



THE PATTERN FOR THE CHURCH

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In another article (“By What Law Do You Live?”) we considered God's pattern for successful spiritual living. There is one pattern for every person who lives today – or who ever will live – in any part of the world. That pattern is the New Testament of Jesus Christ. The Word of God has always been God's pattern for man's life, and the New Testament is His pattern for our life today (I Timothy 1:16; Titus 2:7).

In years past, a builder followed a pattern in constructing the building in which we live. If a storm, fire, or some other tragedy should destroy your house – or if you were moving but still wanted to live in the same house – you could reconstruct a duplicate of it by following the same pattern, or blueprint. Imagine trying to enter a house where a sidewalk leads up to a window and a flower-bed is before the front door. We certainly would be surprised to flip the light switch and see the water come on instead of the light. Life would be a constant confusion if we didn't have patterns – and if people didn't follow those patterns.

For most of the people in the world life is a constant confusion. We hear people say that they feel as if they are swimming upstream against the current of a strong river. Such people feel as if life itself is always pushing them backward so that they can never succeed in anything that they try to do. Of course, we live in a world of sin, and even righteous people often suffer because of the sins of others around them. Still, one of the major reasons that many people feel like “losers” in this “game” we call life is that they are not playing by the rules. Churches have the same problems.

There are many different churches in the world today, and people are often confused as to which church they should choose. If you have ever visited in the assemblies of the churches of men you have probably felt like a stranger at first. You didn't know what to expect, and you didn't know what people expected you to do. If the builders of churches had all followed the same pattern then we would always know what to expect, just as we know what to expect when we turn on the light switch.

Occasionally we visit futuristic exhibitions, such as Epcot Center at Walt Disney World, a world's fair, science fair or builders' convention. We might see different shapes, different building materials and amazing hi-tech gadgets. We take lots of pictures (if they let us) and go back often just because we enjoy seeing – and being in – that beauty. But that's not a spiritually safe way to choose a church.

If we go a certain church just because going there makes us feel good, we are going for the wrong reason. If we want to see what differences they have designed into their churches, we are going for the wrong reason. Some churches teach that there will be no eternal punishment in Hell. Some teach that God will take the evil out of this earth and the righteous will live here forever. Some churches teach that divorce and remarriage is not a sin, regardless of the reason. Some teach that it is not a sin for a Christian to dress like the sinners in the world. God has given us a pattern which shows us that all of these are wrong (Matthew 25:46; II Peter 3:10; Matthew 19:9; I Timothy 2:9). Churches constructed of these spiritual “building materials” are not built according to the pattern, and are not the true church which Christ will save (Ephesians 5:23).

Some churches teach that salvation is a result only of the grace of God (but see Titus 2:11-12). Some teach that salvation is only from faith (but see James 2:19-24). Some churches teach that baptism is required after salvation; others teach that it is not required at all (but see Acts 2:38). Some churches teach that current local customs must be the foundation of church rules and work (but see Acts 10:34-37). Some teach that it doesn't matter in which church a person is a member because all churches are leading people to the same spiritual destination, even though they are leading in different directions (but see Matthew 7:21-23). Churches

constructed of these spiritual “building materials” are not built according to the pattern which God gave (I Timothy 1:16), and are not the true church which Christ will save (Matthew 16:18).

When the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 16:16, “the churches of Christ salute you,” he was speaking of churches in those cities which he had recently visited, all of which were built according to the one pattern which Paul preached everywhere (I Corinthians 4:17). God's pattern describes a church that worships every Sunday following five practices: eating the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42 “breaking bread”; 20:7), studying the Bible (Acts 2:42 “apostles' doctrine”; 20:7), praying (Acts 2:42 “prayers”; I Thessalonians 5:17), singing without any man-made mechanical instruments of music (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), and giving from our material wealth according to the blessing of God and the measure of our love for Him (I Corinthians 16:1-2; II Corinthians 8:1-8).

The church which Christ built and will save is organized with elders (Acts 20:1), deacons (Philippians 1:1), preachers (II Timothy 1:11), teachers (I Timothy 1:7), and these, with all Christians, are equally members of the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:30). Just as the names of man's churches honor the builders or their particular doctrine or practice, so the names which Jesus gave his church glorify him and his Father. Some of these names are: churches of Christ (Romans 16:16), bride of Christ (Revelation 21:2), church of the Firstborn (Hebrews 12:23), church of God (Galatians 1:13), house of God (I Timothy 3:15), kingdom of God (Mark 9:1). Most often the New Testament simply uses the word “church,” a word which refers to those called by God out of the world and into his household (II Corinthians 6:17-18; I Timothy 3:15; Romans 8:16-17).

The constancy of pattern is rejected by some as being too boring, but not many of them preserve their ice cream in the oven and bake their cakes in the freezer. Aren't you glad that you can depend on God who has given you a pattern for salvation and for fellowship in the church?

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