

According to the Pattern

According to all that I show you, *that is*, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make *it*. ... see to it that you make *them* according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain. Ex 25:9, 40

You shall raise up the tabernacle according to its pattern which you were shown on the mountain. Ex 26:30

Now this workmanship of the lampstand *was* hammered gold; from its shaft to its flowers it *was* hammered work. According to the pattern which the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand. Num 8:4

Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen. Acts 7:44

As Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See *that* you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.' Heb 8:5

When God gave instructions to Israel regarding their worship and drawing near to him, he was very specific about absolute obedience to the pattern he showed Moses. There was to be no deviation from those instructions. Every item of the Tabernacle worship, from the main structure to the crushed spices, were according to God's pattern; and there was strict punishment for those who erred from this.

The Tabernacle is meant to be an illustration, or type, regarding the way we draw near to God today. It was where God dwelled with his people, where they approached him with offerings and where forgiveness was found. Many lessons can be learned as we study the various aspects of Tabernacle worship, something the book of Hebrews applies for us. But the most important point, as picked up by Stephen and the writer of Hebrews, is that absolute obedience to God's instructions was commanded on pain of death. Everything in godly worship had to be 'according to the pattern'.

This principle remains. When we approach God it must be according to the pattern. Today we don't follow Old Covenant worship and have no sacrifices or temples, but we have clear instructions. These were given to us by the ascended Lord Jesus Christ through his apostles who were given his final words by the Spirit leading them into all truth. There is no excuse to be ignorant of these principles since they are clearly apparent in the New Testament revelation.

An old problem - syncretism

Now in the Old Testament history we find that the reason Israel repeatedly fell into apostasy was because it ignored the pattern revealed by God and men were influenced by pagan ideas. These concepts were then brought into Israel's worship as an addition to Yahweh worship, thus breaking God's commandment, 'You shall not make anything to be with Me' (Ex 20:23). Syncretism was the big problem of Israel, beginning with the golden calf episode. The people kept importing foreign ideas about religion and adapting their worship accordingly, being focused upon what they could see and feel, upon what was fleshly. See for instance the copying of a Syrian altar in 2 Kg 16:10-16 or the sacrifices on the high places according to Canaanite tradition.

A modern problem

The modern evangelical church commits the same apostasy as ancient Israel in that it keeps importing foreign, pagan ideas into its worship services to boost popularity, induce emotionalism, or increase numbers. Very few churches today pay any attention to the regulative principle (which forbids any unscriptural introduction) and so design their meetings upon the latest whim of leaders, usually after copying the idea from someone else. Layer upon layer of unbiblical items are added to the gathered church, none of which has any divine provenance and most of which are pagan in origin.

If the punishment for ignoring the divine pattern worship in the Old Testament was death, why do modern Christians believe that God will not chastise people who ignore the words of his own Son? This is a very serious matter indeed. I will make it clear: no church or church leader has any permission to change the divine pattern for church worship as given in the New Testament. No church can adapt, amend, subtract or add to the instructions given by the Lord's apostles without facing God's anger. The same principle holds true regarding how the believer conducts his daily walk of faith – it must be Biblical, according to God's instruction.

This leads us to the sorry state of the lack of understanding of most modern believers regarding their walk with God, the nature of the church and worship.

Questions modern Christians fail to answer correctly

Here is a sample of some questions that modern Christians appear to have no clue about:

- What is the Gospel?
- Whom do we address our prayers to?
- Why do we gather together?
- What is the authority for the things we do?
- Are we under any form of law?
- How do we worship?
- How does the NT relate to the OT?
- What will happen at the end?

This list could be extended, so shocking is the ignorance of the modern church. Let us simply take up a few points.

The demand for compliance to God's words

Many people hold the view that the Old Testament is all about law and the New Testament about freedom. Nothing could be further from the truth; grace is to be found everywhere in the OT just as there are many examples of law in the NT.¹ In short, the believer is never without law since this is God's will for human behaviour. The Moral Law has always demanded compliance with the divine will, both before the Mosaic Law and after it was cancelled by the New Covenant. Believers are not under the Mosaic Law, the purpose of which was to show men that they could not achieve God's standard of righteousness. But Christians are under the Law of Christ, which is the standard of human behaviour that God requires – conformity to Christ, which is only possible by walking in the Spirit.

