
What About the Pattern?

Doesn't God give us a divine pattern for the church by which we will all be judged? The answer is no!

There are billions of people but no two people are absolutely alike — each has his own unique fingerprints, voice print and physiognomy. There are billions of stars; but no two stars are exactly alike, for every star differs from every other star in glory (I Cor. 15:41). Every snowflake has its own unique design. Every grain of sand has its own special size and shape.

The God whom we serve is a God of infinite variety! In the light of His nature it would be strange indeed, if not unnatural, for all churches and all Christians to function in identically the same way.

The early disciples were said to have continued steadfastly in:

- (1) The Apostles teaching,
- (2) Fellowship,
- (3) The breaking of bread and
- (4) Prayers (Acts 2:42).

This, however, is far from being a tightly structured "pattern" which would preclude diversity. As a matter of fact, within the framework of these four functions, there could be an infinite variety of expression.

A wide divergence in creation can result from only a few basic

components. For example, we have only five senses: We can see, hear, smell, taste and feel — but these basic components provide us with unlimited sensations.

There are only four tastes which the human tongue can discern. They are sweet, sour, bitter and salt. Yet we enjoy an infinite variety of flavors.

All the colors of our world spring from only three primary colors. They are red, yellow and blue. Black and white are technically not colors but serve only to shade and tint. To print a picture in full color on a white piece of paper, it needs to go through a printing press only four times.

All the harmony in the world is formed from only seven notes on the scale. The musician, the artist and the cook can express their creativity from a few basic ingredients in an infinite variety of ways, and so can the Christian.

When Moses met with God upon the mountain, he was given specific instructions regarding the building of the Tabernacle. He was divinely commissioned to “make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount” (Heb. 8:5). The entire system was rigid and inflexible. It is important to remember that the Tabernacle was a copy or shadow of things in the heavens. It was not at all to teach that the Christian system was to be rigid and inflexible.

As a matter of fact, under such a view of things Jesus could not even be a priest for He came from the wrong tribe. The priesthood of Jesus, however, transcends and takes precedence over legalism. His ministry is like that of Melchisedek. It somehow eludes human explanations and reasoning.

Christianity differs from Judaism like Isaac differed from Ishmael. Those who are born of the Spirit operate upon a different level from those who are born after the flesh. Among those that are born of women there was no greater prophet than John the Baptist — but even the least in the Kingdom of Jesus takes precedence over John (Matt. 11:11).

Patterns

Let us consider the various Greek words which are translated as “pattern” in the New Covenant Scriptures. *Please observe that not one time does the word pattern ever refer to the governmental structure of a local congregation!*

Tupos comes from the word which means “to strike.” It means “an impression or mark of a blow,” “a seal, stamp or die,” “form,

mold, pattern." It is used 16 times and is variously translated as: ensample 5, example 2, fashion 1, figure 1, form 1, manner 1, pattern 2, print 2.

Hupodeigma. This is from the Greek word *hupo*, under, and the word *deiknumi*, to show. It is used six times and is translated as ensample 1, example 4, pattern 1.

Hupotuposis means to "outline, sketch." Thayer associates it with a pattern to be held up and copied. It is used two times and is translated as form once and pattern once. *Hupogrammos* is used only once (I Pet. 2:21) but is so similar to the words for pattern that it should be included here. It literally means "underwriting" and refers to letters which were traced or copied. *Deigma* is also similar and is used one time in Jude 7.

Here is the way these words are used in the Scriptures:

1. Adam was a "figure" or "pattern" of Jesus (Rom. 5:14).
 2. The tabernacle, etc. were "patterns" of spiritual realities in the heavens (Acts 7:44, Heb. 8:5, 9:23).

3. Old Testament prophets were "patterns" or "examples" for those suffering or in need of patience (Jms. 5:10).

4. Jesus gave a "pattern" or "example" by washing the disciples' feet (Jn. 13:15). When He was persecuted, He also gave us an "example" that we should follow in His steps (I Pet. 2:21).

