

## Publisher's Note

This book contains a series of lead articles from *Mission Messenger*, Volume 32 (1970). The bound volume for that year was entitled *Our Living Pattern*.

The text for this volume was produced by optically scanning the original articles. We have re-set the type in a larger typeface, corrected obvious typographical errors, and made minor formatting changes. We have also added an index of Scripture references.

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On a personal note, I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge my indebtedness to Pat and Gene Rice, of Niceville, Florida, who introduced me to the writings of W. Carl Ketcherside by subscribing me to *Mission Messenger* in 1970, the volume of that journal from which the present work was compiled.

— Bob D. Lewis, Managing Editor

# **Our Living Pattern**

**W. Carl Ketcherside**

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## Chapter 1

### ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN

I never met the man of whom I write but he was a graduate of one of the Christian colleges before the turn of the century. He was a diligent student of the Bible and a devoted disciple of the Master. It was his desire to follow in the path of righteousness and to do all things pleasing unto God. As he read the sacred pages he became aware of the fact that the primitive saints constituted “a church of the upper room.” Jesus ordained the Lord’s Supper in “a large upper room furnished and prepared.” After the ascension of Jesus the apostles and others abode in an upper room. In Troas the saints were gathered together “in the upper chamber.” The brother to whom I refer constructed a two story building and during his lifetime the congregation met to break bread upstairs. This was deemed essential in order to “do all things according to the pattern.”

I personally knew the sister to whom I now refer. She was a humble saint but possessed of strong convictions. She was a member of the congregation I attended as a mere lad. It was our custom to do our baptizing in a clear pool of a small stream that flowed through a pasture owned by one of the elders. It was a lovely spot shaded by the overhanging boughs of a large tree, although it was inconvenient in the winter when icy winds swept across the fields and chilled the observers. But when the brethren decided to construct a baptistery under the pulpit there were objections raised at once. The aged sister was more adamant than any of the others. I can recall her saying, “There’s just as much scripture for an organ on top of the pulpit as for one of them things under it. The day they put it in they can put me out. There’s no pattern for it. The Lord was baptized in a river and I don’t want to see anyone baptized in a box.”

A number of years ago my father went to speak for a congregation on the Lord’s Day. By enquiring in advance he learned that he would speak following the Lord’s Supper. Imagine his surprise when the congregation stood following the Supper, and while singing a hymn, all marched out of the building. Thinking he had misunderstood the arrangement, father got his hat and book and started out, only to meet them all coming back in. They informed him that they followed the divine pattern for the Book teaches that “when they had sung a hymn, they went out.” Father did not have the nerve to tell them that the record said, “they went out *into the mount of Olives.*”

In 1836, Francis Whitefield Emmons, a respected contemporary of Alexander Campbell, took the position that Acts 2:42 contained a divinely ordained order of worship and that to be scriptural a congregation must observe the sequence therein set forth for its “items of worship.” Both Campbell and Robert Richardson took issue with Emmons, denying that “this order should be considered as of divine order.” Sixty years later the controversy was revived by publication of a tract on December 1, 1897, under the heading, “The Worship.” So heated did the discussion become that one participant wrote, “That there has been haste on both sides of this unholy war is not a question. This is to be regretted and repented of. Unfair methods have been employed. Men, regardless of character have been justified; and men, without regard to character, convictions or conscience, have been condemned.” He ended with a challenge to debate.

A short time later another furor was created when a well known brother reached the conclusion it was wrong to eat the Lord's Supper "at dinner time." He presented the case for partaking of the loaf and fruit of the vine after dark, and continued, "History shows it was kept at night in the first centuries and never in daylight." He said, "I think you will conclude with me that the evidence for the Supper at night is as clear as for the first day of the week. Those who contend for a restoration of New Testament Christianity will not ignore the argument for long without drifting to the common ground of indifference to the whole matter. It comes with poor grace to contend for loyalty to one example, and ignore the other. But Paul says, 'Ye have us for an ensample.' Phil. 3:17."

Recently I have had letters from two sisters in Texas who tell me that they are worshiping with those who had to leave "the daylight worshipers" in order to follow the apostolic pattern. They have pleaded with me to direct my energies toward fighting the spiritual decadence evidenced by partaking of the Lord's Supper in the daytime. I am asked to insist that everyone "come out from among them and be separate."

On a trip to the east I learned of two small groups of brethren in the mountain regions who have declared a state of non-fellowship with the congregations around them that do not practice "washing of feet" as a proof of loyalty to the commands of Jesus. It is their contention that nothing is plainer than the statement of the Lord, "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

When brethren began to become conscious of microbes and germs and the emphasis upon hygiene caused laws to be passed to abolish the common drinking cup at schools and on trains, there arose a tendency to adopt an "individual communion service." This launched a struggle which has not ceased to our day. Many places which had always used two or three glasses took up the cudgel against individual cups. As usual, both sides quoted those who had previously been recognized as heroes of the faith and claimed them as favorable to their positions. Debates have been held in many places with a constant emphasis on the divergent views, one side contending that we must have one container "according to the pattern," with the other just as vociferously affirming that the cup of which Jesus spoke is "the fruit of the vine."

In an endeavor to be even more literal there are two congregations of our acquaintance which will not use a glass or goblet at all but insist upon using *a cup*. In the community about them they are designated as the "One Cup With a Handle Church of Christ." They seem to appreciate rather than resent this as it serves as a means of distinction from those whom they regard as "liberals" or "glass digressives." It is not at all uncommon for adherents of the several groups to call each other "one-cuppers" or "cups churches." It is a strange, and almost ludicrous commentary on our condition to read in some reports of "cups preachers."

In several areas small groups have reached the conclusion that "the pattern" calls for fermented wine in the Lord's Supper. They have severed themselves from what they term "the grape juice churches" and claim no "fellowship" with them. Others have divided over a method of breaking the bread, with certain ones insisting that the one who presides at the table must first break a bit from the loaf and eat, then pass it to the other communicants and allow each to break off a portion in turn.

A special field of literature including magazine articles, tracts, booklets, and printed debates, has grown up around what is called “the Sunday School question.” The right to teach in classes has been challenged and discussed with intensity, and even with resultant partisan bitterness in many places. The Sunday school has been labeled, “a missionary society for the children which differs no whit from the organized missionary organizations for the grown ups.” Those who have classes have been dared to find a precedent for their practice in “the pattern.”

In recent years a question has been raised about the scripturality of congregations contributing their funds to a congregational treasury remote from them for the purpose of propagandizing by national television and radio programs. The problem of institutionalism has reared its head again as it often has through the years, but this time in relation to charitable organizations. The non-instrument segment of the disciple brotherhood has been fractured into three fragments — called “liberals,” “antis,” and “middle-of-the-roaders.” In these areas the feeling has been so deep that divisions have occurred and those who met in the same building a few years ago have set up rival encampments from which to assail each other.

What shall I more say? Time would fail me to tell of all the other ideas which have splintered and shivered the heirs of the restoration movement through the years. The things of which I have written are but a small minority of those which have been documented as having caused schisms among the brethren. I think that it is time that we should study objectively the underlying causes and basic reasons why our brethren divide periodically. Why should a movement which began as “a project to unite the Christians in all sects” end up as the most bitter and strife-torn in our generation? Is it possible for a people who have spent their time in unmitigated attacks upon others to turn the searchlight upon themselves and explore the philosophy which has wrecked their influence in many communities? Certainly it is dangerous for one who attempts it, for those who have been conditioned to regard themselves as “the elect of God” and to treat all others as “heathens and publicans” will bitterly resent any implication that they are as guilty as those whom they have accused.

## **The True Radical**

I can no longer be content to continue in a factional program and insulate my heart from some of the real elemental problems which make us behave as we do. I regard those things over which we have divided, and even the divisions themselves, as mere symptoms of a deep underlying fallacy in our thinking. It has betrayed us into bitter strife in the past and will lead us into such civil wars in the future as will decimate us and render invalid any plea that we make to the religious world at large. In short, it will make of us a bitter and bigoted sect with “our hand against every man and every man’s hand against us.”

Unfortunately, certain concepts become entrenched in the thinking of a people and are eventually sanctified by the passing of time. To attack the traditions of a group is regarded as equivalent to an attack upon the word of God. We cannot deny that the interpretation of scripture is substituted for the scripture and becomes the real criterion. We have seen this demonstrated too often in the sectarian creeds of those about us. “Our way of looking at it” is equated with God’s message and one must be bold indeed to fling down the gauntlet in the face of ingrained position and practice.

Men are not too concerned with critical investigation provided that it is not radical. So long as it consists of lopping off twigs and snipping away at small undergrowth, they will debate and skirmish without being particularly perturbed. But the word “radical” is from a term meaning “root.” That is why we call a certain root vegetable a “radish.” Jesus was a radical. He got to the very root of life and sin and so he was crucified. Most real radicals must be removed because men cannot stand what they reveal. You “dig up things” when you get to the root of them. Few people want to be really disturbed. In the final analysis, it has been the radicals who have always been responsible for our progress.

I know why I am writing this way. It is because I realize that I will be branded an extremist. In our parlance an extremist is always one who opposes any position we hold. One who opposes instrumental music is regarded as an extremist by one who employs it; one who opposes classes is an extremist to the one who has them; one who opposes individual cups is an extremist to the one who uses them. We are all extremists as viewed by someone. It does not hurt me to be labeled an extremist for this is a term of universal application. I have learned that the word is never applied to oneself. It is always reserved for application to others. It is obvious, then, that one is not an extremist because of where he stands in his views, but because of where others stand as they view him.

There is a difference between an extremist and a radical. The former has to do with the horizontal, the latter with the vertical. One is an extremist because he stands to the right or left of us but a radical may cut the ground right out from under us. If we are to the right or left of Jesus, one may be to the right or left of us and be closer to Jesus than we are. Or he may be farther from Jesus. The whole point I am making is that there may be nothing seriously wrong with being called an extremist or radical. There may be something *seriously right* about the one so designated. I will have one thing in my favor in this current investigation because I will not be examining the position of one faction as opposed to another. Instead, I will be probing the question of what has created all of our factions.

I am sure that opinion will be divided as to the worth of what we write. There will be some in every faction who will hail what we say as true, others in every faction will regard it as the greatest threat of our day, while the majority will continue in complacency and unconcern. They are not moved by what Jesus said so there is little hope they will become aroused by what I say. I am personally convinced that a lot of us would be perfectly content to pursue our factious course and engage in occasional tilts and tussles with brethren provided no one ever really reflected against “The Church of Christ” as such.

We can permit a contest over colleges or a contention over classes and the din of battle dies away, but when someone challenges our standing as a people, or implies that we may be sectarian, that is going too far. We do not mind the members of the family having a tug of war provided no one reflects on the family honor. Some of the things with which I shall deal may get beneath the surface. Perhaps it is time that we rise above banalities and superficial examination. We are where our thinking has brought us and it has brought us division and schism. This is where God does not want us to be. I suggest it is about time to change our thinking. In order to proceed with as little misunderstanding as possible let me make some points at this juncture.

## Viewing the Pattern

1. I have a very deep reverence for all of the brethren in every faction growing out of the restoration movement. I do not think that those who disagree with me are dishonest. I do not regard as sectarians those who have things I cannot endorse, nor do I regard as hobbyists those who cannot, in good conscience, endorse things I have. They are all my brethren for whom Christ died. I do not look with disdain upon some nor with obsequiousness upon others. Those who choose not to have classes or cups and those who choose to have colleges and instrumental music are alike my brethren. They are accountable unto God and not unto me. There is no compunction about moving among any of them because I love them all — not because of what they have or do not have, but because they are children of my Father.

2. All of us are victims of a heritage of division which has given us certain traditional backgrounds of a partisan nature. I am aware that there are those in orthodox “Churches of Christ” who deny that there is any division. They constitute the elect of God and all others are separated from them. They have “arrived” while everyone else has “departed.” Of all our various groups, these deserve the greatest pity and compassion. It is the person who is sick and does not know it; the one who is seriously ill while he thinks he is well, who deserves our commiseration. In many places the faction which puts on the biggest front has the least behind it and arrogant exclusiveness is merely a cloak for an empty spiritual shell. No faction is “the faithful church,” no segment or splinter constitutes “the loyal body.”

3. One of us is not divided from the other. We are separated from one another. No group is completely guilty nor wholly guiltless. Those who project all of the guilt to others have the least to commend them in the sight of God and their fellows. We are divided because of a philosophy which confuses division with fidelity to God. Each party feels that the thing it elevates as a test of fellowship is vital and essential to relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. Brotherhood is thus conditioned upon an attitude toward cups, classes, colleges, or other things. It is not knowing Christ but “the right stand” on these issues upon which one must rise or fall with the party.

4. No faction among us can be wholly discounted. The smallest group may have something of value to contribute to others. Each has emphasized a different area of thought and has specialized in a certain field. Not all that any faction does is completely wrong. The factional spirit is a sin but that which it seeks to exploit may be right. None of us should become so arrogant or spiritually sophisticated that we cannot listen attentively to any of our brethren. “Setting at nought a brother” is a dangerous procedure.

