

6. Establishing the New Testament Pattern

Previously we have established two positions by the scriptures. *First, the Lord, his apostles, and the prophets taught that there is a New Testament pattern. Second, they taught that to fail to apply the New Testament pattern to the church results in devastating consequences.* The Lord will say, “Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness (Mt 7:23).” The apostle Paul said that if anyone preaches a different gospel let him be accursed (Gal 1:6-10). The issue is **how do we establish the New Testament pattern?** The scriptures bring the pattern to us in four ways: direct commands, express statements, approved apostolic examples, and necessary inferences.

The first way to establish the New Testament pattern is by **direct commandments of the Lord, the apostles, and the prophets.** Direct commands teach us who true believers are and how they become such. In giving the great commission, Jesus said in Matt 28:20: “Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.” New Testament Christians became such by obeying direct commands. In Mark 16:16 the Lord commanded: “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved.” On the day of Pentecost, when they cried out what must we do, Peter commanded in Acts 2:38: “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” These two direct commands succinctly answer the issue today of what constitutes those of the fellowship of true believers.

Direct commands also help teach us the New Testament pattern for worship. What constitutes scriptural worship by music is a question answered by the direct commands of the apostle. We are commanded in Eph 5:19, “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.” Col 3:16-17 also commands, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” These direct commands answer the issue today of what constitutes true worship by music.

Express statements by the Lord, apostles, and prophets establish the New Testament Pattern. The inspired writers made clear and express statements that tell us what the truth is. One example of this is 1 Peter 3:21. In speaking of Noah and the flood, Peter says: “Eight persons were brought safely through the water. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you.” We cannot mistake this express statement: *baptism now saves you*, and its corollary is *the saved are baptized*. The New Testament pattern for what constitutes the saved is very clear.

Approved apostolic examples establish the New Testament pattern. Paul could not be clearer than in Phil 3:16-18: “However, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my *example*, and observe those who walk according to the *pattern* you have in us.” Not only are we to follow the apostolic examples, but also that example is the pattern. Paul portrays those who do not walk according to the pattern in the worst terms: “¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.” Innovators and destroyers of the New Testament pattern should beware. Church members should watch out.

It is by command that we partake of the Lord’s Supper in our communion. The Lord instituted and commanded it in the Gospels (see Matt 26:26-30). The apostle Paul reiterated it in I Cor 11:23-34. However, the frequency of partaking of the Lord’s Supper comes via approved apostolic example. The example of the Jerusalem Church in Acts 2:42 showed that the pattern of partaking was continual: “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the *breaking of bread* and to prayer.” The example of the church at Troas in Acts 20:7 defines the continual nature of the pattern more certainly: “*On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, . . .*” The pattern is certain: we come together to break bread on the first day of the week. Every week has a first day.

Finally where inferences are necessary, they establish the New Testament pattern. Truth can only be inferred where the sacred writers imply truth. Inference is not supposition such as in the saying: “Well, it could be this or could be that.” We are not at liberty to make up in the name of necessary inference. In John 3:23 we see, “John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.” Much water forces one to necessarily infer that baptism requires much water. Of the three modes of baptism practiced in the religious world, only one requires much water – immersion. In Acts 8:38-39, we find Philip baptizing the eunuch: “And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.” One must necessarily infer that baptism requires both the baptizer and the subject to both go down into the water prior to baptizing and come up

out of the water after baptizing. Only the baptism of the New Testament—immersion—fulfills this pattern. The express statement of Col 2:12 reinforces this pattern: “Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Direct commands, express statements, approved apostolic examples, and necessary inferences are the tools for establishing the New Testament pattern. When men come with new ideas for worship and for what constitutes a true believer, the elders and congregation must ask: Where is the New Testament pattern?