

A Survey of the Bible

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" Psalm 119:105

Lesson 10

The Church Jesus Built Following the Divine Pattern

Recall for a moment God's instruction to Moses concerning the tabernacle. Several times God warned Moses to make all things as he showed him on the mount (see Ex. 25:40). Read the last chapter of Exodus and note that Moses did all that God commanded. He followed the pattern God gave him on the mount. This is a great illustration for us to follow. In all things, when God has given a pattern to follow he expects us to follow it completely.

In the New Testament we have a pattern from God. The instructions found throughout the New Testament provide the pattern for modern man. Paul instructed Timothy to *"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). If we are to be found faithful to God we must seek to understand the pattern and follow the pattern.

The Pattern of Organization.

Peter told of the coronation of Jesus in his sermon to the Jews (Acts 2). He said that Jesus was sitting at the right hand of God till his enemies are made his footstool (2:35). This gives us the first picture of the pattern for church organization. Jesus has complete authority over the church.

One of the comparisons Paul used to help us understand God's plan for the church is the human body (see 1 Cor. 12:12ff). In this comparison Paul emphasized that Jesus is the head of the body (Eph. 1:22,23). The head controls the body, the church. The church is to be subject in all things to the head (Eph. 5:22,23). Jesus has sole authority in the church.

Jesus promised to build his church, his kingdom. The kingdom is another illustration of the church. The promise

Jesus made was that he would establish the kingdom within the generation of those who heard him speak (Mk 9:1). Did he? Yes! The apostle Paul rejoiced that he had been translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of the son of his love - the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13). John, the apostle, said he was a partaker in the kingdom (Rev. 1:9). Since there was/is a kingdom, Jesus is king.

As Jesus reigns from the right hand of God he has also given organization to the church on earth. He gave some to be "apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). This is organization. This organization was peculiar to the New Testament age. To be an apostle one had to be an eye-witness of the life of Jesus (Acts 1:21). There are no living apostles on earth today, for no living person was an eye witness to Jesus' life. The prophets were preachers who were led directly by the Spirit of God. We do not have prophets today either. Evangelists were those teaching the lost, but they too

were guided directly by the Holy Spirit. In fact, in this context, these 'offices' in the church were all connected to the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. So what about today? What organization is the modern church to have?

In the first century age certain men were appointed to oversee and spiritually feed the church. Many of the tasks these men were to fulfill are indicated in the word used for their work: bishop, elder, pastor. While the word elder refers to age and wisdom, the term bishop emphasizes 'oversight' and the word pastor denotes the work of the shepherd with his flock. These three words are used together in Acts 20:17-29 and 1 Peter 5:1-5 to refer to the same men. The bishop is the pastor, who is also the elder, who is referred to as the bishop.

The New Testament Letters

The New Testament has 27 books of which 21 are letters. These letters are called epistles in some translations. Each letter has its own background and circumstance of writing and addresses unique needs of the early church. However, despite different men writing them they are all the product of the Holy Spirit. The men who wrote were guided by the Spirit of God to provide for man the exact instructions [pattern] God wanted [wants] man to follow. Read these letters carefully. They are man's guide from God.

This man is to meet certain qualifications before he is to serve as a bishop [elder, pastor]. He is also to carry out his work under the oversight of the Lord himself, the chief shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1-5). Note the qualifications this man must have before he becomes an elder - see 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:2-5.

The elder is always one of a plurality. Whenever you read of an elder in the new Testament, as a bishop of a congregation, you will note that he is one of a plurality and that he only exercises authority [oversight] over the congregation which selected him.

So, where there are men qualified, the New Testament pattern prescribes a plurality of elders over each congregation of the Lord's church.

Under the oversight of the elders [bishops, pastors] there are men who work as deacons. The word deacon simply means 'to serve'. These men serve the congregation in specific works. They too have specific qualifications to meet before being appointed as a deacon and blessings to enjoy as a deacon - 1 Tim. 3:8-12.

Also under the oversight of the elders, and working with them, are preachers [ministers, evangelists]. The preachers have specific works to do as given by Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus, two gospel preachers in the first century. A preacher who follows these instructions completely will be a faithful soldier of Christ Jesus.

Every member of the Lord's church is to also place him or her self under the oversight of the elders of that congregation (Heb. 13:17). The elder will give answer to the Lord for each member, and that answer will affect the eternal condition of the member. It is within the local congregation that we serve the Lord and one another. When we identify with a congregation and work diligently within the oversight of that congregation we are pleasing to the Lord [assuming the congregation and its leaders are following the pattern God has given].