5. I think we may concede that all of our divisions have resulted from a proper desire. All of the brethren have sought to do what they earnestly believed would meet God’s approval and avoid His chastisement. Those who oppose individual cups believe they are contrary to the pattern; those who oppose classes believe they are contrary to the pattern. The same thing can be said of those who oppose colleges, institutional homes, societies and instrumental music. The opposition does not stem from a desire to be reckoned cranky or cantankerous but from a fear of violating a divinely ordained pattern. All who practice or endorse things believe they are



justified by a proper interpretation of the pattern; all who oppose them believe just as firmly that they are forbidden by the pattern.

It is evident that we have disagreed so violently over *the pattern* that we have fragmented ourselves into warring tribes and clashing clans. Yet the word of God reads identically the same to everyone of us and all are equal in their anxiety to understand and obey it. It is not enough for one party to say that all that is necessary is to take the word of God for what it says. That is precisely what each party feels it is doing now. The party that makes such a statement simply implies that everyone should take the word of God for what that particular party thinks it means by what it says. Each party feels that it has an infallible interpretation and those who do not concur with the party exegesis do not understand the Bible at all. They misunderstand it. This is a simple and naive approach. It merely begs the question, it does not solve the problem.

For example, take the question about the container for the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper. So long as one ardently believes that *the cup* is the pattern and another believes that the "fruit of the vine" is the cup about which Jesus speaks, there will be contention. So long as this is esteemed vital to walking in the Spirit there will be division. Which is in accordance with the pattern — one container, multiple cups, or both? Would it shock you too greatly if I came directly to the point and suggested that perhaps God gave us no pattern at all in the commonly accepted usage of the term by the various factions calling themselves "The Church of Christ."

If Jesus ordained a Supper instead of a pattern, one might partake of it in memory of Him without regard to minute details, and there could well be several different ways of handling the details by consecrated disciples who could "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." To bind a method as *the pattern* when no pattern was intended would be fallacious, and might become sinful. We are not divided over the Lord's Supper, but over "the pattern." We are not divided over teaching the Bible, but over *the pattern*. We are not divided over caring for the needy but over *the pattern*. In every instance the basis of division is "the pattern."

Regardless of how we view the various items which divide us, all of us without exception will acknowledge that division among brethren is a sin of grave consequence. All admit that the purpose of God's revelation was to unite us and to create harmony where division previously existed. It is evident that any use of God's word for the purpose of creating or justifying division among humble and earnest saints is an abuse and misuse. Nothing has been more productive of dissension among us than the concept that God intended to provide for us a specific pattern complete in minute detail and that this pattern constitutes an inviolable law for His children in all ages, climes, and conditions. It would seem that the attempt to establish the new covenant scriptures as a legalistic blueprint or template with every insignificant and incidental matter spelled out has resulted in an overthrow of God's purpose.

To merely suggest that the new covenant scriptures may not have been intended for such a positive pattern will bring down upon the head of the one doing so a storm of acrimony and resentment. He will be denounced, proscribed and anathematized. The fear of being harried and harassed through brotherhood journals acts as a constant deterrent to the exploration of new areas of thought. In spite of this, I am urging that the whole "pattern concept" which makes of the apostolic letters mere legalistic documents be examined calmly and dispassionately. This is not

an adoption of liberalistic philosophy. It represents no renunciation of the faith upon my part. It is merely a suggestion, made in all humility, that, in the light of present knowledge and available information, we measure up to our responsibility in our generation by examining the ground for our spiritual procedure.

It is an admitted fact that every faction among us rejects as being a part of *the pattern* that which every other faction accepts as an essential part of it. The brethren who use individual cups reject the idea that there is a specific pattern for one container; those who employ classes reject the idea that there is a specific pattern for teaching methods. The same holds true for those who set up chartered institutions to care for the needy, as well as for those who employ instrumental music. Every detail which means so much to some is lightly esteemed by others in the brotherhood of saints so that a compilation of composite views would show that if these views were universally adopted as a criterion there would be no detailed pattern at all. Yet to suggest this will bring indignant response from every segment. This indicates that the pattern in each instance is the partisan interpretation and this is equated with the will of God. This is creedalism in its worst form!

It is obvious that the person who does not believe there is a technical specification for each requirement of God can worship with his brethren regardless of how they carry out the requirement, so long as it is not in violation of good order and decorum. The reverse is not true. One who has no qualms about instrumental music can enjoy a service where the praise is rendered *a capella*. The same is true of one who believes it is proper to have classes and individual cups. The man who has no scruples about the state of the fruit of the vine can drink in fellowship with his brethren wherever he may be, whether they use fermented or unfermented fruit of the vine. If it be true that God did not design to give us an exclusive pattern, those who interpret the sacred writings as such, do themselves and other brethren an injustice. Despite their good intentions and zeal they run counter to God's purpose by binding laws in areas where he intended for us to be free. Let me be candid enough to say at this point that I believe every faction among us is guilty of this very thing in its relation to other factions. I will go one step further and say that it is my conviction that "The Church of Christ" has done the same thing in relation to other segments of our religious world. While this will be hailed as treason we can never recapture a real sense of destiny until we face up to the stark truth about ourselves.

We are prone to look with disdain and condescension upon the scruples of others. Those who contend for them are agitators and busybodies. When we do the same thing we are "contending for the faith." Recently a congregation in Iowa engaged in a prolonged and somewhat heated business meeting engendered by a preacher who protested against "taking up the collection" before partaking of the Lord's Supper. The congregation had inherited a tradition stemming from the "order of worship" controversy in which "the fellowship" in Acts 2:42 was regarded as the contribution, and thus was attended to before the breaking of the bread. The preacher referred to insisted that they were violating the pattern because Paul gave instruction for observing the Supper in chapter 11 of First Corinthians, whereas he did not give orders for the collection until chapter 16. I mentioned this to a brother of my acquaintance who laughed in high glee at such naiveté. The very next Lord's Day he was in high dudgeon because the brother who presided began the service with meditation and prayer rather than with a song. It all depends upon "whose ox is gored."

I would like to believe that all of my brethren are sufficiently mature to face up to some questions which will help us to scrutinize our philosophy and practice openly and fearlessly. I suspect that it is too much to count upon this but I do believe that we live in an era when a sufficient number are beginning to think independently that we can suggest some matters for concern and study. I have no desire to arouse additional bitterness nor to increase areas of tension. I would like to relieve these if possible. However, I cannot make myself think that we better ourselves in the ultimate by ignoring truth as we go along. For that reason I crave your kind indulgence while I propose a series of questions which may serve as guide lines for exploration in subsequent articles. A careful study of these will enable you to properly evaluate what we shall say in the immediate future.

1. In the fulfillment of any responsibility there are things essential and others which are purely incidental or accidental. The former are inherent and grow out of the nature of that which is to be accomplished; the latter are adherent and provide a setting in which, or a means by which, the thing may be furthered. This is a principle so universally recognized that any attempt to elucidate it would be superfluous. Was this true of the things which Jesus performed and of the principles he enunciated? If so, how can we determine that which is essential and that which is incidental? That this demands the exercise of judgment and requires an application of the faculty of discretion and the powers of discrimination must certainly be plain to all. Whose judgment must prevail and who is to be the final arbiter unto whom all must submit?

2. Every teacher, in spite of his grasp of truth, lives among a people who are products of their own environment. Unless he becomes a hermit and retires to solitary exclusion, he must face up to practical problems growing out of the circumstances of his day. His teaching is affected by, and must directly affect, the culture in which he lives and labors. I doubt not that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God and a universal Savior, but he was instructing a provincial and parochial people in a land which constituted an occupied territory. Is it possible that some of his statements were directly relating to conditions then obtaining and have relevance only under such conditions? I am fully aware of the fact that principles may be enunciated which are applicable under all circumstances and I am certain beyond question that our Lord gave such ecumenical truths.

But is it possible that Jesus, while in the flesh, recognized and followed the customs of his day and time, without intention to bind these upon all men in all ages, or without expecting conformity in these respects? If so, what is universal and exhaustive and what was temporary and localized? What will be our standard for differentiation and whose mind will apply the measure? Admittedly this is no problem to those in an authoritarian and monolithic structure. My friends who are Roman Catholics are not at all disturbed by the problem but neither are they free men in Christ. Who is to determine such things for free men and if they surrender the right for someone else to do so, are they still free?

3. In view of the fact that the apostolic epistles were written to meet situations arising in congregations of their day and would probably not have been written at all if such conditions had not obtained, to what extent did these epistles urge conformity to customs and modes which are no longer acknowledged and recognized? I am sure that everyone of our readers would regard some of what is written as being within such a category and while there would no doubt be

disagreement as to what should be included and what should be excluded it would be admitted by all that certain portions of the apostolic coverage would have to be relegated to this sphere. Who is to rule as to what matter was purely contemporary and what was to continue? By what standard can we reject the command to “greet one another with a holy kiss” or substitute for it a different and more modern form of salutation? On what ground can we dispense with the *Agape* (love feast) which was practiced by the primitive saints with regularity?

4. The apostle Paul specifically wrote of the new covenant that it was “not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6). When we regard the new covenant scriptures as a pattern in the absolute, do we not convert them into a written code? Have we not regarded these scriptures as a legalistic basis of justification? I am not questioning the inspiration or authority of the sacred scriptures. I believe in both. I believe the apostolic writings have the authority of God behind them, but if we have used them as God intended, why are we divided contrary to the word of God? Have we changed the scriptures into something they were never intended to be? Could Paul become all things to all men, that he might by all means save some, if he was operating under an inflexible set of rules as unalterable as the law of the Medes and Persians?

To state it in slightly different fashion — is every word spoken by authority of equal importance? Are there “weightier matters of the law” if so, what makes them weigh heavier? Granted that there are some absolutes in God’s revelation, does it follow that everything is in that domain? What is central to the Christian way and what is on the fringe or border? What things *must* be understood to be a Christian and what things *may* be misunderstood without severing or impairing the relationship? Are the latter the same with every individual?

In the physical realm some members of the body are essential to being and some to wellbeing. God created the little finger as well as the head, but if you cut off the latter you will die. This is not true of cutting off a finger. Can the same distinction be made with reference to the body of revealed truth? Surely all that God has said is valuable but is all of equal value in our Christian life? Is it possible to fight over certain things which are not worth the effort? Can we exalt some things to a position of prominence they do not deserve? One would not willingly dispense with anything that has been written any more than he would cheerfully cut off his finger, but if there is a serious question about interpretation should not the salvation of the other man be given prior consideration? Should we not incline to that interpretation which would achieve and maintain unity seeing that this was one of the prime purposes for writing the new covenant scriptures?

There may be more than one method of doing the right thing. In a simple operation such as gaining entrance to a box tied with a string, one man may labor patiently to untie the knot, another will cut the string with a knife, while a third will slip it around the edge or corner of the box. That which is effective for one may be ineffective for the other, but there is nothing wrong about either way. In many instances it appears that God has not specified the means of accomplishing an objective. He has left it to us to decide the manner best adapted to our individual ability and temperament. We are not free to set up such a method as an absolute and demand that all others work on this basis or be lost, nor should others legislate for us where God has not done so.

It is difficult for most of us to realize that we are not under a legalistic code. The record declares, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). The contrast is not between two laws. It does not say that the law came by Moses and another law came by Jesus Christ. The law is contrasted with grace and truth. Perhaps the contrast is nowhere else seen as clearly as in Hebrews 10:28, 29, “A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?” On one hand you have as the greatest crime the violation of law; on the other hand is the spurning of the Son, profaning the blood and outraging the Spirit of grace.

It is characteristic of Pharisaism to “bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders” (Matt. 23:4). This is the spirit of partisan righteousness. In the primitive church “some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses.’” Peter asked them a pertinent question, “Why do you make a trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” Was he talking about the written code with its meticulous observances of rituals and forms? Is it not significant that the apostles, elders and whole church at Jerusalem, wrote to those who were being subjected to legalism, “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things” (Acts 15:28). The necessary things did not include circumcision or legalism. How many things are really necessary according to the Holy Spirit and the apostles? How many things are simply laid as burdens upon men to “hold them in line?”

The Roman Catholic hierarchy makes no apology for binding certain things simply as authoritative and disciplinary measures. They do not profess to find scriptural authority for commanding to abstain from meats on Friday. This is a law of the church and not of God. It is accompanied by threats which are effective only because of the hold that *the church* has over its communicants. Are there any forms or requirements in traditional “Church of Christ” practice designed for the same purpose? It is one thing to perform an act voluntarily, willingly and spontaneously, and doing the same thing under threat of reprisal and to avoid public castigation.

I think it would not be quite honest with our readers if I did not tell you that it is my conviction that the system which constitutes Church-of-Christ-ism is the result of a degeneration of noble restoration principles into a narrow and sectarian framework. For this reason the haughty and arrogant back-patting done by some of the larger factions does not affect me for this is a clear demonstration of the truth of my claims. The self-righteous criticism of the smaller groups by these larger ones, and their utter denial that there are Christians outside the restoration movement background — these do not betoken that the spokesmen for “the loyal church” have a better vision of truth. It only means they are in a worse state of blindness as to their own condition.