The Law of Christ is expounded in many ways in the writing of the apostles, who passed on Christ's words from heaven for the church. There are not simply general principles but clear, objective commands which God expects us to obey. The Christian walking in the new

¹ For a detailed examination of the principle of law for the Christian see my book *'The Believer's Relationship to the Law'*; or for a summary see *'The Law or the Holy Spirit; what is the rule of life for a Christian?'* or *'A Simple Paper on Law'*.

man can obey these by the power of the Spirit, but those who do not comply cannot be true believers. Thus Paul could demand:

Keeping the commandments of God *is what matters*. 1 Cor 7:19

And so could John,

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 Jn 2:3-4

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. 1 Jn 5:3

Just as Christ had formerly said:

You are my friends if you do whatever I command you. Jn 15:4

If you love me, keep my commandments. ... He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. Jn 14:15, 21

Thus the apostles could issue commands from Christ on very specific issues:

- Regarding marriage Christians cannot marry unbelievers: 'she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.' 1 Cor 7:39
- Regarding our life in the world, we must not be part of it: 'do not be conformed to this world'. Rm 12:2
- Regarding life in fellowship we must care for each other and not let the weak fall aside: 'Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ'. Gal 6:2; 'look out not only for [your] own interests, but also for the interests of others' Phil 2:4.
- We must love each other: 'Love the brotherhood'. 1 Pt 2:17; 'above all things have fervent love for one another'. 1 Pt 4:8.
- Regarding our attitude to outsiders, we are to do good to them: 'do good to all' Gal 6:10; 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' Jam 2:8.
- We must serve one another: 'through love serve one another'. Gal 5:13; 'As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another'. 1 Pt 4:10.
- We must submit to one another (that includes everybody without exception, including leaders): 'all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility'. 1 Pt 5:5; 'Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another' Rm 12:10.
- We must take account of, or audit, our work for Christ to ensure we are on track: 'let each one examine his own work'. Gal 6:4.
- We must be righteous: 'be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless'. 2 Pt 3:14
- We must bless those who attack us: 'Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse'. Rm 12:14
- We must never react badly, never be violent or vindictive or return evil for evil: 'Repay no one evil for evil'. Rm 12:17; 'See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good'. 1 Thess 5:15.
- We must not get into debt: 'Owe no one anything'. Rm 13:8
- We must test and evaluate what we hear: 'Test all things; hold fast what is good'. 1 Thess 5:21
- We must give thanks for God's sovereignty over all things in our life: 'in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you'. 1 Thess 5:18
- We must not grumble: 'nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer'. 1 Cor 10:10

We could literally add hundreds more specific commands that are recorded by the apostles, but the point is made.

Now the issue of compliance is very serious and carries penalties. God expects us to obey his commands and live according to his pattern; if we disobey wilfully there are serious repercussions.

The first is that God, as a loving heavenly Father, will chastise us in order to bring about compliance with his will. Those who are loved are disciplined in order to make them behave like their Father (Heb 12:5-9). Surely this is obvious and understood by all. The second is that serious public sin and heresy results in Christians being expelled from fellowship until they have repented properly (1 Cor 5:6-13). Again, this ought to be clear to all. However, there are times when God's temporal judgment is severe and Christians are taken away by death. An example is the Corinthians who were sectarian and dishonoured the Lord's Table (1 Cor 11:29-30).

Those antinomians who believe that the Christian is not under any form of law at all and can do as he pleases without sanction are utterly deluded. The true believer will comply with God's commands and pattern; supposed Christians who live with no care about righteousness are either demonstrating that they are unregenerate or are in serious trouble with God and need to repent. Obeying Christ's commands proves that we are truly saved; without compliance to the divine will, there is no hope.

A certain writer makes a telling observation about his own experience:

When I was a child, I 'received Christ' during vacation Bible school and was baptised. From that day until I was 33 years old, I lived a typical pagan lifestyle. I could not have cared less about what Christ had to say. Was I saved? No, not until I was 33. Then the Holy Spirit made such an impact upon my life and conscience that I was immediately convicted of certain sins. Over the intervening years, I have tried to obey Him, while clinging only to God's grace.

