



“According to the Pattern”

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Is the Bible merely a love letter from heaven, or does it also contain instructions for worship and how we live? Should we look at the New Testament as a pattern to follow in religion today?

Hebrews 8:1-5 “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.”

These verses deal with the design of the priesthood and worship of the Old Testament. That system foreshadowed Christ’s plan of salvation and His church. The Old Testament economy was based upon the tabernacle that Moses was commanded to set up in the wilderness. God had minute instructions for how it was to be built. God emphatically told Moses that he was to *build it according to the pattern* he had received from heaven while upon the mountain. That tabernacle was a picture; a picture of Christ and His church.

That leads us to ask: does God have a pattern for the church to follow today? Has the Lord given us a blueprint to follow in worship and service to Him, or has He simply left it up to us to decide how we will worship Him? If the Lord decrees how we worship, is that pattern found within the New Testament alone?

The tabernacle was where God made His dwelling among Israel and where they met God in sacrifice and worship. God was strict about how the tabernacle was built and what took place there. It was fashioned according to a blueprint that God gave to Moses to follow.

Exodus 25:8-9 “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.”

So, Moses couldn't just take off on his own and build the tabernacle however he pleased; he had a pattern to follow. **Exodus 26** gives a very detailed list of instructions to be followed and the people didn't dare depart in the slightest thing. Of course, the attitude has grossly changed in religion since that time. Now, it seems that most people think that God doesn't have any kind of pattern and that Christians are at liberty to do as we please in the church today. That's one of the reasons we have so many churches in the world now and why there is so much confusion in religion. Most are not following the pattern provided within the scriptures.

God has never left it up to man to decide how to serve and worship Him. You can search from the beginning and trace the Bible all through its pages and you will find that God is a God of order and patterns. God's work has always been directed by Him. After all, religion and worship are not about pleasing the worshipper; it is about pleasing and glorifying the Lord. By its very definition, it is directed to God, not directed to those who are actually doing the worshipping.

God established the concept of following a pattern or a precedent early in the history of man. In fact, we don't have to go any farther than the garden of Eden to learn something about the giving of a pattern. When Adam and Eve sinned, that necessitated a sacrifice on their behalf. That was the beginning of any type of sacrificial or redemptive system or scheme. The severe nature of sin and the incredible worth of the soul of man created the need for nothing less than a bloody sacrifice to make atonement with God. When the original pair sinned, their eyes were opened to the reality and shame of sin, and you recall how they realized that they were naked. So, they made garments out of leaves in a meager attempt to cover themselves.

But, God wasn't pleased with that. Their effort was insufficient. God then made garments from the skin of an animal and covered them. The implication is that an animal had to be slain for that to happen. I believe that is the first occurrence, the first inference within the scriptures of a blood sacrifice as a response to sin. That seems to have set a precedent all the way in the very beginning, or created a pattern, because years later when the sons of Adam, Cain and Abel, were called upon to bring their offerings to the Lord, they were to sacrifice animals. Their worship was to be according to a pattern that God had already revealed. How do we know that? The Bible tells us in **Genesis 4** that God not only judged the worshipper—He not only was looking at the attitude with which Cain and Abel worshipped: Abel offered his sacrifice with humility and obedience, Cain offered his haughtily and proudly, presumptuously—but He also examined that which they offered in worship. In **Hebrews 11**, we're told that Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain because he did so *by faith*. What does that mean?

Romans 10:17 “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

So, for something to be done *by faith*, it must be produced by *hearing the word of God*, or that which has been revealed by God. Abel offered his sacrifice according to what God had said and Cain did not. The record tells us that Abel brought a blood sacrifice to the Lord, but Cain being a tiller of the ground

brought a vegetable offering. You can probably suppose that Cain offered the very best of his crops, that he brought a very worthy offering so far as vegetables go, but you see, it's not what God had required. God accepted the sacrifice of Abel but He rejected Cain's. This was a sin offering. Though vegetable offerings were acceptable under the later law of Moses for certain purposes, they were not for a sin offering. In this case, God rejected the sacrifice of Cain because Abel stuck to the pattern, but Cain went out on his own and brought something to the Lord that the Lord had not asked for.