Those who think they have arrived and are therefore in a favored position from whence they can summon all others to come and take their stand, have a great deal yet to learn. It will help them to begin their spiritual education if they will realize that “the pattern” which they insist on imposing upon all others may be a compilation of explanations and interpretations handed down by men whom they would not allow to speak in their pulpits nor call upon to lead in prayer. We

still garnish the tombs of prophets whom we would stone if they lived among us. *The pattern* in most cases is the partisan interpretation, and just as each faction among us has built up its own exclusive body of beliefs in a mistaken view that its foundation is divine, so “The Church of Christ” in its relation to other sincere seekers after truth may have done the same.

It is this kind of writing which will be called treason. I do not want to unduly upset my brethren nor to cause them concern. I wish that I knew of a more diplomatic approach. I would gladly spare all of those whom I love from exposure to any apparent crudity in expression. But the truth must be known and “I am weary from holding in.” Regardless of personal attacks which I may incur I cannot live with my own conscience if I do not decry the spirit of sectarian exclusiveness which is rampant in many areas of the disciple brotherhood.

Let me mention again that inter-factional squabbling and criticism will be condoned. So long as one equates the elect of God as those within the confines of the non-instrumental “Church of Christ” and denies that all outside of its bounds are children of the Father, he can be tolerated. But what we are doing is challenging Church-of-Christ-ism as a modern system. This challenge cuts across all lines and falls with equal force upon all segments of the disciple brotherhood, instrumental and non-instrumental alike. In short, we are doing the same thing with all of the factions growing out of the restoration movement that Alexander Campbell did to all of the Protestant sects growing out of the Reformation movement, and we are doing it for the same reason.

We believe that in a century and a half we have, as a people, compiled a body of interpretations which we have made into an unwritten creed. We believe that variations and modifications of this have produced our divergent factions. The composite views create an affinity which enables us to regard all of these factions as constituting “The Church of Christ” and this body of believers regards all other believers exactly as each faction within it regards all the other factions within it, as respects *fellowship*. We have concocted a basis of fellowship which we project into the sacred scriptures and refer to as “the pattern.” In each instance the pattern is actually the party position and honest men who cannot in good conscience subscribe to it in every minute detail are labeled as heretics and apostates.

While our natural inclinations would deter us from writing thus, our love for the truth prompts us to pursue the crusade for a brighter day based upon better understanding of the word of God and the motivation of all who seek to do His will. We are expendable. What happens to us personally is of little consequence. We are content to await the verdict of time and the final judgment of the Prince of peace. We submit ourselves wholly and completely into His care and surrender unreservedly to His will and purpose. It is in that spirit we write with love for all, including those who disagree. None of our brethren need accept what we write to be loved and revered as children of the Father. We can only hope and trust that what we write will be sufficiently provocative to stimulate a greater study that we might come to really know Him who is the source of all Reality.

If God wills I shall, in our following issues, examine some of the questions raised in this one. It will be my intention to give special attention to the statement, “See that ye do all things according to the pattern showed you in the mount.” I shall expect to demonstrate that this is one

of the most abused passages of the sacred writ, that men have ignored its contextual setting and purpose, and have used it to effect the very opposite of what God intended. I shall deal with the psychological problem of why men convert grace into law and with the equally important question of how we can have freedom without having anarchy. I can promise you that the coming months will provide the most challenging approach to the Christian concept in our generation. It is our hope that you may continue to read and think with us.

## Chapter 2

### OUR PERSONAL PATTERN

We are attempting an unbiased investigation of the underlying cause for division among the heirs of the restoration movement. Our aim is not to uphold any faction as opposed to others nor to defend any party as “the loyal church.” We have no partisan axe to grind. We are simply trying to face up realistically to one of the gravest problems in our religious life, that of division in the ranks of the believers in Christ Jesus. In our previous issue we proposed a number of questions. We are convinced that they are germane and pertinent to our aim and announced purpose. We intend to pursue them with the intent of arriving at a correct solution.

There is a difference between what we are attempting and the course generally pursued in inter-factional discussions and debates. In these the purpose is to determine which faction conforms to scriptural procedure and precedent with reference to some specific point of difference. Regardless of who wins such forensic skirmishes the factions will still continue to exist and they will still be factions. Our accepted task is much more profound than this. It is to find out what basic philosophy gives rise to factionalism and sustains and nourishes it. Although we are concerned about the things over which our brethren *fall out* we are primarily interested in why they do not *fall in* and march together as a united army.

Unless we succeed in finding and isolating the germ or virus which produces division we will continue to fracture and fragmentize ourselves. The treatment of symptoms is not enough. If we debate every currently divisive issue into oblivion our children will find others over which to divide. We must make a radical departure from our previous methods and explore on a deeper level than ever before. We have been too shallow and superficial in the past. It is obvious that we must also be prepared for a shock because what we find may run counter to our every tradition. It may actually frighten us by some of its implications.

Each faction justifies its separate existence on the basis that its procedures in work and worship are true to “the pattern.” Each accuses the others of having forsaken “the pattern.” It is taken for granted by all that the new covenant scriptures constitute a detailed blueprint designed to meet every exigency and provide for every emergency and that loyalty to Christ consists in seeking out these details and binding oneself by them and binding them upon others. Every faction claims to follow the pattern while denying that the others are doing so. None plead guilty to violating it. All are willing to affirm that they, and they only, are identical in every particular with the original.

It will readily be seen that if anyone suggests there is no such legalistic pattern he will draw the wrath of all. Those who cannot work together in pursuance of “the pattern” would all unite their forces in joint attack upon such an intruder. There are two things the brethren cannot tolerate. One is to deny there is a pattern; the other to affirm that anyone else is following it. We are willing to brook the disfavor of all and suggest that it was never the revealed intention of God to provide for us a meticulous bill of specifications covering every facet of procedure and the attempt to convert the new covenant scriptures into such a code of particulars has warped and thwarted the divine purpose.



Let us get one point clear at the outset. We believe the apostolic letters contain a revelation of the will of God. We believe their message is a transmission of the Holy Spirit. We neither doubt nor question the authenticity or genuineness of these writings. To us they are the *sacred scriptures* as opposed to all other writings of men. It is essential that we understand this because in the eyes of many, to question the use they make of the scriptures, is to question their divine origin. We affirm that the scriptures are divine with the same boldness that we deny that the application of them as made by our brethren is inspired. In short, we believe in the infallibility of God's revelation but we do not believe in the infallibility of any human interpretation.

It follows, then, that what we write is not infallible. To this we would be the first to agree. Therefore, what we write is not offered in a dogmatic or arbitrary sense. The word of God, and not MISSION MESSENGER, should be our court of appeal. As we explore some of our cherished traditions, and even explode them, we are not doing so in an authoritarian sense. While we exercise our freedom we shall in no sense *exorcise* yours. We respect your right to differ and to doubt what we say. We encourage you to place your trust in God and His word and not replace it with confidence in men. We shall not be guilty of undermining the faith of others nor of surrendering our own. Neither will we be reluctant or hesitant about a candid examination of all we have accepted as truth. Truth has naught to fear from the searchlight of investigation.

### **An Important Quotation**

We begin with a study of a basic quotation as found in Hebrews 8:5, "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." It is generally assumed that these words spoken to Moses with reference to the tabernacle in the wilderness are applicable to us and that the new covenant scriptures sustain the same relationship to us as did the law of Moses to the children of Israel. We believe that such an exegesis is not only faulty but is the exact opposite of the meaning which the writer of Hebrews intended to convey. Since this is so fundamental we ask your kind indulgence while we make a careful study of the impact of the meaning ordinarily attached to these words. In order to make our statements clearer we shall number them.

1. A pattern or blueprint is needed only by a builder or construction agent. Moses was commissioned to build the tabernacle and no such a structure had ever before been seen. It was necessary for him to have a pattern to follow. God gave no man a pattern for building the true tabernacle. It would have been useless to do so for it is distinctly stated that Jesus is a minister of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man." We are "the building of God" (1 Cor. 3:9). We are "built, as living stones; into a spiritual temple" (1 Peter 1:5). Instead of a pattern for constructing an edifice what we need is the cement to hold us together as stones in the building. Later on in this series we shall show that this is exactly what God has furnished us.

2. A pattern must exist prior to the rearing or erection of a structure and those who do the building must be familiar with it. In the Jewish dispensation God established a system of legalism "as a temporary measure pending the arrival of the 'issue' to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3:19). In any such system the law must be complete and announced in advance or the subjects may be guilty of violating something of which they do not know. Accordingly God called Moses into the mount and wrote for him the constitution on stone tablets and showed him

a pattern of the tabernacle. In the new covenant arrangement we are not under law but under grace. It was more than twenty years after the community of saints was planted before the first letter from an apostle was written. By that time the gospel had been taken to the Gentile world and it was to such a congregation the first letter was addressed.

3. The passage which occurs in Hebrews 8:5 is found in a context in which the writer is contrasting the priesthood of Jesus with that of the priesthood prescribed by law. The argument is that the latter is an inferior priesthood because the priests ministered “in a sanctuary which is only a copy and shadow of the heavenly.” That this is true is proven by the fact that the tabernacle was constructed by human power and skill. “This is implied when Moses, about to erect the tent, is instructed by God: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’” The pattern is mentioned, not to prove that we have one by which to make everything, but to show that any system based upon such a pattern is inferior. The very next sentence declares, “But in fact the ministry which has fallen to Jesus is as far superior to theirs as are the covenant he mediates and the promises upon which it is secured.”

The whole point of the Hebrew letter is that Moses needed a pattern for the first tabernacle because he was a mere servant in God’s house. No pattern was needed for the real tabernacle since it was constructed by God himself. “For every house has its founder; and the founder of all is God. Moses, then, was faithful as a servitor in God’s whole household; his task was to bear witness to the words that God would speak; but Christ is faithful as a son, set over his household” (Hebrews 3:4, 5).

4. The apostolic letters were written because of local conditions which arose and demanded attention. If the Thessalonians had not been disturbed about the state of the righteous dead and if some of them had not continued their slothful and indolent work habits, the first epistle would not have been written. If there had not been a misunderstanding of the tenor of the first letter as related to the coming of Christ there would have been no second. The first epistle to the Corinthians was called forth by a report from the family of Chloe and in reply to a letter of enquiry carried by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus. The Philippian letter was primarily one of thanks and appreciation which would not have been penned at all if a contribution had not been sent to the “ambassador in bonds.” The letter to Philemon was one of commendation for a fugitive slave returning to his master.

Since these letters were written to meet conditions as they arose among congregations existing in a pagan society, it is too much to expect they will cover in detail every condition which may affect the church of God in all ages, locations and cultures. I hold the view that the letters were not written as a pattern at all but to call men back toward an ideal involved in their acceptance of Jesus. As men deviated from the path leading toward this ideal it was necessary to recall them. It is obvious, then, that these letters create an understanding of a norm for those who attempt to be “laborers together with God.” Later, we shall attempt to define the ideal and when we do we believe that the purpose of the new covenant scriptures will be brought into sharper focus.

5. While the apostolic letters constituted a response to needs and conditions then existing they set forth principles which should govern the people of God in all ages until the absent King returns. These letters represented the will of that sovereign expressed by his special envoys. The

ambassadors were endowed with the Holy Spirit to guarantee that the things they wrote corresponded with, and were actually an expression of, the divine purpose. It was not the purpose of these letters to give minute specifications but to create the kind of character or nature which would automatically and spontaneously respond in every contingency in a proper manner.

In this age of the Spirit it was not the intention of God to make his people mechanical robots moving jerkily when a particular law was quoted or realized, nor to constitute them puppets jumping with the manipulation of certain strings behind the scenes. Instead, the record declares, “You, my friends, were called to be free men; only do not turn your freedom into license for your lower nature, but be servants to one another in love” (Gal. 5:13). Law does not free, but confines. “Before this faith came, we were close prisoners in the custody of law, pending the revelation of faith” (Gal. 3:23). Law seeks to affect men from without, so no one can be made truly good by law. It can never justify nor give life. The new covenant scriptures are not new legislation but letters written in love to a new creation. Those who have been made “partakers of the divine nature” respond in a divine manner to every situation. Those who seek to gain the response by law “have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof.”

6. The apostolic letters were never intended to be exhaustive in specifying details even in dealing with the situations which called them forth. After having written at some length about the problems at Corinth, the apostle says, “The other matters I will arrange when I come” (1 Cor. 11:34). The RSV renders this, “About the other things I will give directions when I come.” What were the other things? How did they affect the life of the congregation? What directions were given? Surely it must be admitted that the letter to Corinth did not deal with every problem in that congregation.

The apostle John closes his letter “to the elect lady and her children” with the words, “Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink, but I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face.” He concluded his letter, “to the beloved Gaius” in this fashion, “I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon and we will talk together face to face.” What was included in “the much” that John would like to have written? What instructions, admonitions and exhortations did he impart when he met the addressees? We shall never know nor is it important that we know.

All who love the Lord can agree that while these letters were not exhaustive as to methods, manners and modes, the things that are written are for instruction and admonition. I am convinced from my own study that the principles enunciated cover every *category* of our relationship. It must be remembered that despite the multiform outworking of such relationships, they still fall into relatively few species or types. We do not need a detailed bill of specifications. We simply need to know how “the picked representatives of God’s new creation” are to respond within a certain sphere or domain. It would be foolish to reject the new covenant scriptures as containing no norm. It would be just as foolish to search them to find a scriptural precedent to meet every trivial problem in a modern congregation. The child of God can better employ his time than by engaging in either gnat-straining or nit-picking.

