



“Innovations and the Divine Pattern”

Part II: What is Wrong with Innovations?

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We started a series last week which we will continue today about *Innovations and the Divine Pattern*. Does the New Testament really furnish us with a pattern to follow? Does it matter what we do and how we do it when it comes to the work, worship, and organization of the church? Most people today would tell you that it really doesn't matter all that much, but what saith the scriptures? Last week, we looked at the long history of innovations that began soon after the deaths of the apostles. In fact, the spirit that eventually led to a wholesale apostasy was already working among the church during the first century, soon after Christ established the church. It didn't take very long at all. Beginning with the very nature and organization of the church, change gradually swept through the churches until the picture of what the church was under the guidance of the apostles of Christ was starkly different than what the church became.

As time passes, change is almost inevitable, but is it different when it comes to things divinely authored and revealed to us in God's word? Are those things to remain the same? Is the New Testament a pattern for the church to follow? If not, then nothing really matters when it comes to the practice of the church and we can do whatever we see fit by way of worshipping and serving God. But does God see it that way? If the scriptures furnish us with a pattern, then it DOES matter, and change and innovation can become sinful and digressive. The **Hebrew** writer reminds us that the Jewish tabernacle which typified or prefigured Christ and the church was to be very carefully made according to God's instructions.

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.”

God gave Moses a pattern and the tabernacle was constructed according to that plan. Moses did not dare change it, alter it, take anything away from it, or add anything to it. God commanded him to build it just according to the pattern that He gave. That leads us to the question, what about the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? Are we to worship and serve God? And if so, are we to do it any way that we please, or did Christ fashion the church in the way that He wanted it to be and to remain? We'll take up that question in our study today.

The history of earth is one of change; so much so that change and transition seem to be inevitable in our lives. Our modern world is filled with inventions that our forefathers never dreamed of. We enjoy the conveniences that modern life affords and it's hard for most of us to imagine living life without them. But how does such change affect our service to God? Or does it? Are there things that should remain the same—fixed and maintained as they were when the church was established? God intended the church to exist in this world until Jesus returns, whenever that will be. The question is this: Is the church that was founded in the first century a model for the church now twenty centuries later? Or are we at liberty to do just as we see fit and offer whatever kind of worship we deem good and worthwhile to the Lord, expecting Him to accept it?

As we read the scriptures, one of the pictures of God that quickly appears is that He is a God of order and rule. The Bible says He does not change in His nature, His character, or in His divine purposes and plans.

Malachi 3:6-7 “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts...”

Here, God told His people that they were *away from Him*. But He also says, “***I change not,***” implying that man does change. Therefore, it was man who left God behind and not the other way around. How did they leave the Lord? by not keeping His ordinances, God says. He tells them if they will return to Him, He will return to them. Notice that when people leave the ordinances of God, when they leave the word of God, they leave God. And when they leave God, He departs from them and He will not return to them until erring man returns to His way. Do you suppose that God has ordinances for the church to keep in this dispensation of time? Has God given the church a plan and a pattern to follow? Consider what Paul said to the church at Corinth.

I Corinthians 11:1-2 “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.”

Paul says that he had received the things that he had taught them from Christ Himself. They were to receive his instructions as the words of Christ Himself (**I Corinthians 14:37**). They were to keep the divine ordinances in the very manner in which they had been given. Paul commands that. So, first of all, God HAS established ordinances for the church to keep. Paul affirms that in this passage. Those ordinances were given to the church in the New Testament scriptures and they are to be kept as they were originally given—not added to, taken from, perverted, corrupted, changed, or substituted. Friends, there has never been an age of time in which God left it up to man to offer or invent his own kind of worship. God has always given some form of pattern or instruction to His people to follow. Whether they followed that pattern was one of the things that determined if God received their worship

or not. It takes merely a brief tour through the Old Testament to see how God felt about those who did not follow His instruction when it came to approaching Him in worship. God refused to accept worship that was man's invention as opposed to God's design. And it is no different in the New Testament dispensation. The scripture tells us that we are to *do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus*. That phrase means *by the authority of (Colossians 3:17)*. Peter said that we are only to *speak as the oracles of God* or as God has already spoken (**I Peter 4:11**).

One of the ways the Bible is described by the Holy Spirit is as *a seed*. A seed, of course, reproduces the same kind of organism that the seed came from. The Holy Spirit reveals to us in the New Testament scriptures God's blueprint or design for the church. It's organization, it's nature, it's work, and it's worship. Those are matters that are divinely revealed; not humanly arranged, but divinely revealed. And we dare not tamper with those things that God Himself has established and revealed through His Holy Spirit in His word.