The Pattern Of Worship/Assembly.

God instructs his children to worship him. And, remember, God will not accept any form of worship. *"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"* (Jn 4:24). The basic pattern for worship is in spirit and truth. "In spirit"

points to our spirit. We must worship God sincerely, with our spirit. We cannot go through a ritual without heart felt worship and be acceptable to God. And, "in truth" points to the pattern he has set for worship.

We cannot approach God in any manner but must follow the pattern he has given to us. Remember King Saul's intention to sacrifice the animals of the Amalekites? Could we say that his intentions were 'noble'? We can say that his actions were not acceptable. Why? God told him to destroy them. That prohibited the idea of saving them for a sacrifice later. When God has spoken we must obey. This is worship in truth.

Worship can be done individually and as a body, the church coming together. There are, however, restrictions on both. We are to eat of the Lord's

Supper as a body. We come together to eat (1 Cor. 11:17). I can sing with the congregation (1 Cor. 14:15) or I can sing alone (Jms 5:13,14). Whatever we do we need to make certain we have instruction from God to do it, and that we follow that instruction.

The Lord's Supper. The night before his crucifixion Jesus observed the Jewish passover meal. As he took of it he gave instructions for the Lord's Supper. After his ascension and the outpouring [baptism] of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, further instruction was given. The New Testament pattern tells us that we are to assemble on the first day of the week and partake of this supper as a body. The first day was the designated day of the assembly (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), and it was during the church's assembly that the supper was eaten (1 Cor. 11:17ff). This supper is to be eaten by Christians in memory of the sacrifice Jesus provided for us. We are to remember his sacrifice as we partake of the two elements: the fruit of the vine representing his shed blood and the unleavened bread symbolic of the body he gave for us. These are the only two elements of the Lord's supper. We cannot change them, take one or both away, or add to them. We must abide in the pattern. As we partake we consider our fellow

The Sabbath?

Paul, the apostle, went to the synagogue of the Jews on the Sabbath frequently. He did this to preach the gospel to those whom God prepared. He was not observing it as the Jew did.

The law of Moses ended at the cross and the law of Christ began. With this change of law the Sabbath observance ceased. Paul specifically told the Colossians to let none judge them in respect of the Sabbath (Col. 2:16). The law of Christ instructs the Christian to assemble on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1,2) - the day on which Christ was raised from the dead.

Christian (1 Cor. 11:29ff) as well as proclaim the Lord's death till he comes (1 Cor. 11:26). So, on each first day [Sunday] we are to assemble to observe the supper of the Lord.

Giving. The apostle Paul specifically commanded that we lay by in store, give, on the first day of the week. When Sunday comes we assemble to give. Giving in the New Testament is not prescribed as the tithe, but *as we prosper*. We are to give abundantly and cheerfully. Consider Paul's instructions in 1 Cor. 16:1,2; 2 Cor. 8:1-5; and 2 Cor. 9:6-9 as you consider your giving. Remember that the Old Testament instructed the tithe [10%] as the beginning of the gifts they offered. Since the New Testament [covenant] is the better covenant would you consider it right to give less than the 'beginning' of what was expected under the old covenant?

Singing. Another pattern for the New Testament saint is singing. Singing was a part of the Christian life. James encouraged the joyful to sing (Jms 5:16). Singing can be done for secular purposes or for spiritual. We are studying the spiritual with no comment on the secular.

Singing was also part of the pattern for the assembly of the church. Paul encouraged the saints in Corinth to sing with the spirit and with the understanding. Again, this both emphasizes the sincerity as well as the truthfulness of the expression in song. It is important to emphasize in our modern world that the music authorized in the New Testament was singing. There was no authorization given for playing any instrument, other than one's own heart [figuratively]. If we are walking in the pattern God gave we will leave the instrument and simply sing.

Praying. The Christian is to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). This does not mean that there is no other activity in which the Christian engages, but that the Christian life is a life rich in prayer. This is a privilege which belongs to the child of God. We become children of God when our sins are forgiven. As his children we fellowship God and are no longer separated from him (consider Rom. 3:21; Is. 59:1,2).

Prayer is also a part of the assembly of the Lord's kingdom [church]. Prayer, too, is to be with the spirit and the understanding (1 Cor. 14:15). We give thought to our prayers and pray as we are instructed (see Mt. 6:9ff). Christians have the honor of praying to the Father through his son Jesus Christ (Col. 3:17).

