CALVARY BIBLE COLLEGE

NORMATIVE GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING ACTS

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SALLY ROBINSON

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OUTLINE

The heading (which is just the word OUTLINE, not the paper title) is 2" from the top, centered, and capitalized

I. Introduction

II. Principles of Interpretation

Use only first level headings from the paper for the outline.

III. Conclusion

Double space between outline points

The points need to be set to a 2" margin. This can be done by highlighting the section and going into Paragraph settings and putting in a 1" tab or by pressing TAB twice.

The outline page is numbered with a Roman Numeral "ii"

NORMATIVE GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING ACTS

Introduction

There are widely divergent attitudes toward the use of historical precedence for establishing ecclesiological doctrine. It is very common to assume that the church today is to be as nearly identical to the church as described in the book of Acts as possible. "By and large, most sectors of evangelical Protestantism have a 'restoration movement' mentality. We regularly look back to the church and Christian experience in the first century as the norm to be restored or the ideal to approximated."[1]

On the other hand, it appears to be more popular in recent years to cavalierly dismiss any possible relevance of Acts from consideration in ecclesiological discussions. A pastor friend of the writer was recently heard to declare, "Well, everybody knows that you can't prove anything about elders from the book of Acts."

Fee has well stated the problem posed in seeking to establish normative polity based on New Testament example.

The hermeneutical problem of Acts, therefore is a crucial one and touches many parts of Scripture which are basically historical narrative. How is the book of Acts, which prima *facie* narrates a small segment of the early spread of Christianity, to be understood as the Word of God? That is, what is its Word which not merely *describes* the primitive Church but speaks as a norm to the Church at all times? Indeed, do such narratives somehow establish normative precedents for succeeding generations? Or are they merely

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[1] Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding*

Page numbers for the rest of the paper are .75" form the top and 1" from the right.

illustrative or informative? If they do have a word for us, and I think they do, how does one discover it, or set up principles in order to hear it?[2]

Is there any hope for resolution of such a critical question? Not all aspects of the issue can be included in a brief paper.[3] The following principles are offered as a guide in this difficult area.

First level heading

Principles of Interpretation

Precedence of Doctrinal Passages

Second level headings are centered, but *not* in italics.

Explicit doctrinal passages and commands have precedence over historical narrative.[4] There are many doctrinal passages in Scripture that are specifically intended to teach particular doctrinal truth or to require specific action of God's people. There are numerous commands addressed specifically to the church. In these instances, there is little dispute regarding the

If a reference begins a sentence, the book title should be written out such as Second Timothy 1:9 says . . .

must form the primary basis of ecclesiological decisions. For example, the "filling and coming upon" the believer in Acts 2, 10, and 19 with the resultant speaking in tongues does not take precedent over the doctrinal command in Eph 5:18 NIV, "Instead be filled with the Spirit."

References are abbreviated (see Style Guide p. 11 &12) without the use of periods.

Use Arabic numeral in references.

Historical Precedence Alone

For other Biblical text rules, see Style Guide, p. 9–10

Historical narrative records what did happen in a given situation. It does not prescribe what must happen in every subsequent situation. Historical precedence alone should never form the basis for normativeness. "On the basis of precedence alone it is probably not valid to say,

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[2] Gordon D. Fee, "The Genre of New Testament Literature and Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Interpreting the World of God: Festschrift in Honor of Steven Barabas*, ed. S. J. Schultz and M.A. Inch (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 115.

1 blank line between footnotes

[3] Millard Erickson has a helpful discussion for the larger question of identifying .timeless truths. in Scripture: Christian Theology, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983–85), 1:120–25.

[4] Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, Integrative Theology, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 1–31.

Use an en dash between inclusive numbers

See Style Guide p. 19–28 for more information about footnotes.

'Therefore, one must.'"[5] "Just through being reported as truly happening, no event becomes the revelation of God's universal will."[6]

Scriptural Corroboration

Practices based on historical precedence are most clearly normative if corroborated by principles elsewhere in Scripture. There may not be a specific command addressing the situation, but there will be relevant theological principles that can be established from other prescriptive passages.[7]

Non-Contradictory

> Third level headings are left aligned and in italics. (three levels are not recommended in a paper this length)

It should be obvious, but for the sake of clarity, a principle claiming support from historical narrative cannot contradict explicit statements found elsewhere in the epistles. "The meaning and principles derived from a story must be consistent with all other teachings of Scripture. A deductive principle drawn from a narrative which contradicts the teaching of some other scriptural passages is invalid."[8]

It is perhaps valid to defend a given practice on the basis of precedence if there is substantial evidence for its practice and that pattern can be demonstrated to be the only pattern present. A consistent and clear pattern must be established. Specifically, polity considerations

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[5] Fee, "The Genre of NT Literature," 117.

> Reference to a previously footnoted source only includes the author's last name, abbreviated title, and page number

[6] J. Robertson McQuilkin, "Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl Radmacher and Robert Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 234.

> A footnote can also contain information that would interrupt the flow of the paper.

[7] "For a biblical precedent to justify present action, the principle of the action must be taught elsewhere, where it is the primary intent so to teach." Fee, "Genre of NT Literature," 118. Although addressing a slightly different issue, the following comment is also relevant. "When these injunctions to a specific individual or group parallel general reaching found elsewhere, they may be viewed as normative, but not on their own strength." McQuilkin, "Normativeness in Scripture," 235.

[8] Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 220. See also Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:30–31.

based on Acts may be valid if the matter is both widespread (the actions of many churches reflect

such a practice in the narrative) and unique (it is the only way in which the churches did

something). "The strongest possible case can be made when only one pattern is found . . . and

when that pattern is repeated within the New Testament itself."[9]

Positive Versus Negative

In establishing patterns, it be recognized that positive patterns are clearer than

negative patterns. In other words the fact that something was done is more significant than

something that was not done—unless the text explicitly and emphatically states that a specific

action was not involved. Arguments from silence are dubious and inconclusive in most instances.

Intention Versus Incidentals

Exegesis must emphasize the intention of the passage rather than incidental allusions.[10]

Historical narrative texts record numerous minor details. Although accurate descriptions of what

actually happened, they are not to be elevated to the primary, didactic level unless the writer is

clearly representing these details as significant to his primary thesis.[11] For example, an exegete

must be careful not to draw too many thematic principles from the death of a proud politician as

found in Acts 12. On a related matter, it should be noted that .extensive passages on a subject

take priority for theological purposes over brief allusions."[12]

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[9] Fee and Stuart, How to Read the Bible, 102.

[10] Ibid., 116.

[11] They may, of course, illustrate specific teaching recorded elsewhere.

[12] John Jones, "Missing the Point," www.bibledoctrine.net Accessed December 2, 2002.

Conclusion

The book of Acts can be legitimately used to establish ecclesiological polity in the contemporary church. If these principles are followed consistently, the interpreter will not be guilty of wresting Scripture to teach something that God never intended.

Paragraphs consist of two or more sentence.

Insert page break at the end of the paper before the Bibliography to insure correct page numbering on the Bibliography. To insert page break, click the Page Layout tab, click the Breaks button, and click the section break Next Page.

Helpful Turabian Hints:

*There must be at least two paragraphs on a page

*Do not use contractions such as don't, wasn't, etc.

*Any form of 1st or 2nd person is never used. This includes: *I*, *we*, *you*, etc. Instead use words such as: *one, a person, the writer,* etc.

*A "Capitalization/Lowercasing Glossary" can be found in the Style Guide, p. 12–16.

*See Style Guide, p. 9–11 for other general writing information.

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