spiritual reality of the New Covenant.

If an interpretation gives an outward action a role Scripture has already assigned to Jesus Christ and His inward work, that interpretation must be examined carefully. The outward action must agree with the spiritual reality.

A Simple Scriptural Test

When we encounter an action in Acts, we should therefore apply the same questions consistently:

1. Was it directly commanded by Jesus Christ?
2. Was it directed by the Holy Ghost?
3. What did the person understand at that point?
4. Was former covenant thinking still influencing the action?
5. Was the action done out of consideration for others or because of particular circumstances?
6. Does Scripture commend or correct the action?
7. Does the wider New Testament establish it as permanent practice?
8. Does it agree with the completed New Covenant reality in Jesus Christ?

These questions prevent us from treating every historical action as though it carried identical doctrinal authority. They keep the completed work of Jesus Christ and the full testimony of Scripture as the controlling standard.

Why This Matters to the Ordinances

This method will become essential when we examine communion, feet washing and water baptism. When an outward action appears in Acts, we must not simply point to the event and conclude that because believers performed it, the Church must continue it permanently.

We must apply the full Scriptural test. We must determine whether the action was commanded, belonged to the transition, was done out of consideration for others, was influenced by former covenant understanding, was confirmed by later teaching and was consistent with the reality already found in Jesus Christ.

Only then can we determine what the recorded action establishes for the Church. Historical occurrence must never replace Scriptural interpretation.

We can therefore state the truth of this section clearly: An action recorded in Acts must be interpreted according to its command, context, purpose, the understanding of the people involved, the wider New Testament and the completed reality found in Jesus Christ. The fact that an action occurred does not, by itself, establish permanent New Covenant practice.

We are now prepared to apply this interpretive method directly to the subject towards which this module is moving. That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must an action's context and the wider New Testament be considered together?

Personal Reflection

How can recognising the transition help you face a difficult verse honestly rather than dismissing it? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

Choose an action in Acts you find difficult. What do you need to examine before reaching a conclusion about its meaning for you? What assumption will you examine, and how will your response change if it does not agree with the Bible?

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE ORDINANCES

The previous section brought together the principles needed to interpret an action recorded in Acts. We must consider the command, the context, the purpose of the action, the understanding of the people involved, the wider New Testament and the completed reality found in Jesus Christ.

We can now apply that method directly to the subject towards which this module is moving. The New Testament records outward practices connected with communion, feet washing and water baptism, and the fact that these actions appear in Scripture must be acknowledged honestly.

However, the presence of an outward action in the New Testament does not, by itself, establish that the action is a permanent New Covenant ordinance. The action must still be interpreted according to the full testimony of Scripture.

It is important to ask whether early believers performed an outward action, but that question is not sufficient. Historical occurrence establishes what happened, while further Scriptural examination is required to determine what the action means for the New Covenant Church.

We must also ask:

- Why did they do it?
- What did the action represent?
- What covenant setting surrounded it?
- Was the action directly commanded by Jesus Christ?
- Was it connected with the transition?
- Had the spiritual reality already been accomplished?
- Does the wider New Testament preserve the outward action as permanently necessary?

Without these questions, historical practice can easily be turned into permanent doctrine. We must allow Scripture to establish both the meaning and the authority of the action.

The Completed Work of Christ Must Come First

Before examining any outward ordinance, we must begin with what Jesus Christ had already accomplished. The ordinance must be interpreted from the completed reality rather than the completed reality being redefined by the ordinance.

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 born-again believer is *"complete in him."* Therefore, an outward ordinance cannot be given a spiritual function that makes the believer incomplete without it.

If an interpretation of an ordinance requires us to believe that salvation remains unfinished until a ceremony is performed, that interpretation must be examined carefully. The completed work of Jesus Christ must interpret the ordinance, and the ordinance must not be allowed to redefine the completed work of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must Christ's completed work govern the spiritual meaning assigned to an outward ordinance?

Personal Reflection

What does completeness in Christ mean to you when a ceremony is presented as completing salvation? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

What would help you examine an ordinance honestly while keeping Christ's completed work as your starting point? Examine where you have placed your confidence. What will you change to keep that confidence in Jesus Christ?

We Must Distinguish Sequence From Cause

Acts often records events in sequence. One thing happens, and another event follows.

