

### 3. The New Testament Pattern

**Is there a New Testament pattern?** This is the fundamental issue that divides the new innovative practices from the teaching of the New Testament. These innovative practices include new and different items of worship and new ideas of what constitutes the fellowship of true believers. Some innovators regard the teaching of the New Testament writers as love letters of advice, not to be binding on the church today. They look only to the teaching of Jesus and examples from the Old Testament to establish their position. Therefore it is important to begin by looking to “the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation” (Eph 1:13) – to the words of Jesus and his apostles. In John 17:17, Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

**Jesus preached a gospel of certainty of works and worship.** Not just any work or worship would please the father. In Matt 7:21-23 He said:

21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’”

**These of whom Jesus speaks were worshipers** – They said, “Lord, Lord;” they prophesied in his name; and they did many wonderful works in his name. What went wrong? Where did they fail? On two counts the Lord indicted them. First, they failed to do the will of the father, and second, they practiced lawlessness. Two principles emerge: In practices of work and worship, we must do the will of the father, and we must not practice without law. *If it is the will of God, it is not lawlessness. If it is lawlessness, it is not the will of God.* When innovators advance a new practice of work and worship, the congregation should ask: Is it the will of the Father? Is it in the New Testament?

**Repeatedly the Lord reiterated these principles.** In Matt 15:8-9, he applied the principles to worship: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.” If the new practice is not in the word of God, from where does it come? It comes from men and the precepts of men. Their worship is in vain. No amount of lip worship (“Lord, Lord.”) will change that. When the congregation sees people doing practices that are not in the New Testament, they should realize that it is vain. No matter how fervent the practitioners perform, how conscientious they seem, or how loud they contend for their practice, it is in vain that they worship. In John 4:23 Jesus said: “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.” *Vain worshipers worship according to the teachings of men. True worshipers worship in spirit and truth.*

**The Lord charged his disciples to teach certainty in the practices that the church was to observe.** He commanded in Matt 28:19-20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (emphasis added)

**The spirit was to guide the apostles into all truth.** Jesus taught in John 16:13: “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth.” Our true worship is in truth; we are sanctified in this truth; the Spirit guided the apostles into all truth; and we were commanded to observe it all. It will be in this truth that we will find the New Testament pattern for worship and the pattern for the fellowship of true believers.

**Jesus preached a gospel of certainty of works and worship.** He gave his apostles the right to teach whatsoever He had commanded, and He gave them the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth.

We have seen that (1) Jesus preached a gospel of certainty of works and worship, (2) over and over the Lord reiterated these principles, (3) the Lord charged his disciples to teach certainty in the practices that the church was to observe, and (4) the spirit was to guide the apostles into all truth. To what degree did the apostles carry out the command to teach the disciples “to observe all that I commanded you.”?

**From the beginning, the early church devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.** Luke states expressly: “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of

bread and to prayer." Paul commended these disciples for sticking to the teaching and told the Thessalonica church to follow their example:

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. 1 Thess 2:13-14.

The New Testament writers understood that they were teaching the verbally inspired word of God. Paul said in I Cor 2:7-13:

7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery . . . 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit . . . for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

Paul showed exactly how these words of the Spirit came to us. In Eph 3:3-5, he said:

3 how that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.

**The certain language is unmistakable, for all time.** The mystery of Christ is revealed in His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit. When we read we can understand as Paul understood. The writings are not mere suggestions or love letters, given in part or to be taken in part or ignored, as a new generation of innovators might hope. To the contrary, they are inspired, equipping us for every good work, making us complete: "16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." 2 Tim 3:16-17. As it instructs us in every good work, the word is also for all time. Jude wrote of our common salvation: "I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was *once for all* handed down to the saints." Jude 3.

**The apostles and prophets taught that a certain pattern defines true believers and their fellowship.** The faith that was once for all handed down includes the pattern by which men become servants of righteousness. Paul wrote in Rom. 6:17-18: "17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." The word *form* is *pattern*. "The metaphor is that of a cast or frame into which molten material is poured so as to take its shape." [Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, (c)1985]

**The apostles and prophets taught that a certain pattern defines acceptable worship for Christians.** Not only did the Lord teach that worship according to the precepts of men was vain in Matt 15: 8-9, but also the Apostles and prophets emphatically affirmed it. Paul said in Col 2:20-23:

20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees . . . accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion (ASV will-worship) and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Paul warned against worldly innovations in Col 2:8: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." Paul instructed Timothy: "Hold the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me." 2 Tim 1:13.

The apostles and prophets certainly and emphatically taught a pattern for true conversion and a pattern for true worship.