Robert C Beasley, *The Commandments of Christ*, p30.

Christians will obey Christ and follow his law as explained by his apostles; those who do not prove their faith with good works cannot be true believers at all (Jm 2:24).

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. Matt 12:50

Corporate compliance

Now the same principle equally applies to churches as to individuals. Churches that claim to be Christian and yet ignore God's pattern cannot be true churches at all. Just as God gave a pattern to Moses for the Tabernacle, so he gave a pattern to the apostles to establish local churches. I have written about this in very many papers and will not repeat them here. In essence, God shows us very clearly that the local church:

- Meets to break bread as a chief priority, week by week.
- Always focuses upon Christ above all else. It must never centre upon a man, and certainly not the unregenerate.
- Edifies the saints by way of mutual encouragement with everyone sharing their gifts from God.
- It meets in a home and is never a large mass but is a small interdependent community; a family.

- Is led only by a team of equal elders; there is no senior pastor or sole leader. However leadership strategies are achieved by consensus of all. Salaries for leaders are unknown but itinerant teachers/preachers live by faith and deserve support as God leads.
- Is geared up to teach in every possible way (didactic teaching by elders, scripture readings, mutual participation, exhortations, admonishment, singing). If there is no teaching there is no growth since the purpose of leaders is to equip the saints to function (Eph 4:11-12).
- Enforces discipline so that the body is kept pure. Everything must be decent and in order; behaviour must be pure and heresy must be quashed (1 Cor 14:40).
- There are no smaller meetings than the house church and no larger gatherings in the region. On rare occasions, in order to solve an urgent debatable issue, several churches in a region meet together as a synod in order to determine the answer (as in Acts 15). The decision is made by consensus of all not just the leaders. This meeting is not for worship or teaching but solely to find God's will on a pressing matter.

Now only a very tiny proportion of supposed churches in the world comply with these principles. Indeed, many make it a vital issue to contradict them directly, such as by championing very large meetings, denying genuine fellowship, establishing authoritarian hierarchies, or focusing upon a celebrity preacher. What are we to say about this?

There is a great degree of mixture in the evangelical church today, varying from outright apostate works to confused sincerity. Each church leader will have to give an account to God for how the church was built and will either be rewarded or suffer loss for his work (2 Cor 5:10). Those church leaders that damage the flock, either by direct abuse or negligence, should be trembling in their shoes (Matt 18:6). But many more folk mean well but have always followed tradition and training instead of God's word; these just do not see the vital importance of Scriptural principles on church life. However, for our part we must set our sights on strictly following the pattern of God's words, whatever it costs.

The Gospel

Our preaching of the Gospel must be according to God's pattern. This pattern is set down in doctrinal principles throughout Scripture and is clarified by the works of the apostles. Thus, for instance, we see certain very clear statements that form the bedrock of the Gospel message:

- Man is dead in sins and cannot do any spiritual good work, still less believe the Gospel or repent. He cannot even prepare himself for conversion. (Eph 2:1; Rm 3:10-18; Ps 58:3; Gen 6:5)
- Christ died only for those whom God gave him, the elect; the many not all; his people not the world. (Jn 10: 14-15, 17:2, 9; Isa 53:11; Matt 20:28; Heb 9:28)
- There is no such thing as common grace or God's good favour towards reprobates. Reprobates reveal God's wrath and justice against sin. (Prov 16:4; Rm 9:22; Job 21:30).
- God does not love everyone but hates the reprobate and loves the elect from eternity (Ps 5:6; 11:5; Eph 1:4, 5:2; 1 Jn 4:16)
- Only those that the Father gave to Christ are called and drawn to hear Christ's words. (Jn 6:44, 65; Matt 11:25; Jer 31:3)
- The grace to believe the Gospel and to repent is given by God only to the elect and no one else. (Acts 14:27, 18:27; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 1:29; Acts 5:31, 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25-26; Rm 2:4)
- Sinners cannot contribute in any way to being saved; God alone is salvation. (Ps 18:2, 62:7, 68:20; Isa 12:2; Jer 3:23; Rm 1:16; Phil 1:28)

These truths are set down firmly in God's word and any Gospel message must be founded upon them; to teach otherwise is to deny God and divert from the pattern. People who preach a different message are preaching a different Gospel, something that God curses (Gal 1:6-9); those who 'convert' upon this message are unlikely to be truly saved, since they have not followed the truth. This is the case with countless numbers today. Many in the church today will hear the terrible words of Christ on the Last Day, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matt 7:23).