That is a principle that we find over and over again in the history of God's dealings with man. When God delivers a pattern, it is there for a reason and God expects us to strictly follow it. When God told Noah to build an ark to save himself and his family from the great flood, God didn't just tell him to build an ark or boat, or just give him some vague idea of how to build some sort of a vessel to carry him and his family to safety. Rather, God gave him a very specific set of plans to follow. How specific? Well, He told him in detail how to build it so far as how large to make it. He told him what material to make it out of. He even told him what number of windows and doors to include in the ark (**Genesis 6:14-16**). God had reasons for all of that. God had a pattern and Noah, though I doubt that he fully understood as he was building the ark why God told him to do what he was doing and the way he was supposed to do it, but God had a plan. And Noah was bound to follow that which God had decreed.

Much later, when the sons of Aaron burned incense to the Lord, they were given a set of instructions. They were told to use fire in their censers that was obtained from live coals burning beneath the altar (**Leviticus 10**). I'm not sure why God was so particular, but that really doesn't matter. They were told to do so, and God severely punished them for doing something different. We're told that Nadab and Abihu used *strange fire, which the Lord commanded them not* in their service. There's your definition of *strange fire*. What did they offer before the Lord? Whatever it was, it was that *which the Lord commanded them not*. And the result was tragic. God smote them, killed them with fire right there on the spot because they had not sanctified Him by following the pattern that He gave.

David was also given a pattern for the building of the temple in Jerusalem. But David couldn't build it because he was a man of war, so he passed the plans to his son, Solomon, who built the temple according to the plans given to his father. We could go all the way through the history of the Bible to show how God has directed man in every act of worship. Not merely during the Mosaic dispensation of time, not merely during the age of the law and ceremonial law, but from the very beginning, God has prescribed how men are to worship Him.

The question is, has God given us a pattern to follow in the New Testament church today? Some say no. In fact, they don't believe the New Testament furnishes us with any kind of pattern or guidelines to follow, certainly not in worship. They believe that the organization, the work and worship of the church is up to us to decide what is best. As a result, much of the worship and much of the church organization and so forth that you see in the religious world today is merely the result of the traditions of men. They are things that men have come up with through the ages.

We have a very pragmatic view of Christianity today, that if something accomplishes good or what we think of as good, or if it causes everyone to feel good about what they're doing, then it must be all right and God must approve of it. But is that true? Has God left it up to us to determine how or what type of worship to offer to Him? Is it really up to us to decide how the church will go about the work of God, how the church is governed and organized? Or is the New Testament a pattern that God has given us to follow?

First of all, what passage teaches that the church was ever given the authority to decide any of those things?

Jude 3 “...exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

In other words, it did not originate with the church, it was given to the church to follow and practice. The apostle Paul sharply rebuked the church at Corinth for this very misconception. The Corinthian congregation was involved in a number of errors. For example, they had confused their gluttonous love feast with the Lord’s Supper. They were misusing spiritual gifts in the public assembly. They also apparently had a problem with the role of women in the assembly of the church. Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, rebuked the church for those practices.

I Corinthians 14:36-37 “What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”

Paul says that the revelation of God’s will did not come from within the church at Corinth. In other words, he is questioning the authority for their practices. He is showing that it wasn’t up to them to determine what was acceptable in public worship. Rather, that is for God to determine, by God’s authority, revealed through His inspired apostles. Then he states that if the prophets at Corinth were truly led of God as they claimed, they would recognize the authority of Paul as an apostle, and submit to his instructions. In other words, they would follow the pattern that was established.

Churches need to hear that in our day and age. Religion has run amuck today. The church is governed by a universal body of truth. The will of Jesus Christ is expressed in the authoritative writings of the apostles. The New Testament is our creed and our charter, and it is our ONLY creed and our ONLY guide. It needs no other catechism, creed book, manual or confession of faith—call it whatever you may. The New Testament is our creed—not what is decided in some annual convention when church officers come together, or an ancient creed that was written by men hundreds of years ago. The New Testament provides our creed. It furnishes us with a blueprint for the church.