However, sequence does not automatically establish spiritual cause. If God has already performed the inward work and an outward action follows afterwards, we must not assume that the outward action produced what God had already accomplished.

Suppose Scripture shows that God has purified the heart, given the Holy Ghost, accepted the believer and brought that person into relationship with Jesus Christ. If an outward action occurs afterwards, the action cannot be credited with producing those realities unless Scripture clearly says that it did.

What happens afterwards is not automatically the cause of what happened before it. This principle will become especially important when we later examine water baptism.

If God has already purified the heart by faith, an outward washing cannot be credited with producing that purification. If God has already given the Holy Ghost, an outward act cannot be credited with placing the Spirit within the believer.

If God has already accepted the believer, a ceremony cannot afterwards become the true cause of that acceptance. If God has already given spiritual life, an outward action cannot be made the source of that life.

The inward work of God must remain the reality. A later outward action cannot be given credit for producing something Scripture says God had already accomplished.

The Inward Reality Is Greater Than the Outward Action

This principle reaches directly into the central truth of this module. The believer does not possess only an outward representation of Jesus Christ.

The believer has the Person. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit.

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."*

The identifying spiritual reality is the indwelling Spirit of Christ. An outward ceremony cannot place Christ within someone who does not possess Him, nor can it improve His indwelling within the born-again believer.

Therefore, outward performance must never replace the inward reality as the test of spiritual belonging. The Person remains greater than the representation.

When we later examine communion, we must not begin only with the fact that bread and a cup appear in the New Testament. We must ask what those outward elements represent and what spiritual reality Jesus Christ has already established.

If communion is said to represent fellowship with Jesus Christ, the deeper question is whether bread and a cup create that fellowship or whether the born-again believer already possesses fellowship with Him because He dwells within. The outward action must be tested against the spiritual reality.

The representation cannot become the source of what it represents. Jesus Christ Himself must remain the reality.

The same principle applies to feet washing. If the action represents humility, love and service, we must ask whether washing another person's feet creates those spiritual qualities within the heart.

True humility, love and service flow from the life of Jesus Christ within the believer. An outward action may illustrate those truths, but the illustration must never become greater than the spiritual reality it represents.

Therefore, the outward washing must be examined according to the inward life of Christ. The act cannot be made the source of qualities that come from Him.

Water baptism will require especially careful examination because it appears repeatedly in Acts. Those Scriptures must not be ignored, but neither can we simply count the references and conclude that repetition proves permanence.

We must ask:

- What did the water represent?

- What baptism did Jesus Christ come to bring?
- Was the person already born again?
- Had the Holy Ghost already been received?
- Had the heart already been purified?
- Does water give spiritual life?
- Does water complete salvation?
- What baptism brings the believer into the one body?
- Why did water baptism continue during the Acts transition?
- Does the full New Testament preserve it as a permanent New Covenant requirement?

These questions are necessary if we are to allow Scripture itself to determine the answer. Historical occurrence and permanent spiritual necessity must not be confused.

This becomes especially important when ordinances are used to determine who belongs to the Church. If an outward ordinance has no saving virtue, we must be careful not to make it the defining mark of spiritual membership.

The New Testament directs us first towards inward realities. Has the person been born again? Does the Spirit of Christ dwell within, and does that person belong to Jesus Christ?

Those are spiritual questions. An outward action must never be allowed to become the test of a spiritual reality that Scripture locates in the inward work of God.

The Church consists of those who belong to Jesus Christ. Outward ceremony cannot create that belonging.

The Ordinance Must Be Tested Against the Reality

For every claimed New Covenant ordinance, we must ask what the outward act represents and whether the spiritual reality has already come in Jesus Christ. We must also ask whether the born-again believer already possesses that reality.

We should ask:

- What does the outward act represent?
- What spiritual truth is associated with it?
- Has that spiritual reality already come in Jesus Christ?
- Does the born-again believer already possess that reality?
- Does Scripture state that the outward act continues permanently?
- Is the action part of the transitional record?
- Does the wider New Testament establish it as necessary?

These questions must govern the individual ordinance studies that follow. The reality must remain the standard by which the representation is understood.

We can therefore state the truth of this section clearly: An outward ordinance cannot be made necessary to produce, complete or confirm a spiritual reality that God has already accomplished in the born-again believer through Jesus Christ. Every outward practice must be interpreted in harmony with the completed New Covenant reality.