So, those whose Gospel message is based upon: God loving everyone, Christ dying for everyone, grace given to everyone, man's decision being necessary, that man can accept or reject the Gospel by free will, or that man co-operates with God in salvation, are all forms of apostasy from the truth. Such messages will do no spiritual good but will damage individuals.

The end (eschatology)

It is of grave importance that we understand what the Bible teaches about the end, what is the pattern of sound words regarding our future. The first reason is that various erroneous ideas about this have spawned faulty theological systems that then distract gullible believers and divert them from the truth and God's will. The second is that Scripture explains God's plan regarding the end in order that we should be encouraged in the victory of Christ, but also be prepared for the suffering to come. Just as the early church was persecuted but spread underground, so will the final church. In the same way the pre-deluvian church was persecuted down to only eight people, but these alone saw God's salvation in the Ark, a picture of Christ.

This means that all those systems of theology which teach that the church escapes the final persecution, such as by means of a secret rapture, are wrong. The final expression of the church is an underground movement of Biblical house churches that come to harvest like wheat, despite the fulness of weeds all around. It is not a Jewish kingdom; neither is it some other millennial golden age; it is a secret movement of ordinary believers meeting in homes.

Some of the pattern of sound words regarding the end:

- *There is no Biblical mention of a millennium* either by the Lord himself or the apostles. Such an idea is a figment of men's imagination; there is no apostolic teaching on this anywhere. The mention of 1,000 years in Rev 20:1-4 does not mean this and has to be interpreted within the scope of the symbolism that fills Revelation. In any case the scene in Rev 20:4 is heaven and dead saints not earth and living saints.
- *Christ is Lord over all that happens* in the end times. The work of Satan to build a global empire and persecute the saints is under God's total control and according to his purpose (hence his explanation to us in advance). The book of Revelation was written to teach this in particular.
- *There is a widespread apostasy of the outward church* to believe a delusion based upon signs and wonders (2 Thess 2: 1ff.; Matt 24:24). This falling away (which is happening now) is a sign that the end approaches. Alongside this delusion is a great deal of lawlessness, pagan intrusions and sin in the professing church (1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-3, 4:3-4). This means that all the postmillennial, dominionist and triumphal claims of a great Charismatic global revival at the end are false. Indeed, the end sees a proliferation of false prophets (Matt 24:11; Mk 7:15, 13:22), along with massive deception and false teaching (Acts 20:30; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Pt 2:1).

- *There is global persecution of the church* (Matt 24:9; Mk 13:9; Lk 21:12) under a totalitarian world government that has two arms: political and religious (Rev 13, 17). The church thrives underground during this just as it did under ten Roman persecutions (Matt 13:30).
- *The age-old Gospel is preached to all nations* as a witness of God to the world in the time of its fulness of sin (Matt 24:14). There is no new Gospel message; no new people of God; no demise of the church; no renewal of the Old Covenant.
- *There is one glorious coming of the Lord Jesus Christ*, to gather his saints. There is not a shred of evidence for two returns. This will usher in the transformation of the saints, the Final Judgment and the Restoration of the earth to be united with heaven for evermore (2 Pt 3:10-13; 1 Thess 5:2; Matt 24:27; Lk 17:24; Mal 3:2).

Therefore, all these theological systems are false:

1. Those which focus upon a Charismatic, end-time, super-powerful church under apostles and prophets (Charismatic Postmillennial Dominionism).
2. Those which focus upon the renewal of strict Mosaic Law through a revival church that dominates the world (Theonomy and Reconstructionism).
3. Those which focus upon Israel, Judaism, Jewish Roots, a separate Jewish kingdom, a separation of the church and Israel etc. (Dispensationalism of various sorts).

Anything that is not according to the pattern given by God is false and dangerous.

A simple matter, much confused

To take a final example, it ought to be clear and straightforward that new believers are taught how to pray in a Biblical manner. However, there are two problems: the first is that most young converts are not trained or catechised at all but are left to their own devices. This is a great evil. The second is that, even when they are discipled, many pastors don't understand this matter properly themselves.