I Corinthians 11:2 “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.”

The word *ordinances* here is translated from the Greek word *paradosis*, and it means *a tradition*. In fact, many say that this would be better translated *keep the traditions as I have delivered them unto you*. Of course, a tradition is something that is established and then passed along. A tradition can be good or bad, depending on where it came from and what it consists of. A tradition that comes from God by inspiration of the apostles in the scriptures is a good tradition, and it is a tradition that is to be kept sacred. It is a tradition that is to be held on to.

The traditions of men don’t originate in the scripture. They didn’t originate with the Lord, and they need to be abandoned and cast aside. The traditions of God are what matter. By divine inspiration, Paul states in this passage that he received the Lord’s directions and passed them along to the church to practice and preserve, and they were to keep those traditions or ordinances just as he had received them and delivered them. They were given a pattern to follow and Paul expected them to follow that pattern.

Later in the same chapter, he corrects them concerning the Lord's Supper. He shows them how it is to be properly and scripturally observed. It is to be done just exactly as Jesus did it in the upper room, as Paul related to them by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (**I Corinthians 11:23-26**).

Colossians 3:17 “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

Paul says that our service to God is to be performed *in the name of the Lord Jesus*. What does that mean? How do we do or say something *in the name of Jesus*? Does that mean that everything we do should be done simply by mentioning the name of Jesus or in some way associating the name of Jesus with it to legitimize or spiritualize it? That's not what it means at all.

Notice the phrase *in the name of*. That's a familiar phrase to us. We've heard the expression *in the name of the law*. What do we mean when we invoke the name of the law? If a police officer comes to your house in the middle of the night and raps on the door, he may say, “*Open the door in the name of the law.*” We would understand him to mean that he has the legal authority to make that demand. He is there with a search or arrest warrant, and he is therefore vested with the authority to enter the premises and do what he has been instructed to do. Commentator Albert Barnes says that the phrase means *do it all because He requires and commands it, and with a desire to honor Him. His authority should be the warrant, His glory the aim of all of our actions and words* (Barnes, Albert. Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, p. 1075). Matthew Henry says that it means *according to His command and in compliance with His authority* (Henry, Matthew. Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible). In other words, our service to God is to be rendered because we are acting by His authority and not our own.

The fact is, we use patterns all of the time in our everyday life. If a person makes a piece of clothing, maybe a woman makes a dress, she typically uses a pattern. That pattern gives her an outline along with instructions of how to make that garment. It will show her where to cut the fabric, how long or short to make the cut, how to put the pieces together, where to place the seam. And when she's finished, she can hold up a dress that will match the pattern. Now, suppose she deviates. Suppose that she wants to add a button or change the shape or style of the dress. She can do that, but she can't say that she followed the pattern all the way through. She may have followed it to a point, but she eventually departed from it. If the pattern doesn't specify what kind of fabric to use or what color to make it, then she can choose whatever type of material and color she chooses and still have precisely followed the pattern. But when she changes anything the pattern calls for, she has departed from that pattern. It's the same way in our service to the Lord. The Bible provides us with a pattern for the work and worship of the church. In every point, we are required to follow that pattern. Perhaps the pattern doesn't specify what color to make the garment. That being the case, yes, we can do what is most expedient without violating or changing the pattern. But so far as the scriptures give us direction, we are not at liberty to lay that pattern aside and do as we please.

I Thessalonians 5:21 “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

The New Testament scriptures, like all scripture, is given *by inspiration of God* (**II Timothy 3:16**), and the writings of the inspired apostles and prophets of the 1st century are authoritative, both in the church then and in the church today. The instructions they gave for the churches of the 1st century to follow are just as applicable and just as binding upon the church today in the 21st century. In fact, that's how pure, unadulterated New Testament Christianity is preserved and spread from heart to heart, from culture to

culture, from continent to continent and from age to age. I hope that you will join with us in our pursuit of restoring New Testament Christianity.

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