Now, how is the Bible a pattern? The word *pattern* is translated from a Greek word that, according to Greek lexicographers, means *a figure formed by a blow or an impression; a model*. Joseph Thayer says that it means *an example; in the technical sense, the pattern in conformity to which a thing must be made*. William Arndt and Wilbur Gingrich say that it means *a type, pattern, or model*. E.W. Bulinger says that it means *a mark or impress made by a hard substance on a softer one; a model or pattern*. The Bible not only instructs us to worship and to do so in a particular way; it also gives us examples of how the early church, under the guidance or auspices of the apostles, carried those things out.

As we pointed out in our study last week, it didn't take long for the church to begin to leave that apostolic model and to introduce doctrines and practices that the apostles never taught or authorized. So, how are we to view that? Should we just go with the flow and allow change to take its course, leading us wherever it may go? Or does God intend for us to follow the pattern revealed by the apostles long ago? How much can you change and still follow a pattern? What about modern conveniences? What about the innovations of men? Do they violate the divine pattern? Obviously, our world has changed. We possess technology and conveniences of modern life that the church of the first century knew nothing about. Are we to abstain from all technology, all advancements in human development? Is it wrong to use these things in serving the Lord?

Those are all good questions. Jesus told His disciples, ***"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," (Mark 16:15)***. There is a simple instruction in that: *Go* and *preach*. *Go* throughout the world and *preach* the gospel. There are certain things that are limited within that and certain things that are allowed within that. There are places where liberty cannot be taken and places there that allow for liberty. Those men to whom the great commission was given mostly walked where they went, I suppose. But at times they rode in a chariot across the sands of the desert or boarded a ship to carry them across the Mediterranean Sea throughout the Roman Empire. But we know they could not get into an automobile and zoom about the country to preach the gospel as we do today. They certainly couldn't board an airplane and go around the globe carrying the good news. They didn't have this medium of television or the internet with which to communicate with thousands or even millions of people at a time. So, does that mean that we cannot do so today? Well, of course not. Because whether by plane, train, or automobile, whether I walk, run, swim, or fly, I am still doing what God commanded to be done—that is, *go* and *preach the gospel*. You see, the pattern is not changed in those things. Now, if I change the commission to say less or more than it says, that's a different matter.

That's a logical and rational principle we apply to nearly every facet of life. But when it comes to the teaching of the Bible, people often deny what they accept and even take for granted in everyday affairs of life. What I've just described is not something that was cooked up in some religious council or convention or in some upper room of some monastery somewhere. Rather, it's just simple logic that we carry with us throughout other aspects of life, but we tend to forget about those same principles of logic when looking at religious matters. Changing times, cultures, and conveniences are not an excuse to tamper with God's arrangements. They only go so far as God's arrangements are not changed or altered. We must make such things fit God's pattern; not try to change God's pattern to allow for new things. Let's say you're a builder and I hire you to build me a house. I'm going to provide you with a blueprint and instructions. There are things within that blueprint that I will specify. I will specifically state that not only do I want a house built, but I'll give a number of directions as to how I want it, the design of it. I probably won't list one by one on the blueprint every minute detail that I want included or every single instruction that I want you to follow. Instead, I will provide you with a blueprint, which draws out and exemplifies the type of house that I want. It will show you where I want the rooms and doors and windows, for example. Part of those blueprints will include specs as to what type of materials I want to use. Maybe brick on one portion of the house, siding on another portion. A person can look at those blueprints and visualize what my house will look like when it's finished.

Now, within those blueprints there are things that are necessarily implied, things that are illustrated, and things that are commanded or specifically spelled out. There's also room within it for the builder to take certain liberty. He may employ a different method for constructing certain aspects of that house. But what he cannot do is change what is called for in the blueprint. He can't change the house itself. He might choose the method for constructing the wall, but he still must construct the wall in the dimensions and height and thickness that the blueprint calls for and put it where the blueprint tells him to put it. He can't move it arbitrarily without the permission of the homeowner. You know, the same thing is true regarding God's plan. God's plan limits where it specifies, and where the Bible does not specify, there is liberty to employ whatever convenience or expediency that might allow us to carry out the command *as long as it doesn't change the command or change what God has specified about the carrying out of the command.*

Let's use another common-sense example. You may obtain a pattern to make a dress or some other kind of clothing. Unless the pattern specifies otherwise, you can use blue cloth, yellow cloth, red plaid cloth, purple polka-dotted cloth, and still produce the dress called for in the pattern. But if you begin sewing seams in different places than the pattern calls for or adding extra features or omitting things that the pattern specifies, you might end up with a second cousin to what the pattern shows, but you didn't really follow the pattern. You might've started with the pattern and used what suited you, then added what you chose to add, essentially making your own kind of dress. You modified the pattern, in other words. We're not allowed to modify God's pattern. Yet, that's what has happened in religious practice today.

