

Point #4

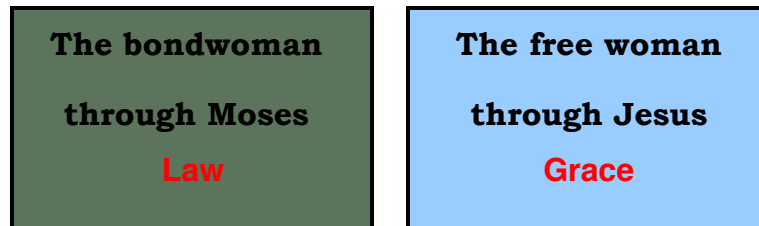
Acts is the story of the coming of a New Covenant Community.

Do you agree or disagree?

- A spirit-filled church should not experience conflict among leaders with respect to its direction and policies.
- The Clergy are responsible for making all important decisions for the body.
- A gracious (New Covenant) church should not excommunicate people.
- Moral failure is far more serious than false teaching.
- Rules and discipline are not a part of a grace oriented (New Covenant) church.
- The sign of a church’s success is measured by how popular it is and how smoothly it runs.
- Church leaders that are spirit-filled should not be side tracked by introspective and self-critical examination.
- We should expect that if we are walking in the Spirit, God will make His will clear on all important issues.
- The role of lay people is to “show up”, “shut up”, and “cough up.”

Gal. 4:22-24 “²² For it is written that **Abraham** had two sons, one by the **bondwoman** and one by the **free woman**. ²³ But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the **promise**. ²⁴ This is allegorically speaking: for these women are two covenants,”

The two sons of Abraham



1. The New Covenant Community is the Body (church) of Jesus Christ. It is characterized by the grace covenant in contrast to the law covenant.
2. The Promise given through Abraham was a redemptive covenant that involved the justification of individuals by faith and also the formation of a community of believers who were to be “the Body of Christ” through His Spirit.

SINAI	CALVARY
Through Moses With Israel The Law Conditioned upon man's obedience Based upon works Was concluded at the Cross	Through Christ With the Church Grace Conditioned upon Christ's obedience Based upon faith Was initiated at the Cross

<p>Demanded obedience Exodus – Gospels</p> <p>Malachi 3:7 “Return to me, and I will return to you.’ says the Lord Almighty.”</p>	<p>Enabled obedience Acts – Revelation</p> <p>I Jn.4:19 “We love because he first loved us.”</p>
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A. Acts describes the nature and function of New Covenant community.

Acts 2:41-47 “⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ⁴² And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they {began} selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ And day-by-day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

A healthy Christian community starts with personal faith.

Three views of the church. (from *Life in the Spirit* by Thomas C. Oden p 263-4)

	Pietistic	Orthodox	Activist
Model	Cross Christ	Church of Christ	Incarnation of Christ
Typical historical expressions	Evangelical Revivalism Pietism	Liturgical Eastern, Roman, Anglican Catholic orthodoxy	Liberal “Mainline” protestantism Political theology
Focus of common life	Conversion Discipline of regenerate life Religion of the heart	Sacramental life Unity of apostolic teaching Religion of the book	Social action Relevant service in the world Religion of the people
Key values and achievements	Vitality Inner life	Authority Correct doctrine	Solidarity Social change
Teaching concentration	New birth The individual Personal regeneration	Authoritative dogma and catechetics The eternal Apostolic authority	Reconciling base communities The social Social action
Church and society correlation	Christ against culture	Christ of or above culture	Christ transforming culture
Heterodox tendency	Gnosticism	idealism	pragmatism
Focus of human predicament	Sin	Heresy	Injustice
Key mark	Holiness	Apostolicity	Unity

A healthy Christian community is the “end game” of the Kingdom.

<i>Point of emphasis #1</i>	<i>Sphere of ministry</i>	<i>Point of emphasis #2</i>
Hostile enemy	THE WORLD (NON-CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENT)	Opportunity, Mission field
Faith	SELF (PERSONAL REGENERATION)	Faithfulness
Personal growth	THE CHURCH (CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY)	Service to others

1. The “end game” of the Kingdom is “Christian community”.
2. The world is the larger environment from which the elect of God are called to participation in the Kingdom by personal faith in Christ.
3. Personal faith unites us with “the Body of Christ” – a community of the Spirit.

A healthy Christian community is an environment that facilitates many different ministries.

Six functions of a healthy church are illustrated in the early Christian community of Acts 2.