5. Paul became a "pattern" or "example" by means of his conversion (I Tim. 1:16), his personal conduct (Phil. 3:17) and his willingness to work (II Thes. 3:9).

6. Timothy was to be a "pattern" or "example" in "word, manner of life, love, spirit, faith, in purity" (I Tim. 4:12).

7. Titus was to be a "pattern" in good works, uncorrupt teaching, gravity and sincerity (Tit. 2:7).

8. Elders are not to be lords over God's people but "patterns" or "ensamples" to the flock (I Pet. 5:3).

9. Timothy was to hold fast a "form" or "pattern" of sound words (II Tim. 1:13). The word "sound" means "healthy" and refers not to the governmental structure of a local assembly but to the moral conduct of one's personal life. (See I Tim. 1:9-10, II Tim. 4:3, Tit. 1:9, 13; 2:1.)

Negative Patterns

1. Israel is a "pattern" or "example" to us that we should not "lust after evil things" (I Cor. 10:6), "murmur" and "be destroyed" (I Cor. 10:11), or fall after their "pattern" or "example" of unbelief (Heb. 4:11).

2. Sodom and Gomorrah are "patterns or examples" for those who want to live ungodly lives (II Pet. 2:6, Jd. 7).

Jesus' Pattern

The "pattern" which Jesus left for His disciples was a "pattern" of love. They were to love God and they were to love humanity, and they could not do one without the other.

He did not bind upon them one "standard operational procedure," but encouraged them to trust in God and improvise. Upon one occasion, for example, He sent them out like sheep in the midst of wolves. They were to take no wallet, no money, no shoes and no extra clothing. Their journeys from city to city would naturally place them in a wide variety of different circumstances. It is not difficult to imagine that such a program would necessitate a great degree of flexibility.

Upon another occasion when circumstances were different, He reminded them of a previous commission and then gave them new instructions:

And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, nothing. Then said he unto them, But now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one (Lk. 22:35-36).

It is not necessary that we understand all of the circumstances involved in His change of instructions, but it is important that we see the necessity of remaining flexible.

The genius of the Christian System is that it is based upon love. Love, you remember, doesn't insist upon having its own way. It is not rigid and inflexible but has a way of adapting to unusual circumstances.

The story of the Good Samaritan provides an interesting case in point. The priest and the Levite looked at the victim of a crime through the eyes of legalism and preferred not to get involved. Perhaps they gave serious thought to their official responsibilities and considered Leviticus 21:1ff regarding defilement by the dead. Should the victim have died while they were ministering to him, they would have been ceremonially unclean. Or perhaps they thought of Leviticus 22:5 which prohibited the touching of a man who had any form of uncleanness. At any rate the result of their legalistic approach was zero. They passed by on the other side.

Then came the Samaritan. He did not whip out a copy of the

law to determine his course of action. He did not send off to Jerusalem for authority or permission to digress from standard operational procedure. *His love enabled him to adapt to the situation.* He had compassion upon the man — that's why he poured oil and wine into his wounds. He felt sorry for his suffering; that's why he set him on the beast and transported him to a place of refuge. He had mercy upon him at the hour of his need; that's why he paid his bill and even returned to compensate for any further expense. In short, he did for that man what he would have wanted someone to do for him and under the same or similar circumstances. That's what love is all about!

If there is a pattern for the New Testament Church, it is the pattern of love. It is the one thing that can safely be superimposed upon every situation with no fear of doing violence to the purpose of God.

Questions for Discussion — Lesson 12

1. Since the word "church" simply means "assembly," what is it that distinguishes a Christian assembly from one that is not Christian?
2. Can a church exist and function without elders?
3. How much structure is essential for Christians to constitute a church? Can you prove your answer?
4. Contrast the tightly structured religion of the Pharisees with the teaching of Jesus.
5. Does a church have to have deacons?
6. Did Jesus ever do anything unscriptural?
7. Can you think of a church problem which a proper kind of love will not solve?