7. The content of the apostolic letters demonstrates that it was never the intention of the writers to compile a code of laws. One who writes statutes and judgments does not insert little matters

of personal interest and concern at intervals throughout the document. What would you think if you were reading a copy of the Missouri Statutes and found tucked away among the “whereases” a request for the reader to pick up the writer’s overcoat and also bring along his writing materials? Does one insert in a legal code of jurisprudence a suggestion of a remedy for the stomach ulcer of the proofreader?

In the letter to Philemon in which the apostle refused to “pull his rank” as an ambassador in order to have his desire fulfilled (verses 8, 9) he inserts a casual request for a room reservation. “At the same time prepare a guest room for me” (verse 22). All of this makes these letters much more appealing unto me. Of course there is a natural curiosity about some of the things which were written and have not been preserved. I cannot help wondering what was in the letter John wrote to one congregation which their leader rejected with false accusations against the writer. “I sent a letter to the congregation, but Diotrephes, their would-be leader, will have nothing to do with us. If I come, I will bring up the things he is doing. He lays baseless and spiteful charges against us; not satisfied with that, he refuses to receive our friends, and he interferes with those who would do so, and tries to expel them from the congregation.” I wonder if John ever went, and if he did, what happened when he brought up the things this character was doing. I’m especially interested because I have met some of his “relatives” around over the country. They also refuse to receive some of my friends and have tossed out of their congregations some who would like to receive them.

There is no question but what the Mosaic dispensation was governed by a legalistic arrangement which is designated as a written code” in contradistinction to the new covenant which is called “a spiritual bond” (2 Cor. 3:6). A simple comparison of the apostolic letters with the Pentateuch will show the difference. Take, for instance, the regulation of the law with reference to birds. This covered every contingency from robbing a bird’s nest of eggs or squabs (Deut. 22:6, 7) to the kind of birds which could not be eaten — “the eagle, the ossifrage, the osprey, the kite, the falcon, the raven, the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk, the owl, the cormorant, the ibis, the water hen, the pelican, the vulture, the stork, the heron, the hoopoe, and the bat.”

Unwittingly, I think, but nonetheless certainly, many of our brethren have drawn up almost such a list of particulars with reference to the Lord’s Supper and other aspects of Christian witness. This is the result of a mistaken concept, a reversion to Judaistic attitudes of justification. It culminates in confusion by exalting incidentals to essentials. It seeks to establish human judgment as being an infallible criterion by which to measure all others. Traditional procedures become hallowed in each party and division is finally enshrined as the divine objective. When this occurs men are discouraged from attempting any real reform. They trudge the weary rut of factional debate and wearily walk on the treadmill of partisan orthodoxy. They dare not question the whole structure of sectarian exclusiveness for fear they will be accused of denying the word of God or the revelation from heaven.

I hold no brief for the empty mouthing’s of modernism nor for the vapid vagaries of what is mis-called “liberalism.” I accept without question the fact that the sacred scriptures are a revelation from God just as I do not hesitate to affirm my belief that Jesus of Nazareth was a revelation of God. But I do challenge the use being made of the new covenant writings which reduces them to a repository of factional texts and purports to discover within them a specific prescription for

every detail of current controversy. I am asked if it is not dangerous to thus write and speak. The question is raised as to whether some who are weak may not be encouraged to disregard the authority of the word. To this I reply that there is always an element of danger when anyone challenges an entrenched view with truth. Faith itself is not without its risks.

Shall we continue in mistaken attitudes simply to “play safe”? Is it really being safe in a spiritual sense to maintain and defend the *status quo* at the expense of our integrity? All freedom has about it an aura of danger. Certainly one feels more secure behind the walls of exclusivism. Shall we purchase security by bartering away our freedom to investigate and our right to speak and act? Is it not an act of weakness upon our part to conceal truth by hiding behind the skirts of the weak? There will always be men who will seek for justification for their departures from the truth. Will we be held back from discovering and affirming the truth on the basis that they will use it as an excuse for their own undue latitude? It is not a sin to regard the word of God in its proper perspective.

### **The True Pattern**

Our pattern is not a law, not even a divine one. It is a person. Even the previous written code of legalism was temporary in nature and designed to bring us to him. Mistaking this fact the Jews set their hope on the written law. Jesus said, “Your accuser is Moses, the very Moses on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses you would believe what I tell you, for it was about me that he wrote” (John 5:46). He further declared, “You study the scriptures diligently, supposing that in having them you have eternal life; yet, although their testimony points to me, you refuse to come to me for that life” (John 5:39, 40). Before Jesus ascended he opened the minds of the apostles to understand the scriptures and this understanding helped them to see for the first time the purpose of those scriptures. “Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms was bound to be fulfilled.”

Jesus is our everything! God has made him “our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” If we have any right to boast it cannot be because of our own program, performance or perfection. “Therefore, as it is written, Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord” (1 Cor. 1:31). The New English Version reads, “If a man is proud, let him be proud of the Lord.” So long as we regard the scriptures as a legalistic code we will be as proud as any other lawyer of our knowledge of the law. “This knowledge breeds conceit, it is love that builds. If anyone fancies that he knows, he knows nothing yet, in the true sense of knowing. But if a man loves, he is acknowledged by God” (1 Cor. 8:2).

The great envoy to the Gentiles reaches his peak when he writes to the Philippians. Referring to those who placed their confidence in ritualism of the law, he said “We are the circumcised, we whose worship is spiritual, whose pride is in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in anything external” (3:3). Several things need to be noted here. Our pride must not be that we are in Christ, but it must be in him. It is his status rather than our state which counts. We did not find him, he found us. Worship which is spiritual is also contrasted with confidence in external things. This is a definition and distinction which many need to learn.

Paul could have predicated his hope on externals. He writes, “If anyone thinks to base his hope on externals, I could make a stronger case for myself.” He then mentions some of these, including racial purity, tribal identity, attitude toward the law, pious zeal and legal rectitude. He says, “But all such assets I have written off because of Christ. I would say more: I count everything sheer loss, because all is far outweighed by the gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I did in fact lose everything. I count it so much garbage, for the sake of gaining Christ and finding myself incorporate in him, with no righteousness of my own, no legal rectitude, but the righteousness which comes from faith in Christ, given by God in response to faith.”

Jesus is our pattern and love our guiding principle. It is a summation of all law as well as the consummation of all law. “He who loves his neighbor has satisfied every claim of the law. For the commandments, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not covet,’ and any other commandment there may be, are all summed up in the one rule, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love cannot wrong a neighbor, therefore the whole law is summed up in love” (Rom. 13:8-10). “Every claim — any other commandment — all summed up — one rule.”

In view of the fact that we have only one pattern (a person), and only one law (love), we fulfill the demands of God by pledging allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ and loving one another. “We can approach God with confidence, and obtain from him whatever we ask, because we are keeping his commands and doing what he approves. This is his command: to give our allegiance to his Son Jesus Christ and love one another as he commanded” (1 John 3:22, 23). This is one of the most difficult things for men to grasp. So long have they regarded the religion of Christ as one of rules, regulations and rituals, they simply cannot accept the fact that the scriptures teach there is just *one rule*. Paul wrote that, “The whole law can be summed up in a single commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal. 5:14).

### **Purpose of Scriptures**

Why do we have the new covenant scriptures? This is a legitimate question as was the one asked by the apostle, “Wherefore then serveth the law?” The writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, constitute the written testimony related to our Lord. These are not biographies at all although some biographical features are found in them. The writers had a definite purpose in giving their accounts. They were selective of the mass of material available. One of them wrote, “There are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). It is obvious that their treatment was not exhaustive. John said, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” These records point men to Jesus as the source of life.

The book of Acts is the story of the struggle of the message of Jesus to free itself from narrowness, bigotry and prejudice. It is the dramatic account of how the story of the cross overcame the limitations of class and race. It ends with the messenger in prison and the message

liberated. The envoy in chains was “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered.”

The purpose of the apostolic letters was not to formulate a pattern for our pattern is a person. Peter wrote to the Christian slaves, “For to this end you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). The context shows that the purpose of Christ was not to bring a new religion or a systematic theology to mankind, but to develop a character in harmony with the divine nature — a character which would spontaneously react to every external situation and do so in harmony with God’s design. Since the pattern is a person and the law is love, when the saints exemplified the proper character they were commended and when they did not they were reprimanded, rebuked and encouraged to alter their conduct in conformity to his life. The purpose of the letters was to call men back to the pattern of the divine nature as exemplified in Christ Jesus.

Take the first letter addressed to the Corinthians as an example. They were divided over men who had special gifts and over the special gifts which men had. Paul did not lay down the law to them. Instead, he showed that to boast of men was inconsistent with their call. “Consider your call, brethren” (1 Cor. 1:26). The source of life is not in our association with each other. “He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord’” (1 Cor. 1:30). Division among brethren is an exhibition of the lower nature. “Can you not see that while there is jealousy and strife among you, you are living on the purely human level of your lower nature?” (3:3).

”There can be no other foundation (for Christian unity) beyond that which is already laid; I mean Jesus Christ himself” (3:11). It is important to catch the significance of this statement in its context. The letter is not the pattern of unity at all. It does not propose to specify a foundation upon which Christians can unite. The foundation has already been laid. No one, not even an apostle, can lay another foundation than Jesus Christ himself. Men who belong to Christ should not divide over anything which belongs to all of them. “For though everything belongs to you — Paul, Apollos and Cephas, the world, life, and death, the present and the future, all of them belong to you — yet you belong to Christ, and Christ to God” (3:22, 23).

As men divide over gifted men only when they forget their allegiance to Jesus, so they divide over the gifts men have only when they forget the principle of love for each other. The answer to the problem of division over men is to reaffirm Jesus as the center of our life. The solution to the problem of division over gifts is to re-establish love as the only true absolute in the Christian frame of behavior. “The higher gifts are those you should aim at. And now I will show you the best way of all.” That way is the way of love. “You are, I know, eager for gifts of the Spirit; then aspire above all to excel in those which build up the church” (14:12). Regardless of what gift a man possesses he cannot build up the church without love.

Look at the other problems in Corinth. The man who used his father’s wife for fleshly gratification violated every principle of love and enthroned lust. It held dominion over him. He did not love his father, the woman, himself, or the community of saints. Notice in 1 Thessalonians 4:2-9 how closely associated is the subject of love for the brotherhood and illicit

relationship with the wife of another. “No man must do his brother wrong in this matter, or invade his rights” (verse 6). In Corinth, a Greek city, the apostle makes a strange allusion in dealing with the fornicator. He refers to a Jewish festival, the Passover, and does so for one purpose — to introduce our true pattern. “For indeed our Passover has begun; the sacrifice is offered — Christ himself.”

Those who haled their brethren into court before heathen judges disregarded the real law, the only law of the Christian, love for the brethren. Christians do not go to law for the law has come to them. Paul reasons that it would have been far better to suffer harm from and be defrauded by a brother, than to retaliate in a way that shamed the brotherhood and brought it into disrepute. “Indeed, you already fall below your standard in going to law with one another at all. Why not rather suffer injury? Why not rather let yourself be robbed? So far from this, you actually injure and rob — injure and rob your brothers!” What was the standard below which they fell? It was not a law at all, but a person. “It is better to suffer for well-doing, if such should be the will of God, than for doing wrong. For Christ also died for our sins once and for all. He, the just, suffered for the unjust, to bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:17, 18).

I would that time and space permitted an analysis of every part of the Corinthian letter, and each of the other letters, from this standpoint. Paul writes about an escaped slave and sends him back, “no longer as a slave, but as more than a slave — as a dear brother, very dear indeed to me and how much dearer to you, both as a man and as a Christian” (verse 16). He is not hesitant about returning Onesimus to Philemon because, “My prayer is that your fellowship with us in our common faith may deepen the understanding of all the blessings that our union with Christ brings us” (verse 6). To the community at Philippi he exhorts, “Let your bearing toward one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus. For the divine nature was his from the first” (2:5, 6). To the Ephesian community he writes about the follies of paganism, “But that is not how you learned Christ. For were you not told of him, were you not as Christians taught the truth as it is in Jesus?” (4:20, 21).

It is apparent to the thinking reader that the apostles nowhere set up technical legal procedures for handling the various problems which were presented unto them. We are living proof that they did not. Do we not all love the Lord? Are we not all in Christ Jesus? Why are we divided? The answer is simply that we have regarded the new covenant scriptures as a legalistic framework and we have read into these letters our own interpretations. Every law needs an interpreter, or interpreting body, to apply it to specific cases and instances. The Constitution of the United States has its Supreme Court and the decisions of this august body become the official interpretation of the written code, whether popular or not. Because the interpretation is official that interpretation actually becomes the law of the land.

If we look upon the new covenant scriptures as a code of laws we must have an official interpreter, for no law can be adapted to cases which come before it unless someone rules upon the applicability of the law and the degree of culpability involved in the alleged infraction. This is what has happened. Each party has made its interpretation official and regards it as infallible. The party interpretation has become the will of God. Partisan traditions are accepted as precedents by which to judge contemporary problems. Thus division is multiplied and strife increased.