We commune in the Lord's Supper because Christ and His disciples did. That within itself is following a pattern. But then some, of course, change the pattern and change the Lord's Supper. They still try to call it the Lord's Supper, but in reality they are not following the pattern given in the Bible. When the church at Corinth corrupted the Supper through their carnality and casual disposition, Paul said they were not even eating the Lord's Supper any longer. They had moved far away from Christ's intention and design for His Supper. Paul consequently reminds them of what Jesus did and why He did it when He instituted it in order to call them back to that pattern. Jesus Himself, when He took the loaf of unleavened bread,

blessed it, took a piece of it, gave the loaf to His disciples to partake of, and He told them to do what He had done remembering His body.

1 Corinthians 11:24 “**And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.”**

Christ established a pattern. He told us to do something. But what? To do what He did. He then took a cup containing fruit of the vine and blessed it, drank from it, gave it to them instructing them to drink from that cup remembering the New Covenant ratified by His blood.

1 Corinthians 11:25 “**After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.”**

We’re not to do something else in remembrance of Him; we’re to do what Jesus did in remembrance of Him. The Lord’s Supper was established with a pattern. Mark’s account tells us that they followed that pattern. They did what Jesus said. They all drank out of the cup that Jesus gave to them (**Mark 14:23**). Is that a pattern? Jesus instructed them to do what He did and they followed His example. Isn’t that what a pattern is?

I want to ask you a couple of questions. Do you believe in the need to follow Bible examples? I would be pretty safe to assume that the vast majority of you would object to observing the Lord’s Supper using chicken fried steak and Dr. Pepper. You may love chicken fried steak. I do. You may like Dr. Pepper, Coca-Cola, or sweet tea. But would you object to using those elements in the Lord’s Supper? Likely, you would. Yet, at the same time, there’s nothing in the Bible that says, ‘You shall NOT use chicken fried steak or Dr. Pepper or any other drink element in the Lord’s Supper.’ But, you see, Jesus gave a pattern and whether you realize it or not, when churches use unleavened bread and grape juice, they are following the pattern that was given for the Lord’s Supper. Are we at liberty to change that pattern? If we can change the bread or the grape juice into something else, then why can’t we change if from communing together with common elements to everybody having individual communion? If we can change one element, why can’t we change another? Why can’t we change the day and decide that we’re going to come together and commune on Tuesday instead of on Sunday, the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week? The only specific example that we’re given of when the disciples came together is in **Acts 20:7**.

Acts 20:7 “**And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them...**”

We know from religious history that the early churches of Christ met on Sundays to perpetuate the feast that Jesus instituted before His death. If those examples are important, why aren’t the other examples of scripture important? The answer is that they ARE important. One of the fundamental principles taught throughout the word of God is that God’s people are not to go beyond what is written or what God has said.

Deuteronomy 4:2 “**Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”**

How do we keep the commandments of the Lord? By not adding to or taking away from them. Doing what God said to do in the way that He showed us how to do it.

Deuteronomy 12:32 “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.”

Balam of old may not have practiced what he preached, but he was preaching the truth when he said this:

Numbers 22:18 “...If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more.”

Is that not saying that we cannot speak where God is silent? When Paul affirmed his authority as an apostle to the church at Corinth, he said this:

I Corinthians 4:6 “...that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written...”

Oh, that we could learn the same thing in religion today. Paul condemned the false teachers in Galatia who were perverting the gospel of Christ (**Galatians 1:7**). What were they doing? The word *perverting* there is not talking about anything moral or immoral; rather, they were adding elements to the gospel that the Lord didn't include in the gospel system. Therefore, they were perverting it.

The closing words of the canonized New Testament itself are as follows:

Revelation 22:18 “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:”

I would remind us all that when the sons of Aaron offered “*strange fire*” to the Lord, God rejected it and rejected them (**Leviticus 10:1-2**). What was “*strange*” about the fire they offered? The record says that it was *fire that the Lord did not command*.

You see, it matters. God's patterns are meant to be followed. Surely it is not left to us as feeble man to do whatever he pleases in worship to God. Lord willing, in the next several weeks, I plan to talk to you about why the churches of Christ worship as we do. Why is our worship so simple and primitive? Why do we not use instrumental music? Why do we commune on the first day of the week in the way that we do? Why is it that we are distinct from the religions around us? We'll see what the Bible says about these subjects and show you how we strive to follow the pattern given in the New Testament: the pattern for the organization, the work, and the worship of the church. It will be an informative study. I hope you'll make plans to be with us each week.

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