

# THE PATTERN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Jesus only built one church (one collection of saved people who follow Him). This is the church taught in the New Testament. Then, there are local collections of Jesus's saved people who work, worship, and fellowship in communities throughout this world. However, these churches must not function in just any way they choose. Instead, there is a pattern given in the New Testament concerning this church that those who desire to please God should follow today.

## HEBREWS 8:1-6

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This passage demonstrates how God had previously instructed Moses concerning the pattern for all aspects of the Old Law, particularly the Tabernacle and its service (Exodus 25:9, 40; 26:30; Numbers 8:4; Acts 7:44). God expected everything to be made and executed just as He had revealed in His pattern. No one can know what is in the mind of God unless God reveals it to them (Isaiah 55:8-9; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Therefore, when God reveals a pattern of what He desires (as He did concerning Adam and Eve, Noah and the ark, the Old Law, temple worship, etc.), people were expected to pay attention to and follow that pattern! When this pattern was not followed, God was not pleased and there were consequences (Leviticus 10:1-3; 2 Samuel 6:1-7; Deuteronomy 30:11-20). This passage demonstrates that though there was a pattern given to Moses, these were only copies and shadows of the better things to come under Christ's new covenant (Hebrews 8:7-13)! So, learning the importance of following God's pattern under the old covenant should help us recognize the need to follow God's pattern under the new and better covenant (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11).

## MATTHEW 21:23-27

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Churches teach and practice many different things today. However, this text should help us navigate them. Jesus demonstrates that the question of where authority for a thing comes from matters! That is, we should question where the approval for church teachings and practices comes from. Ultimately, Jesus only identified two possibilities (using John's baptism as an example): From people or God. So, you need to question everything about a church's teachings and practices to see whether the things done and taught have been authorized through human authority (e.g. human tradition, human teaching, human opinion, etc.) or God's authority (in the New Testament Scriptures)!

## ROMANS 6:15-23

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Christians no longer live under the law of the Old Testament. Instead, they have access to the grace of God through Jesus. However, this access to God's grace does not negate the presence of a pattern that must be followed (though some claim it does). Instead, people are set free from slavery to sin through their obedience to the pattern of teaching in the gospel (v. 17; 6:3-4; Acts 2:37-41; Galatians 1:6-9). Obedience to God's pattern of teaching will not, however, set one free so he/she can live however he/she desires, but to be enslaved to righteousness and God leading to sanctification and eternal life in Heaven through the gift of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. So, if you want the eternal life God has offered by His grace through Jesus Christ, you must obey His pattern of teaching today (Philippians 2:12; Titus 2:11-14; Matthew 7:21-23)!

## 2 TIMOTHY 1:13-14

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As Paul knew his time on earth was short (2 Timothy 4:6-8), he urged Timothy to hold on to the pattern of sound teaching/words Timothy had heard from Paul. So, we learn that this pattern of what Christians and churches believe and practice matters! Otherwise, Paul would not have needed to be so concerned about the heresy he would often warn Timothy about in which people would depart from the faith revealed by God (1 Timothy

1:3-11; 4:1-5; 6:3-5, 20-21; 2 Timothy 4:2-4). Today, we have this pattern of sound (healthy, uncorrupt) words recorded in the New Testament (Philippians 1:27; Jude 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). This is a deposit that must be carefully guarded and then passed on to others (2 Timothy 2:2). However, also recognize that God's pattern of sound words must be held in faith and love, not in cold, lifeless, and ritualistic ways (Revelation 2:1-7)!

## **2 THESSALONIANS 2:13-15**

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The Thessalonians had been saved through their belief and obedience to the gospel Paul taught (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1:3). They were now to stand firm and hold on to all the traditions (including the teachings and practices) that had been delivered by Paul and those who were with him. However, these were not mere human traditions passed down from Paul. Instead, Paul and his companions delivered what God had given them (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 11:2, 23; 14:37; 15:3; Ephesians 3:3-7)! Today, these God-given traditions of teaching and practice are preserved within the New Testament. Therefore, Christians and churches must demand New Testament authority for everything done and practiced (established through direct commands/statements, approved examples, and unmistakable conclusions). In fact, those who do not live according to the traditions God has given walk disorderly (like a soldier out of line) and should be disciplined (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15)!

## **CONCLUSION**

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Every Christian must follow the pattern God has revealed in the pages of the New Testament. This includes carefully evaluating the teachings and practices of the local church they associate with. Ultimately, a local church that is seeking to please God should carefully hold to the pattern of teachings and practices God has revealed in the New Testament!

## **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS**

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What was the importance of God's patterns in the Old Testament?

How does understanding the patterns of the Old Testament help people and churches today?

Why is it important to evaluate the source of authority for a teaching or practice?

What are the possible sources of authority?

How is following God's pattern involved in both becoming a Christian and living as a Christian?

What does the pattern God revealed consist of and what is the Christian's responsibility to it?

How must Christians hold on to God's pattern?

What must Christians and churches do concerning the traditions recorded in the Scriptures?