It will be asked if the “law of love” has no interpreter. Indeed it does and the interpreter is our pattern. He interpreted by action. “It is by this that we know what love is: that Christ laid down his life for us. And we in turn are bound to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16). “The love I speak of is not our love for God, but the love he showed to us in sending his Son as the remedy for the defilement of our sins. If God thus loved us, dear friends, we in turn are bound to love one another” (1 John 4:11, 12).

If Jesus is the interpreter who is the judge? I answer that there is both an immediate and an ultimate judge. The immediate judge is the conscience. The final judge is God who gave us both conscience and Christ. No man must ever be forced to act contrary to conscience. “This is how we may know that we belong to the realm of truth, and convince ourselves in his sight that even if our conscience condemns us, God is greater than our conscience and knows all. Dear friends, if our conscience does not condemn us, then we can approach God with confidence and obtain from him whatever we ask, because we are keeping his commandments and doing what he approves. This is his command: to give our allegiance to his Son Jesus Christ and love one another as he commanded” (1 John 3:19-23). It is for this reason that “Those of us who have a robust conscience must accept as our own burden the tender scruples of weaker men, and not consider ourselves” (Rom. 15:1).

If in our approach to an understanding of God’s will the conscience is to be a monitor I must respect its decisions even if I do not agree with them. I do not concur in all of the decrees handed down by the Supreme Court but I respect them as a citizen of the United States. Respect for a present judicial decision does not mean that I may not labor for a reversal of it within the framework provided by the Constitution. I must defend the right of brethren to examine the scriptures for themselves and this includes a recognition that they may form certain conclusions which my own conscience cannot accept as correct. Within the framework of love I can work for an amended decision, or even for a reversal of the current one, based upon new evidence. But I have no right to deny the citizenship of those who differ any more than I have a right to affirm that members of the Supreme Court cannot be Americans if their interpretation of the Constitution differs from my own understanding of that august document.

I need not be concerned about the ultimate triumph of truth. It is not necessary that I attempt to coerce or force the consciences of others into a strait-jacket of conformity. “God is greater than our conscience and knows all.” Some day each of us will give an account to the Lord of all. “To his own master he stands or falls.” It is not my prerogative, while the Lord delays his coming, to smite and beat my fellow servants. We will be measured by how well we have manifested our allegiance unto him. We will be saved, not because of our perfection, but because of his perfect sacrifice.

Not even a divine being could write a document which would be proof against abuse by its recipients and readers. Our attitude toward the love letters of the Spirit will regulate our attitude toward our brethren. If one receives a letter from a fleshly brother or sister he does not subject each word to a microscopic scrutiny in an attempt to determine what may be concealed in it that other members of the family have overlooked. It is assumed that the intent and purpose of such a letter is not to destroy but to augment and encourage the family ties. No one would assume in advance of perusing a letter from his parents that every word or statement would be of dual

importance, although because of the relationship of love there is a pervading interest in all that is said.

We do not minimize the value of linguistic research but it is possible that one can become so involved in word studies that he forgets the Living Word. One may develop such an obsession for minute details related to the Lord's Supper that he cannot really eat the *Lord's Supper* and only partakes of the "proper kind" of bread and the "proper kind" of wine. But are we not to hold fast "the form of sound words"? Indeed we are, but the purpose of sound words is to develop sound lives and attitudes. The proper criterion by which to measure how well one holds to sound words is by the hold they have on his disposition toward others of God's children to whom the same words were written. When one makes it his chief aim in life to announce his own soundness and denounce all others, we may question if it is not the sound of his own words to which he holds fast.

Perhaps we have become tiresome and tedious in this presentation and lest we provoke your patience beyond endurance, let us summarize what we have been saying.

1. Our pattern is the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to reveal how sons of God should behave. Ours is a personal relationship with the Father, so the Son of God became the Son of man to demonstrate how the sons of men may become sons of God, We have been "chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood." Since he has "called us to his own glory and excellence," he has seen fit to grant "to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature."
2. The purpose of the transformation from our lower nature to the divine nature is to make it possible for us to react spontaneously to whatever temptations or problems we meet in life. When the primitive Christians did this they were commended, when they did not they were reprimanded. The design of both commendation and condemnation was to assure their conformity to His life and character.
3. The apostolic writings provide a normative basis for the Christian life in that they constitute a revelation from God as to how His children must conduct themselves to please Him. We cannot deprecate the value of the new covenant scriptures because they constitute our means of knowing what is involved in the divine nature. Every person who gives his allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ must seek to understand and implement in his own life the things taught by the Spirit.
4. While every facet of our relationship is provided for in the new covenant scriptures, not every detail or method of implementation is spelled out. The church of God is ageless and timeless. Its members must apply the principles set forth to the best of their ability and according to their discretion. This was true of the communities of the saints to whom the letters were originally addressed. It is equally true of those who read them nineteen centuries later.
5. As knowledge and discernment increases, alterations and amendments will be made, both personally and corporately, in order to conform more fully to the demands of the divine nature. Such changes should always be within the framework of scriptural reference while love abounds

more and more. These changes undertaken to come closer to the ideal of the Master must not be regarded as digressive but as part of a spiritual maturing process.

6. Since the new covenant system is not one of legalism we should avoid making the new covenant scriptures a written code of justification. This means an avoidance of judging those in Christ Jesus whose character and behavior is above censure and who demonstrate their allegiance to Christ Jesus. We should not judge the eternal worthiness of one upon his ability to see every detail as we do, lest we set up as laws or tests of fellowship, our own reasoning or interpretation. For example, it would be sinful for me to speak disparagingly of one of God's children who does not share my views relative to the use of multiple cups in distribution of the Lord's Supper. The feast is the Lord's and I must love all of his brethren who sit down at his table. They are my brethren too. If Paul could recognize as brethren those in Corinth "who came together not for the better but for the worse" surely I can revere as brethren those who do not share all of my views about externals which have no power to save or to damn. It is enough for me that "he has put his seal upon us and given his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."

7. I shall not be so concerned about how much my brethren know about the written word at a given time as I am about how much they love God and the brethren at all times. Surely I want to increase in knowledge and I want others to do so, but if one could "understand all mysteries and all knowledge" he would still be nothing without love. The more I learn of God the more I will know about love because "God is love." The blueprint is not written in a book. It is inscribed on the heart by the Spirit. If I interpret the Book to inspire hate or to create and justify division, I have missed the whole point. I must believe everything God said and I must believe in Him whom God sent.

Let me once more assert my conviction. I love the revealed word of God as contained in the new covenant scriptures. It is a light to my path and a lamp to my feet. But to pervert it from its divine purpose is to take the staff intended to support one who walks with his brethren and turn it into a club to kill the brethren with whom it is intended he should walk. Signposts are to be followed and not jerked up as weapons to kill other pilgrims. God has not given us a blueprint for an institution, but a green light to proceed in the Living Way, and I am ready to go.

If God wills, it is our intention, in the next issue, to discuss very openly and frankly, some of the practical implications of what we have said about "the pattern." Please remember that we will love you as sincerely if you cannot concur with what we write as if you do! Like Paul in his letter to Corinth I can truly close with the words, "My love be with you all in the Lord Jesus."

## Chapter 3

### A PATTERN OF FREEDOM

How shall we regard the new covenant scriptures? Do they constitute a body of laws, statutes and regulations, which spell out in minute detail every action we must perform in order to please God? Or, do they provide for us a revelation of the divine mind in love, enunciating certain great principles consistent with the exemplification of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ? The answer to these questions will determine our whole philosophy of Christian behavior. The way we treat God's children depends upon our concept of God. If we regard him in the role of a stern and inflexible lawgiver we will make the church a law-enforcement agency with about as much warmth and human compassion as one would find in the criminal investigation bureau of the local police station. If we regard him as a loving parent interested in the welfare of all of his dear ones, they will be treated with personal concern by ourselves as part of the family.

It is our conviction that the new covenant scriptures were never given as an arbitrary pattern in the sense that the term "pattern" is commonly used. It is a mistaken view at this juncture which has created most of our strife and division. Men have attempted to ride roughshod over the consciences of others under the false impression that they demonstrated fidelity toward the Father by laying a heavy hand upon His children. The love letters of the Spirit have been converted into an iron scepter and a whip of scorpions. The apostolic epistles have been regarded as a yoke to be riveted about the necks of the humble by clerical despotism. It has been made to appear that God has placed his subjects under martial law.

In no sense do we deny that the scriptures are the word of God. We respect both their origin and the authority for which they were given. We are not skeptical of the word of God but we are a little skeptical of the way it is employed by a lot of people in the world, some of whom are our brethren in the Lord. We do not conceive of the new covenant scriptures as supplying a rigid pattern for every exigency that can arise among us. If our view is correct, then to force them into a peremptory and rigorous role is to wrest them from the real purpose for which they were bestowed upon us by a beneficent God. It is actually, to run counter to the divine will by making that which was intended to unite us a divisive instrument. Let us catalog for you certain points which we believe to be of utmost significance to such a discussion.

1. God has always sought to insure the togetherness of his people. In previous ages he did this by *law*, he now accomplishes it by *love*. The law constituted a stockade inside which men were confined. It provided unity at the expense of freedom. "Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed" (Gal. 3:23). Such a system is not adapted to free men. "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). We are not under law but under grace. We are held together, not by a wall or fence around us, but by a mutual attachment to our Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews were held together by that which enclosed them on the perimeter; we are held together by a magnetic power which attracts us to a common center. They were hemmed in, we are in Him!

2. The previous covenant was written upon tablets of stone. It was a legalistic system as unyielding and inflexible as the stones upon which the ten commandments were inscribed. The new covenant is “written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor. 3:3). The envoys of Jesus were “qualified to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Observe that the man who wrote the majority of the new covenant epistles positively declares that he was not ministering unto us a written code. Those who take what he did write and convert it into a code of legalistic procedure violate his very purpose.

3. The difference between God’s treatment of us and his attitude toward the people in previous ages is found in the maturity to which mankind has attained. While his people were children they were no better off than slaves. They were under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. When the time arrived, God sent forth His Son to redeem those who were under the law, so they might receive the adoption as sons. Confinement under law is slavery, freedom in Christ is sonship. “So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.” Few of us have recognized that if we seek to be justified by law we forfeit our inheritance. Only those free from law are sons, only sons are heirs! To convert the grace of God into a law is to deprive us of the very thing we hope to achieve by such action.

4. The coming of Christ made the difference! “The law was our custodian *until Christ came*, that we might be justified by faith.” Sin separated man from God and broke up the personal relationship which existed between them. No law could ever be devised or imposed which could restore such a relationship as sin destroyed. Law can confine, keep under restraint, and act as a custodian. It can point out and identify sin and provide a penalty for it but it cannot give life to the dead. Reconciliation had to be provided by a person. The law was holy, but God was not in the law reconciling man unto himself. The righteousness of God is not revealed in a law but in persons. Since the new covenant is written upon our hearts, we are the righteousness of God. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, ... For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:19, 21).

5. Many of us seem incapable of accepting fully the implications of such transcendent glory as that with which God invests us. We still want to view it through a veil. Consider the import of the statement, “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian” (Gal. 3:25). “The law was our custodian until Christ came.” The very function of law is custodial. If we make of the new covenant scriptures a written code, or law, then we are under a custodian. We have merely swapped a previous custodian for a present one. When the apostle says we are no longer under a custodian, he simply means we are no longer under a law. We are free in Christ Jesus. To take the apostolic injunctions, admonitions, and commandments, and forge these into a law for justification and righteousness; to impose them as a written code to restrain men and hold them “in line”, is to create another custodian as certainly as we do it.

6. All law requires interpretation and he who interprets it regards his interpretation as the law, or its equivalent. He may, or may not, enforce his interpretation, depending upon his temperament, zeal, and inclination, but whether he does, or does not, enforce it, he will regard those who do not conform to his interpretation as violating the law. The hope of securing proper reverence for all who are in Christ Jesus lies in a recognition that we are not under law at all, but under grace.

“But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit” (Rom. 7:6).

Such a noble concept when enunciated always brings a question about the rise of anarchy. A goodly number of brethren trust themselves and distrust everyone else in Christ Jesus. They regard themselves as the divinely appointed “keepers of orthodoxy” and “detectors of heresy.” By some indefinable means God has blessed them with such profound wisdom and proficiency in judgment that they can relay to the rest of mankind the official meaning of the messages from the Throne. They cannot furnish others with an unadorned copy of the sacred writings and trust them to understand what they read. They must embellish it, explain and emphasize it, and then “withdraw” from those who do not accept their interpretations as the divine *law*. It is obvious that they are much more frightened by anarchy than by tyranny, unless someone seeks to do unto them as they do unto others!

As for myself, I am not too fearful of any who are in Christ Jesus and who seek to walk “not after the flesh but after the Spirit.” I rather suspect there would have been faithful children of God if I had never been born. Our real problem is that we have filled our congregations with people who know nothing about the indwelling Spirit and we have to continue “cracking the whip” over their heads to keep them coming and contributing to the support of their taskmasters. Let us not forget that only slaves require taskmasters to be “urgent, saying, ‘Complete your work, your daily tasks’” (Exo. 5:13). Loving sons will do the wish of their Father, prompted by an inner feeling which no law can create.

