

Lesson Six: Acts – The Question of Historical Precedent

I. Introduction:

A. What is “Historical Precedent”

1. “Historical Precedent” simply refers to “binding examples.”
2. That is, examples in the Bible from which we learn binding doctrine.
 - a. Acts is the inspired historical record of the establishment and spread of the New Testament church.
 - b. It is given to provide for us a pattern of what the New Testament church is supposed to “look like.”
 - 1) Even though this was not Luke’s primary purpose in writing Acts.
 - 2) Luke’s primary purpose, evident in the address and content of the book, was to record the spread of the gospel from exclusively Hebrew Jerusalem to predominately Gentile Rome (cf. Acts 1:1, 8).
 - 3) Nevertheless, we have in this historical record what the Divinely instituted and organized First Century church looked like.
 - 4) If we would be the New Testament church today, we must “look like” the church in the New Testament.
3. In studying Acts, we must take care to discern what is a “binding example” and what is not.

B. Acts is Historical Narrative

1. The book of Acts is a narrative, so much of what was discussed in the previous lesson will also apply to Acts.
2. However, Acts is different in that we do not just learn “moral principles” but “binding practice” for the church today.
 - a. We do not look to the Old Testament narratives for the work and worship of the church today.
 - b. However, we do find a great deal of “doctrine” for the work and worship of the church within the historical narrative of Acts.
 - c. Therefore, because of its application for the church today, it is studied differently than would be the Old Testament narratives.

II. Looking for The “Binding” Examples in Acts

A. Examples of Conversion:

1. Acts 2:37-41, 47 – Heard, believed, repented, baptized.
2. Acts 8:5-13 – Heard, believed, baptized.
3. Acts 8:35-41 – Heard, believed, confessed, baptized.
4. Acts 9:1-9; 22:6-16; 26:12-19 – Heard, believed, repented, baptized.
5. Acts 16:13-15 – Heard, believed, baptized.
6. Acts 16:30-34 – Heard, believed, baptized.
7. Acts 18:8 – Heard, believed, baptized.
8. Acts 19:1-7 – Heard, believed, baptized.
9. If this is what people did to be “added to the church” in the New Testament, then it is what people must do today be added to the New Testament church.

- B. Examples of Worship:
1. Acts 2:42
 - a. Assembly – “fellowship”
 - b. Teaching – “apostle’s doctrine”
 - c. Lord’s Supper – “breaking of bread”
 - d. “Prayers”
 2. Acts 20:7
 - a. Assembly – “the disciples came together”
 - b. On Sunday – “first day of the week” (cf. Acts 2:1).
 - c. Lord’s Supper – “break bread”
 - d. Teaching – “Paul...spoke”
 3. Worship in daily devotion:
 - a. Singing and Praying (Acts 16:25).
 - b. Daily Study (Acts 17:11).
 4. If we want to be the New Testament church today, then we must worship the way the church in the New Testament worshipped.

- C. Examples of Work:
1. Acts 4:23-31, A “prayer meeting”? – Edification
 2. Acts 4:32-37 – Benevolence
 3. Acts ALL – Evangelism (cf. Acts 1:8; 8:4).
 - a. The content of the evangelistic message is also exemplified in Acts.
 - 1) Acts 8:12 – “the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ”
 - 2) Acts 28:23 – “the kingdom of God ... Jesus”
 - 3) Acts 8:31 – “the kingdom of God ... the Lord Jesus Christ”
 - b. They preached about Christ AND His kingdom!

III. Non-binding Examples:

- A. Incidentals (cf. Acts 20:7, 8; 4:32-37).
- B. Bound to custom or culture (Acts 6:6; 10:9; 13:3; 20:37).
- C. Limited in scope (Acts 6:8; 8:4-8, 17).

IV. Common Sense Is KING!

- A. When studying Acts – historical narrative – the majority of the questions concerning what is binding on the church today, what is historical principle, and what is simply incidental information, can be solved with just a little common sense.
- B. When we keep a close eye on the **purpose** of the book we can avoid many of the mistakes people make in applying the examples of Acts.