Historical actions recorded in Acts must be interpreted according to their setting, purpose and the full testimony of Scripture rather than being turned automatically into permanent New Covenant commands.

The final section will bring these principles together and state the governing conclusion of the Study Guide. That brings us to:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can an outward action that follows God's inward work not automatically be credited with causing it?

Personal Reflection

How does distinguishing the inward reality from its outward representation help you consider communion, feet washing or water baptism? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

Which claim about an outward practice do you want to examine more carefully in relation to what Christ has already accomplished? Identify one practice or belief you will test against the Bible, and explain what you are prepared to change.

CONCLUSION - THE RECORD MUST BE READ IN THE LIGHT OF THE REALITY

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous section showed why the principles established throughout this Study Guide matter to the ordinances. Before an outward practice can be treated as a permanent New Covenant requirement, it must be interpreted according to the full testimony of Scripture and the completed reality found in Jesus Christ.

We can now bring the teaching together. The book of Acts is inspired Scripture, and Luke faithfully records what happened as the Gospel was proclaimed and believers lived through a period of transition.

However, the inspiration of the record does not mean that every human action recorded within it becomes a permanent command for the New Covenant Church. The inspired record tells us truthfully what happened, while Scripture must also show us what those events establish.

The Record Is Inspired

We must never weaken our confidence in the book of Acts. Acts belongs to the Word of God, and its record of the apostles, believers, disputes, corrections and spread of the Gospel is trustworthy.

Yet an inspired record can faithfully record human misunderstanding, developing understanding and conduct that required correction. The record is inspired, but the human action recorded within it must still be understood according to what Scripture teaches about that action.

This distinction allows us to honour the inspiration of Acts without turning every recorded action into a permanent command. The truthfulness of the record and the correctness of every human action within the record are not the same thing.

Acts tells us what people did, but that does not automatically tell us what God commands every believer to continue doing. Historical description and permanent command must therefore be distinguished.

Throughout this Study Guide we have distinguished between:

- What Scripture describes;
- What Jesus Christ commands;
- What the Holy Ghost directs;
- What the apostles teach as doctrine;
- What believers did within transitional circumstances.

These distinctions are necessary if we are to read Acts accurately. A recorded action may be important without becoming a permanent New Covenant requirement.

The apostles genuinely belonged to Jesus Christ. They had heard His teaching, received His commission and were used mightily in the proclamation of the Gospel.

Yet Scripture also shows that their understanding continued to develop. This does not diminish their calling or the authority of their inspired teaching.

It shows us something important about the transition: The truth was already established, while human understanding was still being brought into agreement with that truth. Revelation could therefore come before full understanding.
The transition involved more than incomplete understanding. Peter later demonstrated that a person could know the truth and still fail to act consistently with what he knew.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:14**:

> *"But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"*

Paul measured Peter's conduct by *"the truth of the gospel."* The standard was not Peter's position or behaviour but the truth God had already revealed.
Therefore, human conduct must be interpreted by revealed truth. Revealed truth must never be redefined by human conduct. This principle must govern every historical action recorded during the transition.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can confidence in the inspiration of Acts be maintained while recognising conduct that the Bible corrects?

Personal Reflection

What have Peter's experiences helped you see about your own need for both understanding and a truthful response?

Action Step

What would help you respond to correction without treating a respected person's conduct as greater than the Gospel? Choose one familiar claim, check the surrounding verses, and state what you will change if your earlier understanding was mistaken.

Historical Practice Must Be Tested by Scripture

Acts must therefore be read together with the words of Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Epistles. Historical narrative tells us what happened, while the wider New Testament helps us understand what those events establish doctrinally.

We must not isolate one event, one apostolic action or one repeated practice and allow it to become the whole doctrine. The full testimony of Scripture must speak.

This does not set Acts against the Epistles. It allows Scripture to interpret Scripture and places each historical action within the complete New Testament witness.

A practice may appear many times in Acts. Repetition proves that the practice occurred repeatedly, but it does not by itself prove that God intended the practice to remain permanently.

The early Church existed within a world still strongly influenced by former covenant customs and expectations. Therefore, repetition must be interpreted within that setting.

Likewise, adjustments made for particular circumstances cannot automatically be turned into universal command. Continued practice is not the same as continuing authority.