Let us think together about the origin, nature and purpose of the new covenant scriptures. I consider these to be an expression of the will of God through chosen ambassadors. The Father gave this revelation to an age of the world which had attained its spiritual majority. This maturity was reached by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ who is our pattern. It was not the intention of God to provide for us a detailed program for every spiritual activity. This would have been a reflection against those who were no longer slaves, but sons. Moreover, the Father desires to preserve the individuality of His children as does a careful earthly parent. It was never His desire to stifle our rational powers but to channel them. Can we agree on the following suggestions relative to the new testament writings?

1. The apostles wrote to deal with specific conditions which had arisen or which threatened. They did not specify the exact method in every instance for application of the principles they set forth but entrusted this to the sanctified hearts and consecrated commonsense of those to whom the messages were addressed. The administration of those same principles in our own age must be subject to the discretion and judgment of the saints.
2. The problems confronting the Christian system change from one generation to another and vary in different localities on the earth. However, all such problems resolve into questions of relationship and neither the categories of relationship nor the principles governing such ever alter. Any problem of relationship is always complex and latitude must be allowed in working it out. There may be more than one manner of approaching such a problem and we should not conclude that the employment of a different approach necessarily negates or destroys the relationship.

3. While the adaptability of divinely enunciated principles to our present state and needs is a demonstration of superior wisdom, their validity does not inhere from this, but from the authority of their author. As the source of all power, God is greater than any principle he has announced, and since every principle has been stated to secure a certain objective or goal, that objective is superior to any method which may be employed to attain to it. This in no sense affirms that the end justifies the means but it does warn us that when we become so involved in discussion of the means that we lose sight of the goal, we are sacrificing the greater for the lesser and our sense of values is distorted. It is astonishing how many debates have been held about modes and means by those who never pray together about the real goal to be achieved by such means.

4. In carrying out the divine Purpose the primitive saints made use of such means as were at hand to accomplish their objective. Their employment of such means was not intended to be either exhaustive or exclusive, and we are free to make use of such means as we have at hand in implementation of the divine will, provided that the use of such means is not forbidden, or is not contrary to some other feature of the divine will as expressed. The selection and utilization of such means must be by the function of human judgment and in its exercise one is accountable to the Master and not to other servants. In other words, one slave cannot sit in judgment of another slave. "To his own master he stands or falls." A member can exercise his own judgment to reject the judgment of another but he cannot reject the other Person. There is a difference in disagreeing with a man's judgment and in judging him as being unworthy of the family relationship.

5. Inasmuch as the Lord lived among men at a given place on the globe and at a given time in history, some of what he said, and some of what the apostles wrote, was directly related to conditions then and there obtaining, and must be understood in that frame of reference. All truths are equally true but they are not all equally important. The relative importance of certain truths may fluctuate in different eras and in diverse areas. A truth is not always equally relevant in every spot on our globe. Certainly that which is essential to being is more important than that which merely contributes to wellbeing.

6. The method of implementation of principles or truths may vary according to custom, environment or tradition. Such variations need not be assessed as a denial or abrogation of the principles, nor should a specific method be bound as uniformly required regardless of circumstances or conditions. We suggest two examples, one related to an act of Jesus, the other to an apostolic declaration, which may serve to illustrate our point.

## 1. Washing of Feet

*"Before the feast of the Passover ... Jesus ... rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded."*

Due to the terrain over which they traveled, and because men wore sandals or walked barefoot, it had long been a custom to set a basin of water before a guest that he might bathe his feet. Eventually this act was performed by a servant, or slave, of the household, who washed the feet of the visitor and dried them with a towel with which he had girded himself. In view of this, it

came to pass that when a host wished to demonstrate special honor to a guest, he personally performed the task, thus relegating himself to the role of a menial in kneeling before the guest.

Jesus enforced the point of his action with the words, “You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.” He then added, “A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

Upon the basis of these words some followers of Jesus in an age and place remote from his time have felt called upon to practice the washing of feet as an ordinance to be observed by the congregation. We do not speak derogatorily of any sincere attempt to be like Jesus when we mention that the observation of such a practice in our present circumstances may have exactly the opposite effect of that intended. No longer is the custom followed generally in the homes and lives of the people. It has completely lost its significance in our culture. To offer a guest a basin of water and to volunteer to wash his feet as soon as he arrives in the home would only insult him.

Under such circumstances to make a ritualistic observance of such an act may actually engender pride in partisan orthodoxy. There is a possibility that a group may place so much value on externals as to say, “Lord, we thank thee that we are not as other men, even as those who do not follow the example of our Lord in the washing of feet.” In such case the washing of feet may become a matter of sectarian glory and not be an exhibition of the humble spirit at all. It was the very casualness with which our Savior arose and carried out the ablutions which made his deed so outstanding. To arrogate to such an act a credal significance and to bind it upon men as a ritual when it has lost all of its original instructive value is to foster partisan vain-glory. This is the ever present danger in all ritual observances. It is easy to *display* our faith to men rather than *dedicate* it to God from the heart.

No thoughtful person will deny that we need to recapture for our age that sense of genuine humility and concern which characterized the life of Jesus. We live in a world where “luxury’s vile contagion” has affected the whole social structure. It is an era of braggadocio, bluster and boasting. From our international relationships to our local traffic congestion, it is often the biggest bluffer who wins. This makes for glorification of the artificial and superficial. It is precisely at such a time that men are tempted to place their trust in externals as the means for demonstrating intangible qualities. A ritual may be created which, when performed, will enable them to say, “That takes care of my humility for this week — or year.” Under the group pressure to participate in such a ritual for ritual’s sake, the truly genuine man may be the one who declines to do so.

You will note that we spoke of the humility which *characterized* the life of Jesus. We need to develop that type of character which will respond in proper fashion in every circumstance that may arise and which will exhibit itself in any recognized custom or procedure. It is absurd to suppose that if Jesus visited America this year that he would insist upon washing our feet as an indication that we should be in subjection to each other. He would adapt himself to our manner of existence and give force and meaning to our recognized modes of expressing values. He



would demonstrate the difference between empty forms and vital requirements. The record of John is not authority for washing feet but for cleansing hearts of pride. The former was but incidental to the latter. He who takes such an incidental and exalts it into a law mistakes the purpose of the divine example. The grave danger is that one may give such emphasis to the incidental that he neglects the essential.

## 2. The Feminine Veil

In the same category as we see it, is the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. No doubt there are a good many things the apostle had in mind which we may never clearly understand. Without a complete knowledge of the circumstances which called forth the letter we can only surmise its direct application. It seems that certain of the sisters in the congregation were praying or prophesying without wearing a veil and this practice was bringing reproach upon them and upon the community of the saints. We think that a careful study of the passage will show that its central theme is the subordination of the woman to her husband. There is no degradation involved in this for "In the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God" (1 Cor. 11:12).

In Greek cities, as well as in Eastern cities, it was the custom for women to wear a veil in public. This was a visible token of the fact that the woman recognized a status of social subordination. It was a badge of authority on her head (verse 10) and was indicative of that becoming modesty associated with the finest quality of feminine grace. Only the women of bad character who depended upon their physical charms to enhance their profession appeared without the veil. Apparently, the women in the community of saints at Corinth, mistaking certain aspects of the apostolic instruction, concluded that Christianity was intended to disregard all customs and abolish existing social structures. Their action created a scandal in the eyes of the heathen populace and if persisted in, would have rendered the divine message useless and ineffective.

Christianity did not have as its goal the destruction or abrogation of social customs. It did not interfere with funeral customs, wedding customs, or legal proceedings. True, it has had an effect upon traditional patterns by the gradual dissemination of truth about human relationships, but Jesus and his apostles were not "social reformers" in the current usage of that term. Therefore, those who were Christians conformed to social customs which were without moral significance when considered objectively, but which would have made those who disregarded them liable to moral stigma.

A great deal of writing has been done about whether or not the women in our society must wear a veil in the public services of the saints. It is not at all my plan or intention to enter into controversy over the matter. I have read all that has been written on all sides of the question and which has been available to me. In most instances, brethren are willing to settle for women wearing a hat (quite a gaudy creation in many cases which would really have created a stir in Corinth), or a token covering of some sort. I do not believe that either modesty or subordination is judged by our society on wearing a veil or hat. Since the criterion no longer obtains it would be a useless gesture. The veil is not now regarded as a badge of authority and a woman who appears publicly without a veil does not thereby dishonor her husband.

The principle of subordination will last as long as time continues. The distinctive differences between the sexes must always be recognized and maintained. We must differentiate between improving a state and abolishing it. Christianity has worked as a constant leaven to elevate woman from the plane of a chattel to that of a companion, in all the fullness of meaning and dignity attached to this latter term. But the overt demonstration of subordination will vary in different social structures, and to bind upon all and sundry, traditions which have been out-grown or lost their significance, is merely to rivet a yoke which God has not authorized. To use as a measuring rod of modest behavior a standard which has been discarded or outgrown would be like insisting upon paying your taxes with a *denarius* because Jesus did. Standards of social judgment change as do those of coinage.

Of course the real danger lies in the literal adoption of a thing as a symbol of a state of heart. Modesty and subordination are inner qualities of Christian character. It is possible that we may become so involved in discussions about a covering for the head that we fall into the error of supposing that the mere act of wearing such a covering constitutes the proper attitude. Thus a woman may sit in a public meeting with a hat on her head and a heart full of hate and revolt toward her husband. It is one thing to wear a veil in a society where it is universally regarded as a symbol, but a wholly different thing to wear one in conformity to a legalistic procedure where society is wholly oblivious of whether one has a hat on or not. A short time ago I was in a congregation where a husband affirmed in class that he did not believe a woman needed to have her head covered in the public assembly. His wife disagreed. After the service she said to me, "You just wait until I get him home!" She wanted to get her hat off before she started in on him.

The new covenant scriptures are authority for a recognized standard of subordination. "The head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." They are also authority for conformity to recognized social customs which publicly demonstrate the Christian character of modesty and humility. But the church of God is universal. It is ageless and timeless. It must exist in every clime and amidst varied cultures and traditions. It must not be made the excuse for that arbitrary action whereby one nation or people impose their own culture and traditions upon all others. It is a little difficult for some people to separate their loyalty to Jesus from their patriotism!

## Preserving Our Freedom

Perhaps it would be well for some of us who think we have a correct understanding of the relationship of foot-washing and veil-wearing to Christian character, to take a second look at some of the other things which we regard as vital to fellowship with God and Christ Jesus. It could well be that we are making the word of God authoritative in matters where it was not intended to be such at all. Few of us would be willing to place the scriptures in the hands of others without some commentary and explanations accompanying them. Our plea for the authority of the scriptures means that they are authoritative "as explained by us." The real authority, in the final analysis, is not the scriptures at all but our interpretation. If you doubt this you need merely to observe what happens to a man who questions the orthodox and traditional viewpoint. Regardless of how godly in character he may be, or how much he loves and values the word of God and seeks to emulate it, he is driven forth as a pagan and publican.

We do not trust the rest of God's children as much as he trusts them. He gave them his revelation unencumbered by our interpolations and footnotes. Apparently thousands of saints died for the faith, and in the faith, before we came along. They did not have the advantage (?) of our erudition and interpretative skill. They were forced to go to the stake with only the Bible for comfort and without one of our debate books clutched in their hand. In this generation the word is authoritative as it has been digested, collated and officially explained by partisan heroes and editors. If we immerse one into Christ we hand him a Bible and give him a subscription to a partisan journal. It is the word as filtered through that journal which is authoritative. The word as explained in other and rival journals is not authoritative at all.

What sect or party would simply send the word of God, the revelation of God's will, to enlightened parts of the world, and tell men to obey its teachings? The American Bible Society has as its mission the publication of the holy scriptures in the language of the people, without note or comment, and most of those who plead the loudest for the authority of the sacred scriptures would not even support it in its mission. They would not announce its programs and they might "withdraw fellowship" from any who supported it. The word of God is not enough to save the world. Men go to the very countries from which they import many of the Bibles they carry and announce that they are taking the gospel to them for the first time.

The Wycliffe translators are doing a tremendous job in translating the scriptures into the languages of tribes which have never had the Word of God. Young college students are devoting their lives to going among savage peoples, living with them and sharing in their lives. They exist among these primitive folk in almost indescribable conditions. Through use of tape recorders and other means they capture the gutturals and grunts which constitute a mode of communication and from these construct an alphabet which may be employed in translating the message from heaven into another language of the world. It is doubtful whether we would support a brother who felt called upon to labor with the Wycliffe group. The constituents do not all belong to our party. It would be considered a compromise to give the heathen the message of God unless it was sponsored by "a faithful church."

Yet, every translation of the sacred scriptures that we so readily employ in our own study and services, was the result of painstaking labor by men who were not connected with "our movement." We do not hesitate to use the King James Version despite the fact that it was commissioned by a foreign monarch and those who gave it to us were all connected with the Church of England. We will stand before an audience and read the J. B. Phillips' translation, but if Phillips himself visited us we would not call upon him to stand up and read it in our hearing. We are not averse to warming ourselves by fires that others have kindled provided the others do not attempt to stand with us and warm themselves.