Most people do not know how to pray in general, or how to pray on a daily basis in their own devotions.

First is the matter of to whom do we pray? Well every example of godly prayer in the Old Testament is directed to God the Father, the Lord of Hosts, the Almighty. This is logical since the Messiah had not yet appeared in the flesh and the ministry of the Holy Spirit was not illuminated as it is in the New Testament. However, it sets a great precedent that prayer should be to God the Father, the Almighty.

In fact, this is continued in the New Testament. All the examples of godly prayer are addressed to God. Even those directed to 'the Lord' mean the Lord God. Indeed, we are told to address our prayers to the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ:

Giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Col 3:17

I thank my God through Jesus Christ. Rm 1:8

I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord! Rm 7:25

You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Pt 2:5

This is because, as Jesus himself explained, 'No one comes to the Father except through me' (Jn 14:6). God is the one we direct our prayer to, and Jesus is the reason why this prayer is

accepted, despite its faults. We come in the name, authority and virtue of Jesus and approach God with fear and reverence. Let's look at some examples:

The apostles:

So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: 'Lord, you *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: "Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ." For truly against your holy Servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done. ...' Acts 4:24-28

This clearly distinguishes between Christ in the context of the prayer and the Lord God to whom the prayer is directed.

Stephen

And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'
Acts 7:59

Do not let this verse confuse you. Stephen was praying to God the Father as he was dying. At the point of death he sees the Lord Jesus coming to take him to heaven as Jesus promised (Jn 14:3). When he says, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit' he is actually addressing Jesus in front of him. This occurred during his prayer to God - 'as he was calling on God'. Thus Stephen prayed to the Father.

The early church

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.
Acts 12:5

Paul:

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you... Eph 3:14-16

Now this should be crystal clear to us since the Lord himself taught us to pray daily and that prayer is addressed to the Father

In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Matt 6:9

Indeed, all Jesus' prayers as a man, which are given to us as examples how to pray, are addressed to the Father.

Without question our prayers should be addressed to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ.

Now all this means that much prayer in the modern church is founded wrongly. Those who pray to the Holy Spirit are wrong. He proceeds from the Father and the Son; his ministry is to bring the things of Christ to us and not to draw attention to himself. There is no example in Scripture of saints praying to the Holy Spirit. It also means that prayer to Jesus as Lord, with no attention to the Father, who is the one who answers prayer, is also wrong. How much confusion is there in the church today on these issues?

Scripture gives us a pattern regarding praying; it is our job to pray according to that pattern. Other features of daily devotions, as illustrated and implied in the Lord's Prayer, are, worship, seeking to be filled with the Spirit and put on the new man, seeking God's

glorious testimony in the world, seeking grace for daily needs, seeking to abide in Christ and be nourished by him, seeking daily forgiveness and forgiving others, seeking defence from oppression. Many people fail to ask God for these things daily and wonder why they are under-nourished.

You do not have because you do not ask. Jm 4:2

Conclusion

The apostle Paul was unafraid to make demands of his hearers, commanding them to obey the words that God had given him to instruct believers in the faith. Here are some examples:

But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. Rm 6:17

And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. 2 Thess 3:14

These things command and teach. 1 Tim 4:11

These things command, that they may be blameless. 1 Tim 5:7

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 1 Tim 6:17

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*. 2 Tim 3:14

There is no difference between the New Covenant and the Old in the matter of obedience; in both covenants God commands adherence to his commands (whether expressed by OT prophets or NT apostles) and expects believers to act according to his pattern,

Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 2 Tim 1:13

The reason so many fall aside into deception in these days is because they fail to obey the pattern of sound words given by God through his servants. Through either following dead tradition, the errors of men or the foolish subjective impressions of so-called 'prophets' they disobey God and act contrary to his word. Only God's word reveals the truth of Christ and this truth sets people free (Jn 8:32). There is no freedom in blindly following men or tradition, this only leads to bondage and corruption. Avoiding or ignoring God's word is a path that leads to destruction and only those who obey God's commandments are assured of eternal life (1 Jn 2:4, 3:24; Rev 22:14). We must live according to the pattern.

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