

Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

FOLLOW GOD'S PATTERN FOR CHURCH WORK

Roy H. Lanier, Jr.

Inspiration issues a call to **“follow the pattern of sound words”** (2 Tim. 1:13; *ESV*).

This indicates that God was concerned about healthy, sound words and whether Timothy was willing to follow such a pattern. This also demands that there was a pattern, that God had designed the gospel in words that could be followed, and that God expected His disciples to honor such a pattern.

That such expectations of God were also true even in Old Testament days is seen when God told Moses to **“make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain”** (Heb. 8:5; cf. Exo. 25:40). Thus, the incidence of God's expectations concerning disciples following heaven's designs is quite fully exposed in Scripture.

PATTERNS ARE SCRIPTURAL

Seven prominent words in Scripture emphasize the truth of a pattern. The most prominent word used is *tupos*, used 16 times and variously translated as pattern, ensample (KJV), example, model, form, figure, fashion, and “print” because the word originally meant the mark of a blow or a stamp (Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*). It is even used for the print of the nails in Jesus' hands (John 20:25). Related words are *qantitupos*, *hupotuposis*, *deigma*, *hupodeigma*, *hupodeiknumi* and *hupogrammos*. The word *tupos* is seen

34 times in the New Testament as Christians are called to be patterns, examples, models, and figures.

Following a pattern is an example of walking by faith. Christians are reminded that **“we walk by faith, not by sight”** (2 Cor. 5:7) and that faith springs from hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). A prominent example of this is how Noah built the ark: **“He did all that God commanded him”** (Gen. 6:22). However, because this incident was said to be done **“by faith”** (Heb. 11:7), one can conclude that doing something by faith is doing what God commands.

God is the great Designer, who expects men to follow His designs. This is true in regard to the home, worship, building an ark, building the tabernacle in the wilderness, and later, the temple. And the same principle is true in regard to the church Jesus built. God designed the work and worship of the church, as clearly exposed in Scripture.

THE PATTERN FROM CHURCH ACTIVITY

When one reads carefully the history book—Acts Of The Apostles—and the following epistles, three activities of the church are evident: teaching the Word, worshiping the Lord, and helping the needy. One cannot read about any other activities by the church throughout the New Testament. Even the fledgling church in Thessalonica respected pattern authority, for they **“became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea”** (1 The. 2:14). If “walking by faith” is honored, that is what churches will continue to do.

In teaching the Word, such includes not only edification but also evangelism. The early church

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Contending FOR THE Faith™

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**Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder
August 3, 1917–October 10, 2001**

Seasons Greetings
&
Happy New Year!

Guest Editorial...

THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

Guy N. Woods

Unity in the body of Christ—the church of our Lord—is a goal for which every sincere and faithful follower of the Christ diligently seeks and fervently prays. Why those who profess His name and adhere to His standard should all be one are matters clearly taught in the scriptures and therefore unquestioned by those who respect his will and who confess allegiance to His cause (1 Cor, 1:10; Eph. 4:1-6). But, its realization has, in large measure, eluded us.

Why?

The reasons are many, chief among them being the view that unity must be reached on the basis of agreement in certain prescribed areas, one's soundness being determined by one's mental assent to the views common to the faction to which one belongs. This concept, characteristic of all parties among us, is basically and fundamentally unsound because unity in the body of Christ does not necessarily result from agreement among those who constitute any faction or all of them together. It should be obvious to all that men may, and often do, agree fully on all matters by them regarded as essential yet are far, very far from being one in Christ. Unity—conformity of views—may exist *out of* Christ as well as *in* Him; but, this is very far from being the unity for which the Saviour prayed in Gethsemane. Unity in commitment to *a* cause is not a necessary consequent of faithful discipleship; agreement on certain creedal matters as a condition of acceptance in fellowship is to resort to a human, not a divine standard of soundness. Paul perceived that there were those who would seek to establish their loyalty to party in this manner, and wrote,

For we are not bold to number or compare ourselves with certain of them that commend themselves: but they themselves, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understanding (2 Cor.

10:12).

Christ is the source of our lives as He is also the sphere of our total religious faith and spiritual activity. As the branch withers and dies when separated from the True Vine (John 15:1-6), so the members of His body—the church—subsist and are one in Him only as they partake of His spirit, accept fully His teaching and conform wholly to His will (Luke 6:46). This done, unity with him prevails and, in consequence, with all others in His body with like motivation.