It is true that we spend *hundreds* of dollars sending the inspired scriptures to other lands but we spend *thousands* in sending uninspired men along to give the natives our "official" slant on the Book. This also includes the transportation of our feuds and fusses into remote areas where they have little relevance. We must be sure that primitive headhunters not only find Jesus, but also find out the correct way to break the bread, so they will be "loyal." In no sense am I criticizing the ambition of humble men to go into all of the world and take the gospel to all who are enslaved by sin. However, most of the brethren are confused by what constitutes the gospel over

here. It is not to be marveled at that they manifest the same confusion *over there*. It is for that reason we have sent our missionaries from a half dozen different kinds of “Churches of Christ” to create division *in Christ* of those who were relatively united as heathen. Our history is replete with incidents in which the long arm of American domination has reached across oceans to exercise control over congregations made up of simple people whose humble and unadorned devotion to the Master should shame us in our theological sophistication and pride.

I am not certain whether it is God’s revelation or orthodox American Church-of-Christ-ism which is our real authority. Many of our missionaries must keep one eye fastened on heaven and the other on Texas or Tennessee. The reaction in the latter places to any move or teaching will generally determine “heaven’s will” in the matter. This is not written sarcastically. It is a simple statement of conditions as I view them. Our brethren are sincere but they are victims of a system of exclusivism and legalism unparalleled in our age outside of the Roman Catholic Church. They employ the same tactics of enforcement — boycott, censorship and excommunication. They are frequently coerced by the very clergy to whose support they must contribute under threat of eternal damnation. All of this is done (as by the Catholic Clerics) in the mistaken view that such an attitude is pleasing unto God.

Our real mistake was to confound the church of God with the restoration movement launched by Presbyterians and others on American soil. This has led us to think of Christianity in our age as a sort of American possession to be shared with less fortunate regions of the earth. That it is a kind of “white man’s religion” is evident from the attitude of many in the United States who will contribute copious sums to take the gospel to Negroes in Africa while refusing to allow them in their meetinghouses over here. Our hypocrisy in refusing to develop the kind of character Jesus came to reveal, while at the same time insisting upon the authority of divine revelation, ought to prove to us that Pharisaism is not dead. “The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do, for they preach, but do not practice” (Matt. 23:23). When we send missionaries to other lands it is not to share with them what is *ours* but to take to them what is also *theirs*.

It is rather astonishing how we have learned to “explain away” those things in the sacred writings which we do not wish to accept or practice. Take the “holy kiss” as an example. Here is something for which we have repeated command of the apostles. In addition to the commands we have the actual example of the primitive saints in conjunction with an apostle (Acts 20:37). We need not depend upon a “necessary inference” with regard to it. The last half of Romans 16:16 is very precious to a lot of us. “All the churches of Christ greet you.” But we have a clever way of evading the first half, which says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.”

The average “Church of Christ preacher” when confronted with this, seeks to evade its force by ridicule. He may say, “It’s all right with me if you want to kiss me provided you don’t chew tobacco or dip snuff.” Or he may arouse levity by saying, “I’ll let you kiss me if you insist on it, if you’ll let me smell your breath first.” This approach to what the apostle may have written as tears streamed down his cheeks, is unworthy of one who professes to be a teacher of God’s will. If the word of God is our pattern in every particular, and if what the apostles wrote to the congregations, constitutes an exact absolute guide for every Christian action, why do we dispense with this command?

The truth is that the strict legalist can neither laugh this off nor scoff it out of application. If the new covenant scriptures constitute a specific law, compiled as a written code, the holy kiss is obligatory upon saints today. When the legalist explains it away he forfeits in the process that which is vital to his “blue print” concept. When it is stated that the command is to greet, the regulation is expressed by the word holy, and the custom was by a kiss, and that we are free to substitute our own custom as practiced in our culture, it is evident that the scriptures *must* be interpreted (for this is an interpretation), and they *may* be interpreted (at least in some instances) in the light of contemporary customs. Who is to be the Supreme Court and determine which scriptures can be so regarded and which may not?

In my own concept of the divine purpose, which is simply that Jesus is our pattern and the development of a character consistent with the divine nature is our goal, this scripture presents no problem. If Jesus went among the Chinese he would shake hands with himself in greeting; if he went among the Eskimo people he would rub noses with them. Whatever he did would be holy and free from guile. The Christian character must be exhibited in various forms and methods dictated by the recognized customs of the time and place. While it is true that we are free we must willingly submit to regulations and restraints. In this we exercise our freedom.

”For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law — though not being myself under the law — that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law — not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ — that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

### The Law of Christ

What is the law of Christ to which Paul alludes? Note that it is one which obligates a free man to become the slave of all and to do this voluntarily to achieve a greater cause — to win the more. The law of Christ is not the new covenant scriptures for these had not been written when Paul declared himself to be under it. Moreover, Paul was beheaded before all of these scriptures were written, so if they constituted the law, he was never under it in its perfection.

Any law acts as a restraining force for this is the nature of law. It restricts one in the exercise of freedom by bringing him up short when he reaches its bounds. What law is it which makes the welfare of others superior to your own and thus compels you to sacrifice your own inclinations in order to win others? On this point there can be little question. “You, my friends, were called to be free men; only do not turn your freedom into license for your lower nature, but be servants to one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in a single commandment: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:13, 14).

Love is the law of Christ. In one of his final discourses, Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment: love one another; as I have loved you so you are to love one another. If there is this love among you, then all will know that you are my disciples” (John 14:34, 35). Love is the only absolute within the Christian framework. Augustine was correct when he declared, “Love

God and do what you please.” This is a perfect law of liberty. The exaltation of any other law or code must always infringe upon this. I have never known anyone who regarded the new covenant scriptures as a legalistic code who did not violate the law of love — the law of Christ. When anything except love becomes law, love is restricted or excluded by that thing, for that is the function of law. It is only when love itself is the law that it is uninhibited and unrestrained.

The new covenant letters were not written to comprise a legalistic code for the people of God. If they were, the community of saints existed for some sixty years without part of that law and for two decades without any of it. The epistles were written to commend those who observed the law of love (e.g., the one to the Philippians), or to call back to that law those who deviated from it. Nothing is clearer from these Spirit-filled letters than the fact that Jesus is our pattern and love is our law. This runs like a golden thread through all of them without exception. They constitute for us a norm of Christian behavior because they reveal how a character founded and grounded in love should react under given circumstances.

These scriptures were not written in full and imposed upon the saved ones as a law from the inception of the community of saints. From the beginning they were under the law of Christ — love. “Dear friends, I give you no new command. It is the old command which you always had before you; the old command is the message which you heard from the beginning. And yet again it is a new command that I am giving you — new in the sense that the darkness is passing and the real light already shines ... Only the man who loves his brother dwells in the light: there is nothing to make him stumble” (1 John 2:7, 8, 10). As difficult as it may be for those who have been reared behind a fence of legalism to admit the truthfulness of what we write, it is our conviction that it is true.

The commandments are the outgrowth of the love of the Father and they should be kept out of love for Him. It makes all the difference in the world whether you regard these commands as the statutory requirements of a police state or the uplifting requests of a loving parent. Jesus did not say, “If you fear me you will obey my commands,” but “If you love me you will obey my commands.” Legalism is always concerned with the precept; love is concerned with the person. In the former, if there is any conflict between mercy and law, the law must be fulfilled regardless of circumstances. Judgment rejoices and triumphs over mercy in such a system, because it is the dignity of the law, not the dignity of the person which must be maintained.

This is not true of the law of liberty. “Always speak and act as men who are to be judged under a law of freedom. In that judgment there will be no mercy for the man who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:12, 13). The law of liberty is the law of Christ. It allows one the liberty to show mercy. No one requires mercy who keeps a law in its perfection. It is only when honest intention and purity of motive fall below the legal standard that mercy is required. The thing that makes “a perfect law of liberty” is its provision for imperfect beings. We must ever speak and act as those who will be held responsible for showing mercy. If there is a question as to enforcement of law or extension of mercy, the law of freedom makes love for men, not love for law, our chief objective.

The translation of this passage by J. B. Phillips is a very fortunate one. “Anyway, you should speak and act as men who will be judged by the law of freedom. The man who makes no

allowances for others will find none made for him. It is still true that mercy smiles in the face of judgment.” It is not amiss to cite his translation of Ephesians 4:1-3 at this juncture. “As God’s prisoner then, I beg you to live lives worthy of your high calling. Accept life with humility and patience, making allowances for each other because you love each other. Make it your aim to be at one in the Spirit, and you will inevitably be at peace with one another.”

It is our intention, in our next issue, to deal practically with some of the problems confronting those of us in the non-instrument segment of the disciple brotherhood. For instance, I believe that in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper, some have elevated certain incidentals and made of them essentials, and that this course has been divisive and disruptive. I do not intend to speak censoriously of those who have done this, because their action is simply an expression of the “specific pattern” philosophy which is generally characteristic of all of our factions. Some exhibit it with reference to certain details, while others do so with reference to other details. All of us have been guilty in certain aspects.

My intention is to help all of us to re-evaluate our current condition in the light of God’s purpose for our lives. We will gain little by biting criticism or accusation. I am not so much concerned with assessing fault as with alleviating it. We believe that all of our readers will welcome the next issue of the paper which will be sent forth “with malice toward none; with charity toward all.”

## Chapter 4

### THE SUPPER PATTERN

A few years ago an American evangelist visited a congregation of saints in another land. When the Lord's table was uncovered he saw that it contained a small loaf of leavened bread. He was undecided as to whether he should partake of it, because he had always been accustomed to unleavened bread on the table. That afternoon he voiced his feelings in the home of one of the elders, pointing out that Jesus chose unleavened bread. The elder informed him that Jesus did not have a choice. The Lord's Supper was ordained in conjunction with the Passover which ushered in the feast of unleavened bread. During this time Jewish families ate unleavened bread as their staple diet. Jesus simply took the kind of bread they ate at their regular meals and consecrated it. The elder pointed out that they followed the example of Jesus and used the kind of bread that was used in their ordinary meals.

Tradition is a powerful force in molding religious practice. So the preacher pointed out that Jesus took unleavened bread and we should do the same. It was quickly pointed out to him that when Jesus or the apostles spoke of the bread they used the word *artos*, which means a loaf, leavened or unleavened. They did not once use the word *azumos*, which is the Greek for "unleavened" in any of their instructions relative to the Supper. Jesus used unleavened bread because he was a Jew. This was the only bread at hand. To argue that no one can observe the feast acceptably while eating leavened bread is to impeach the standing of thousands of God's children in the world, as well as to set up *as a law* that which was an incidental feature. The family should not be divided into a "leavened bread party" and an "unleavened bread party." Such factionalism is a sin.

Speaking of sin reminds us that some are so careless as to state that the Jews ate unleavened bread at the Passover because leaven was a type of sin. This is not the case at all. Unleavened bread was used to remind the people only of the haste in which they fled Egypt. "They baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not tarry" (Exodus 12:39). Moses declared, "You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction — for you came out of the land of Egypt in hurried flight — that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt" (Deut. 16:3). Unleavened bread had a special relevance to the Jewish Passover. It has none to the Lord's Supper.

The interesting thing about the preacher to whom we referred is his attitude toward some of his brethren in the United States. He was a champion of individual cups and regarded those who insisted on the use of one container as extremists. He opposed those who advocated the use of fermented wine in the Lord's Supper as radicals. He accused them of creating division by making laws where God had not made them, yet he had no hesitancy of trying to bind his view of unleavened bread upon congregations in another part of the world. One evident feature of the "rigid pattern concept" of the new covenant scriptures is that it renders inconsistent every one of its proponents and adherents. The pattern which all of them really follow is one concocted of partisan traditions, explanations and interpretations.



Perhaps the Lord's Supper will serve as a good illustration of how honest men divide over what they think is involved in "the pattern." It is especially important because it was to serve as a visible witness to our oneness. The word for fellowship (*koinonia*) is actually applied to it and translated communion (1 Cor. 10:16). The record says, "For we being many are one bread and one body: for all are partakers of that one bread." Surely if we are agreed upon any matter it should be this. The truth is that no other single item has been as divisive among us. Since it was divinely authorized as a demonstration of our cooperation, but has become the foundation for our disintegration it may furnish a clue to the nature of our trouble.

In spite of the fact that volumes have been written about the Lord's Supper what is said about it in the scriptures can be contained in very limited space. It is not even alluded to in most of the apostolic letters and had it not been for serious controversy existing at Corinth there is no indication it would have been mentioned in the first letter addressed to the saints in that city.

Christianity has no sacred places, no sacred days, and no sacred rituals. Its only earthly sanctuary is the human heart. Here the Spirit dwells and Jesus abides by faith. Its only law is love. It is universal in scope and makes no demands that cannot be met by half-clad aborigines in the jungles as well as by sophisticated intellectuals in other cultures. While its foundation is the union of individual hearts to the Lord through the Spirit, this union creates a fellowship by its very nature. Those who are called out of the world and into Christ Jesus share in a new relationship with him, and through him, with all others who have responded to his call.