Christ's Completed Work Remains the Standard

Everything must finally return to Jesus Christ. His completed work remains the standard by which transitional conduct and outward practice must be understood.

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

> *"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

Nothing recorded during the transition can make those words less true. If the believer is complete in Jesus Christ, transitional conduct cannot make that believer spiritually incomplete.

If salvation is complete, human practice cannot make salvation partial. If Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, an outward ceremony cannot supply a Person who is already dwelling within.

Therefore, the completed reality in Jesus Christ must interpret the transitional record. The transitional record must never be used to diminish the completed reality in Jesus Christ.

This gives us the governing method for reading Acts. When we encounter an action, we must examine what kind of action Scripture is recording and what authority Scripture gives it.

We must ask:

- Was it commanded?
- Was it directed by the Holy Ghost?
- What did the people involved understand?
- Was former covenant thinking still present?
- Was the action taken out of consideration for others?
- Does Scripture commend or correct it?
- Does the wider New Testament establish it permanently?
- Does it agree with the completed New Covenant reality in Jesus Christ?

Only after these questions have been considered can we determine what the action establishes for the Church. Historical occurrence must be interpreted rather than simply repeated.

The Central Truth of This Study

We can therefore summarise this Study Guide in one statement: Acts is an inspired and truthful record of believers living through a period of transition. It records what God did and what people did while their understanding and conduct were being brought into agreement with the New Covenant reality already established in Jesus Christ. Therefore, a recorded action, even an apostolic action, does not by itself establish permanent New Covenant practice. It must be interpreted according to the full testimony of Scripture and the completed reality found in Christ.

The final distinction can be stated clearly:

- The action is not greater than the truth;
- The apostle is not greater than the Gospel;
- Transitional practice is not greater than the completed work of Christ;
- The outward representation is not greater than the spiritual reality.

Therefore, the record must be read in the light of the reality, and that reality is Jesus Christ. The book of Acts records the transition, but Jesus Christ remains the unchanging standard by which that transition must be understood.

As the Gospel moved beyond the former covenant boundaries of natural Israel, God demonstrated that His purpose was not confined to one nation. The same New Covenant truth must govern our understanding of every action recorded during that transition.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must Christ's completed work govern our understanding of actions recorded in Acts?

Personal Reflection

Which assumption about Acts has this teaching challenged in your own understanding?

Action Step

Name one belief about Acts that you will test by the Bible. What will you change if you discover it is mistaken?

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

How can Acts be an inspired and truthful record while some human actions in it still need interpretation or correction? Explain why the completed New Covenant reality in Christ must govern our understanding of the transition.

2. Understanding

How do the apostles' continuing need to learn and Peter's experience with Cornelius show that revelation could come before full understanding? Explain why this does not mean the Gospel itself was changing.

3. Personal Reflection

Peter knew that God had accepted Gentiles, yet later withdrew from eating with them. What does the difference between knowledge and conduct lead you to consider about your own response to truth under pressure?

4. Response to Truth

Paul judged Peter's conduct by the truth of the Gospel. What does accepting that standard ask of you when a respected believer's example differs from what the Bible teaches? Explain your personal response.

5. Action Step

Choose one action recorded in Acts that you want to understand more clearly. How will you examine its command, context and purpose alongside the wider New Testament before deciding what it means for your own beliefs or choices?

6. Early Response

Have you already begun to examine one action recorded in Acts through its command, context, purpose and the wider New Testament before deciding what it means for your beliefs or choices? If yes, explain what you examined and what became clearer. If not, explain what you are still considering or what has made it difficult to begin.

7. Ongoing Practice

When you repeatedly meet a familiar practice in Acts, what will help you distinguish its occurrence from permanent New Covenant authority? Explain how reading Acts and the Epistles together can guide your continuing study.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

What is the difference between the Bible describing an action and establishing a continuing command? Use Bible verses to explain why neither apostolic position nor repeated conduct alone settles the authority of an outward ordinance.

9. Living the Truth

Someone asks you to join a religious practice out of consideration for others, then says it is necessary for acceptance by God. How would Paul's willingness to adapt and his refusal to compromise the Gospel help you respond respectfully? Explain where you would draw the boundary.

10. Final Response

Bring together what Christ has completed and what Acts records about outward practices. Why must the inward reality in Christ govern the meaning given to communion, feet washing and water baptism? Explain what this has clarified for you and what you still need to consider.