Preaching. To preach is to read, explain, and apply the word of God to all who listen. God's word applies equally to the saint and the sinner. The preacher must be diligent in his work to present the right message to those listening.

The preacher is to 'preach the word' at every occasion, at any time (2 Tim. 4:2-4). One of the dangers Paul addressed was the rejection of the truth and the love of falsehood. Paul told Timothy to preach the word to assist the faithful. Today that same instruction is given to every preacher. Those who preach do not have the authority to preach their opinion or their desire - preachers must preach the word of God. Preachers should be questioned about any teaching which appears to be contrary to the word of God, always in the spirit of seeking truth. Each person must resist following man and determine to follow Jesus. The preacher ought to assist in this determination and never lead one astray. Unfortunately, the modern world is filled with religious confusion. Reader - it is your responsibility to check and make certain what you have been taught [or teach] is true [see 1 Jn 4:1-4].

Each of us can worship God any time and any place. We do need to recognize the pattern of worship which God has given for us to observe. By following that pattern we will be worshiping in truth, and following is sincerely makes us worshipers in spirit. And remember, on Sunday every child of God needs to gather with the local congregation to assemble for the purpose of worshiping God as well as encouraging one another (Heb. 10:24,25).

The Pattern for Living.

God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). When we know the Bible, the word of God, we are able to be perfect [in the sense of complete or mature] in God's sight (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Already several parts of God's pattern have been explained - there is much more to God's pattern.

God gives a **pattern for the family**. God has given a pattern for marriage. In fact, marriage was instituted by God (Gen. 2) and is regulated by God (Mt. 19:1-10). Do you want to have a 'marriage made in heaven'? Follow the pattern God has given for you, whether husband or wife. Consider these passages as a beginning: Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Pet. 3:1-7. A healthy application of these passages will make the

word divorce, as applied to marriage, obsolete. Do you want to have the family God intended? Again, follow God's pattern. Begin with a study of Proverbs and add to that the following scriptures: Eph. 6:1-4; 1 Tim. 5:14; Tit. 2:4-6. Remember, no person is perfect. But you will be blessed by following this pattern.

God gives a **pattern for employment**. Yes, every aspect of our life is addressed by God. Read Ephesians 6:5-9 and Colossians 3:2 - 4:1 and see if they make a difference in your employment. Christians should be the best employers and employees of any society.

God gives a **pattern for living**. Following God's pattern for personal holiness will bring great blessings to your life. Never will you worry about drug abuse, alcoholism, unwed pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and like problems. Following the pattern God gives will cause you to never be involved in activities which result in these consequences. Be bold! Recognize the blessings God has given and follow the path he has provided. Put away those things in your life which hinder godliness. Consider Romans 12:1-3; Galatians 5:16-24; Colossians 3:1-15. This is just the beginning. Seek God's will continually!

Are you a Christian?

You have completed this Bible survey course. This can be the beginning, it may also be a good review for many. The question you need to ask is, "How does God view me?" Are you forgiven of your sin, or are you still separated from God by your sin.

Too many people in the world today believe they are Christians but they follow a pattern which is not found in the Bible. Are you bold enough to check your relationship with God? Are you honest enough to answer only to God? Of the two following quotes which one does God instruct and which one does he not? {Which is in the Bible}

Receive the Lord Jesus into your heart and pray for the Lord to forgive your sins.

Scripture Reference: _____

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture Reference: _____

Do you want to become a Christian? Follow the path Peter (Acts 2:38) gives and the path which Paul followed (Acts 22:16).

Review.

Who is the head of the church?

Does the Bible authorize any church organization on earth higher than the elders of a congregation?

What do the terms elder, bishop, and pastor mean? To whom do they apply?

List the five actions God instructs us to do in our worship to him.

Write down three specifics about God's plan for families [use the scriptures given in the lesson]. How can you improve your family life using these specific actions?

According to God's plan for man's redemption, have you been forgiven of your sins (become a Christian)?

If not, why delay? (Consider Jms 4:13,14; 2 Cor. 6:1,2).

For Further Study

LeRoy Brownlow. *Why I am a Member of the Church of Christ*.

Homer Hailey. *From Creation to the Day of Eternity* (Las Vegas, NV: Nevada Publications, 1982), pages 77-213.

Edward C. Wharton. *The Church of Christ: The Distinctive Nature of the New Testament Church* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Co, 1987).

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