The truth is, the faith that saves is vastly more than simple intellectual assent to a body of teaching; unless it is characterized by love, deep devotion and commitment without reservation to Him; unless the heart, the mind, and the soul are wholly His; unless one's thoughts, purposes and plans all converge in Him is there unity with the Head and consequential unity with all other members of His body (1 Cor. 12:12). Where the one is wanting, the other is impossible.

To seek unity on the ground of common belief in party tenets alone, promotes sectarianism and produces more division in the body of Christ. James wrote, **“The devils also believe and tremble”** (Jam. 2:19). These demons were of common faith and thus united in their convictions but the “unity” resulting was far from that which God intended for his people. One's views may harmonize fully with those of the party yet far short of that unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace which Paul approved. Each factious group among us today began, is maintained, and persists solely on the basis of agreement in a narrow and restricted area of allegiance to a hobby and sectarian view acceptable only to the group which holds it, but which effectively operates as a barrier to fellowship with others of like precious faith in all other areas of teaching and practice! How unutterably sad must this situation be to Him who earnestly prayed that His followers might be one.

—Deceased

(continued from page 1)

“devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). That these edification and worship meetings continued as a regular practice is seen by subsequent events (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11-14; 16:1-2). That the church was also involved in evangelism is seen when Antioch was the church where Paul's missionary journeys began and where they were reported afterward (Acts 13:1-4; 14:26-28; 15:36-41; 18:22-23). Thus, the Great Commission to teach, baptize, and continue teaching was carried out by churches and by individuals.

The churches were also active in helping the needy, even from the very beginning (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37). Shortly thereafter, one sees the church in Antioch responding to the needs in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). Still later, one sees Paul urging gifts to be sent to the Jewish brethren (Rom. 15:25-29), and one can trace his efforts to collect money from churches on his journey to take to Judea (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:1-4; 9:1-15).

The pattern of activities and work of the Lord's churches includes the teaching of the gospel, worshipping together in edification, and helping the needy. No other church works are found during the first century.

OUTSIDE OF THE PATTERN

Many good works and activities in which individual Christians can be engaged are simply not within the scope

of the work of the Lord's church. Parents are to educate their children, but nothing in the New Testament indicates that churches ought to be involved in secular education. Secular studies, from preschool to doctoral degree programs, are now offered by schools owned and operated by Christians. Nothing can be found in Scripture that indicates the work of the Lord's churches could include investing, subsidizing or involving local churches in such secular education. Good as this may be, it is still not within the holy pattern.

Recreation and entertainment are also a part of family life, but no pattern can be found that gives book-chapter-verse for churches to build imposing structures for members to play all sorts of games. (While sitting some 25 years ago underneath a basketball goal in one such building, I heard an elder and a preacher argue quite loudly that the building was not a gymnasium!)

Churches evidently give little thought today about supporting secular hospitals, retirement homes, children's homes, adoption societies, radio stations, disaster organizations, preacher schools, sports organizations, scouting groups, etc. Some of these works, when accomplished by local churches, can be quite scriptural. No pattern can be found in Scripture for those operated as separate secular organizations and then supported by churches.

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Sadly, so many brethren have twisted Scriptures to their own desires, wandering off into their own personal myths (2 Pet. 3:16; 2 Tim. 4:4). We now have a plethora of churches that have turned to secular, social, recreational, and entertainment works. When asked for book-chapter-and-verse, one receives near Olympic-level high jumping treatment of Scripture.

In churches respect “walking by faith,” they will be busy about the Lord’s work, not the mundane activities that have little spiritual value. A quote by B. C. Goodpasture might be pertinent to conclude:

For the church to turn aside from its divine work to furnish amusement and recreation is to pervert its mission. It is to degrade its mission. Amusement and recreation should stem from the home rather than the church. The church, like Nehemiah, has a great work to do, and it should not come down on the Plains of Ono to amuse and entertain.

As the church turns its attention to amusement and recreation, it will be shorn of its power as Samson was when his hair was cut. Only as the church becomes worldly, as it pillows its head on the lap of Delilah, will it want to turn from its wonted course to relatively unimportant matters. Imagine Paul selecting

and training a group of brethren to compete in the Isthmian games! Of his work at Corinth he said: “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” What then is the work of the church? (“The Mission of the Church,” *The Gospel Advocate*, May 20, 1948).



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