Acts 2	Styles of ministry	Longings of humanity	Purposes of Christ’s church
vs.42 “the breaking of bread and prayer”	Reaching UP	Transcendence (worship) in the face of “technology”	Exalt Christ as Creator, Redeemer, Lord
vs.42 “the apostles teaching”	Reaching DOWN	Insight (teaching) in the face of “information”	Educate Christ’s people
vs.42 “fellowship”	Reaching IN	Intimacy (relationships) in the face of “isolation”	Edify Christ’s church
vs.47 “adding to their number daily”	Reaching OUT	Direction (involvement) in the face of	Evangelize Christ’s world

		“professionalism”	
vs. 41 “baptized”	Reaching BACK	Stability (tradition) in the face of “temporality”	Embrace the past
vs.47 “having favor with all the people”	Reaching FOR-WARD	Utopia (ideal society) in the face of “injustice”	Enrich the culture

4. Acts 2 gives us a glimpse of what a New Covenant Community might look like.
5. This community is best understood as a multifunctional social –spiritual body of believers.
6. A balance in a congregations ministry focus is wise with the expectation that there will be individual disciples who are motivated by the Spirit to minister in several different ways and that we all need to be exposed to the whole spectrum of ministry if we are to grow to maturity.
7. As we look back through church history we can identify three different views of the Christian church. The following chart compares the three views. The Pietistic model most closely (but not perfectly) reflects the NT teaching from my perspective. The **orthodox** places too much emphasis on the **church hierarchy** as “the ministers” and the **activist** places too much emphasis on “this world’s concerns” as the **agenda** of ministry.

B. Acts describes the nature and function of New Covenant community and illustrates its faith in the indwelling Spirit.

Acts 6 “1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing {in number,} a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic {Jews} against the {native} Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving {of food.} 2 And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." 5 And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

Acts 15 “6 And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them,

¹³ And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶ *'After these things I will return, And I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, And I will rebuild its ruins, And I will restore it,* ¹⁷ *In order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,'* ¹⁸ *Says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.* ¹⁹ Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, . . ."

²² Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas-- Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, ²³ and they sent this letter by them, . . .

³⁹ And there arose such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. ⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas and departed, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."

1. These two passages in Acts illustrate the degree to which the Holy Spirit was working through the individual believers in the early church.
 - a. The method of choosing the first "deacons" (Acts 6) stands in contrast to the choice of a replacement for Judas in Acts 1 (before the coming of the Spirit).
 - b. The struggle of the early church leaders to discern God's leading in Acts 15 suggests that they used common spiritual sense and Scripture (vs.13-19) with a sense of consensus to find wisdom.
 - c. It is not insignificant that the leaders took very seriously the complaints of the people. They did not dismiss the concerns as distractions from the vision or obstacles to their objectives. The leaders trusted the people to be involved in solving the problems and gave their endorsement to the people's solutions.
 - d. The fact that there were differences of opinion (even among leaders) was natural then as it is today.
 - e. Open debate was not inconsistent with the Spirit's leading. 15:6-7
 - f. Dogmatic certainty was replaced with a more humble "it seemed good" 15:22.
 - g. Some times the disagreement was not resolved and resulted in a parting of ways without breaking of communion. 15:39-41
2. The implications for the church today are important.
 - a. We should not be too idealistic, dogmatic, or certain of our individual convictions on many matters. Wisdom suggests that the degree of our certainty and dogmatism should be proportional to our degree of clarity with respect to a particular decision. Most decisions will call for some degree of humility.
 - b. Leaders should take the concerns of the people seriously and be wise in offering solutions that make sense to the people involved.
 - c. Respect for the whole body of believers is important in making decisions. It is assumed that the Spirit was indwelling all believers not just the leaders. The

early church was not a democracy but its leaders were very interested in the Spirit's leading as assessed by members of the church body.

- d. We should not be embarrassed by disagreements, debates, and even unresolved conflicts of opinion.

C. Acts describes the nature and function of New Covenant community and illustrates its faith in the indwelling Spirit under servant leadership.

Acts 20:28-35 “28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build {you} up and to give {you} the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my {own} needs and to the men who were with me. 35 In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

1. The posture of leaders in the early church was that of a servant.
2. Elders were to guard against false teaching.
3. Leaders were not to be surprised that some leaders would be like selfish wolves and need to be resisted.
4. The leaders self-critical skills were important realizing that anyone could be lead astray. This self-examination while including moral issues was more concerned with the content of the teaching. When we look at Paul's letters we are left with the impression that the biggest challenges came from a misunderstanding and misuse of the Law.

Lesson #4

We are to actively build the church as a healthy New Covenant Community.