It is a *koinonia* of death and life. Those who compose it do so because they are dead to sin and are alive unto God through Jesus Christ the Lord. The watchwords of the fellowship are faith, hope and love. These sustain life in the three dimensions of which we are capable — past, present and future. Faith reaches back to the historical event of the cross which gave value to life; hope reaches forward to the consummation of the divine purpose and gives meaning to life. Love exists in the present and gives expression to life.

The ordinances of our Lord are two in number and both are designed to manifest our relationship to God in all three temporal dimensions. God is a divine economist. He imposes nothing that is superfluous. He requires nothing extraneous. Only two ordinances are required, one to mark our entrance or admission into the fellowship, the other to signal our continuance in it. Since those who are born into a family relationship need never re-enter, the first requires no repetition; but inasmuch as the family endures, the act expressive of it is continuous and repetitious.

Baptism, as a demonstration of our trust in Jesus, is simply a direct participation in "the passion play" drama of the ages. By faith we look back to the cross and are crucified with him. Through hope we look forward to justification in his presence. In love we are raised to walk in new life, the life of love. As Jesus died for us and was raised but one time, so we need to die and be raised only once. Death brings a cessation of all past relationships and their consequences and results. Resurrection introduces us to a new relationship with all of its blessings and privileges, whether we understand them all at the time or not. Baptism is an initiatory act. It is not to be multiplied. One may be born again because he should sustain a relationship to both flesh and spirit, but since these are the only two relationships into which he can come he should not be born again *and again*.

## The Lord's Supper

In the Lord's Supper we give constant testimony to faith, hope and love. We proclaim the Lord's death (past) until he comes again (future). We do this as a communion (*koinonia*) of the body and blood of our Lord. This is an overt and public declaration that the called ones constitute the one body and that they are held together by the mutual ties of love. So important is this that when cleavages exist and factions are present, those who meet as a congregation cannot eat the Lord's Supper. They may partake of the ingredients, but it is not the Lord's Supper. It is not eating the bread or drinking the cup which makes our attitude acceptable unto God, but our attitude toward each other which makes eating the bread and drinking the cup acceptable unto God. "I am told that when you meet as a congregation you fall into sharply divided groups ... The result is that when you meet as a congregation, it is impossible for you to eat the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a public witness that we are one body, the Lord's body. As to this fact the apostle said, "I speak to you as men of sense. Form your own judgment on what I say." The implication is that there is but one judgment to which men of sense can come as they contemplate the Supper. The apostle then says that about which he wishes the judgment to be formed. "When we bless the cup of blessing, is it not a means of sharing the blood of Christ? When we break the bread is it not a means of sharing the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body, for it is one loaf of which we all partake." If one partakes of the bread as a factional function or partisan privilege, he does not discern the body at all. Instead, he regards the faction or the party as the one body, a concept which counts the blood of the covenant wherewith we are sanctified an unholy thing and of less value than partisan conformity. Such a person, by his very eating and drinking, brings judgment on his head. "For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment on himself if he does not discern the Body" (1 Cor. 11:29).

In view of this emphasis it is astounding how men have divided over various features connected with the Lord's Supper, and created factions to advance their divergent views. Those who have done so do not willfully and deliberately desire to disregard the word of God. All of them want to fear God and keep his commandments. Without exception they are trying to be faithful to what they regard as "the pattern" for the Lord's Supper as they have been conditioned to do. All read the same Bible. All appeal to it for authority for their respective positions. Each charges the other with apostasy from the truth.

Why is it that honest and conscientious men cannot see "the pattern" alike? Is it possible that there is no meticulous and legalistic pattern and that all are searching for what does not exist? Can it be possible that men have been taught that the accounts of the life of our Lord and the letters from the envoys constitute a pattern, until they are trying to read a specific pattern into the text, elevating the incidental to the domain of the essential? To be explicit, brethren have divided over the use of individual containers for one thing. Did Jesus shed his blood to create a body to contend for the pro or con of such an issue?

In general, the debaters for each side assume that Jesus provided a pattern, that they both know what it is, and that the opposition is either ignorant or sectarian in attitude. If there is a plain

pattern how can honest men who love the Lord disagree about it? It will avail nothing to impugn motives or imply dishonesty. Both parties have their share of sincere people. Both have their share of spiritual delinquents. If Jesus never intended to give “a pattern” for the things involved, and the word of God was not written for such a purpose as it is quoted during controversy, the dispute is much ado about nothing, and each congregation might well determine how it will proceed without attack or reprisal from any other.

Jesus instituted an ordinance designed to proclaim his death and to be a visible testimony to the unity of the one body. Such an ordinance had to be the essence of simplicity as it would be observed by unlearned and illiterate as well as by those of advanced knowledge. It had to consist of that which was universally known and practiced so that elaborate instruction would not be requisite. It is a tribute to the divine mind that eating and drinking, the very acts essential to the preservation of life, were adopted and elevated to a plane of spiritual significance. To make these common acts a portrayal of fellowship or communion, it was ordained that they must be performed together with others.

For generations before Jesus came, the act of feasting together was regarded as one indicative of sharing in common with others. Even the eternal state was portrayed as one in which men would come from the east and the west and sit down *together* at a table with the fathers — Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This was fellowship manifested in a practical fashion. From it came a veritable vocabulary of togetherness. For example, it is said of Jesus that, “he raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places.”

Jesus was already eating with his disciples when he ordained the Lord’s Supper. As Jews, they were keeping the feast of the Passover. “During supper he took bread, and having said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them, with the words: ‘Take this; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and having offered thanks to God he gave it to them; and they all drank from it. And he said, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, shed for many. I tell you this: never again shall I drink from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God’” (Mark 14:22-25).

It is imperative that we remember that Jesus ordained a supper. This requires two actions — eating and drinking; and these, in turn, require two substances, a solid and a liquid. Jesus used bread for the first and the fruit of the vine for the second. Thus, Jesus ordained that we eat the bread and drink the cup. This is the ordinance and I know of none of us who disagree on anything related to it. When we eat the bread and drink the cup as a memorial to him, we have the proper motivation as relates to *Jesus*; when we do so to proclaim his death we have the proper motivation as relates to *others*; when we do so discerning the Body we have the proper motivation as relates to *self*.

## Human Deductions

Jesus did not *ordain* that we have a certain kind of bread, nor did he ordain that we use one container. It is true that Jesus personally used a certain kind of bread and I am convinced that he used but one container. These features, however, borrowed from the Passover setting in which the Supper was ordained, are incidentals and not essentials. They are not essentials to our eating

and drinking together nor are they essential to the threefold motivation with which we are to eat the Supper. Those who use leavened bread and those who use multiple cups for distribution of the fruit of the vine, eat and drink together as certainly as do others who use unleavened bread and one container. Those who insist upon the latter procedure as the only acceptable and valid one must do so on their deductions based upon the following postulates.

1. The *historical account* narrating the action of Jesus was intended to be a meticulous and detailed law of procedure for all times and places where the Supper is observed.
2. That which Jesus did as a Jew and because of his national relationship to the Passover is binding upon Christians in their observance of the Lord's Supper. Jesus used unleavened bread because he was a Jew and there was no other bread available to him at the Passover. Unleavened bread was the kind used in the regular diet of the Jews at this season of their religious year.
3. That which Jesus did incidentally, and as a matter of course, must be crystallized into an exacting law and become a criterion for judging the spiritual worthiness of others. Jesus took a cup for the simple reason that it is impossible to pass a liquid to others without some kind of container. But the container has nothing more to do with *communion* (fellowship), than a plate upon which to pass the bread. It is eating and drinking together, as in community, that makes communion.
4. All facts connected with an historical event are equally important and are as binding as that which we are commanded to do, so that it is better to forego any expression of fellowship as the aim of the command than to be in error about some detail of method for achieving it. This leads ultimately to the view that man was made for ordinances and not ordinances for men.

No one can prove these postulates to be scriptural by quoting a passage from the new covenant writings which even implies them. Nor will it do any good to resort to the common tactic of those who do not find specific authority and appeal to the essence or tenor of the scriptures, for it can be shown that the trend of the scriptures is generally opposed to them.

They constitute a philosophy of interpretation based upon rationalization and presupposition. They represent the approach made to the scriptures and the sin lies not in having a way of approach, for all men do this, but in dogmatically equating the approach with the will of God. To do this means we cannot correct the approach without feeling that by so doing we are denying God's will. We believe the approach represented in this philosophy needs correction and we give a few reasons for thinking so.

1. It renders its advocates inconsistent for they do not apply the postulates to all actions of Jesus with the same force that they do in the case of the partisan tests of fellowship. In his attendance at "public worship" Jesus stood up to read the scriptures and *sat down* to expound or explain them. When he prayed he "looked up to heaven" or "lifted up his eyes to heaven." Because we generally stand up to speak to an audience and close our eyes when we pray, one who followed the example of Jesus would be called an eccentric and would prove embarrassing to the average congregation. We generally insist on "doing as our Lord did," in those things only that conform to our traditional modes.

2. We can insist that the bread in the Lord's Supper must be unleavened while at the same time we can glibly explain away such things as foot washing and the holy kiss. We are nowhere told to use unleavened bread because Jesus did, but he did say, "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). We have no problem with such phrases as "Ye should do as I have done," nor with pointed commands such as "Greet one another with a holy kiss." These are not part of a partisan pattern.
3. We tend to ignore or disregard the fact that if Jesus adjusted his methods to the background and environment of which he was a part and made use of such means as were available to accomplishment of his design, he set a precedent indicative of his reaction to our present environment and means if he were with us in the flesh as he most certainly is in the spirit.

### **The Basic Fallacy**

It seems to us that the basic fallacy lies in the assumption that historical accounts, or letters, written because of local circumstances or conditions (which would never have been written at all had such conditions not arisen) were intended to be made a written code of legalistic procedure and to be applied irrespective of circumstances, discoveries, or cultural growth and development. The spirit of legalism knows nothing of mercy. It can make no allowances and if the one who affirms it does make such allowances he thereby condemns his whole philosophy.

One must become as near like God as possible, but he must choose whether he will do so in the realm of authority or in the domain of love. In the first he becomes a usurper of divine prerogatives, in the second he becomes a participant in the divine purpose. The first encourages him to lay down laws with which to enslave others; the second to lay down his life to help save others. The law of God as expressed in Jesus is summed up in love which is unitive. Any attempt to enforce human deduction to the point of division among brethren is not fidelity to God but failure to comprehend the divine purpose.

It is at this juncture that brethren sin when they divide over such issues as the manner of passing the fruit of the vine to the communicants, and become a "one cup party" or a "multiple cups party." It is no doubt useless for those who oppose individual containers to argue that there would be no division if some had not adopted individual cups, because those who oppose them are divided among themselves over various other things, some of which are related to other phases of the Lord's Supper. Actually we are divided because we have the will to divide.

We adopt the premise that the letters of the apostles constitute a detailed law, we then proceed to interpret it as specific law, and regard ourselves as the divinely authorized enforcers of the law. When there are two viewpoints of interpretation and those who hold them begin with the idea that there must be either conformity or separation, factions are inevitable. If we were not divided over individual cups we would be divided over numerous other things, as indeed we are. It is our fallacious philosophy which is factional in its very nature.

But what can we do when brethren regard "the pattern" as requiring but one container, and others regard it as allowing more than one? Must we form two parties? Indeed not! We will not do so if we discern the Body and love all of its members. Faced with such a problem, the first thing we

must do is to utterly reject division of the family as offering any proper solution. Division is a sin regardless of whether “cups” are right or wrong. There is no scripture which specifically condemns individual containers. Those who oppose them must do so by inference or deduction. But there are numerous specific passages which condemn schism and division among brethren as a sin. We dare not negate a specific declaration by a negative inference.

Second, we must recognize the right of sincere and honest men whose intellectual attainments at least equal our own, to examine the word of God for themselves and to form conclusions concerning what they read. And we must remember that this means they may reach different conclusions than ourselves. Since we are not responsible for their conclusions we must respect our brethren even while we dissent from their deduction.

Third, we must put such matters back where they belong, and that is in the realm of congregational determination. When a congregation of consecrated saints examines the word of God with the conviction that they exhibit more fidelity to its intent by use of one container they should be respected in their decision. When such a congregation is convinced that it can implement God’s will by use of individual containers it also should be respected. Neither should be placed under censure by the other. Neither should seek to bind its deduction upon the other. The autonomy, that is, the self-government of each congregation must be maintained without external coercion.

It will be asked if division will not result from the fact that the congregations differ in their conclusions on this one matter. It need not do so. The mere fact that congregations meet in separate areas and differ in their method of passing the fruit of the vine does not of itself spell division. Unity is not based upon geographical proximity but upon spiritual affinity. It does not consist of conformity in method but of oneness in Christ. We will not divide until one or both groups become factional. If one binds its deduction as the law of God and demands that the other accede to it as the price of fellowship, division will result, not because of what the Bible says, or even because of our interpretation of it, but because of dogmatism.

Congregations of saints should regard each other as brothers in the Lord whether they use one container or many. They should cease to brand each other as hobbyists or sectarians. They should stop hurling insults and desist from accusations of apostasy. This exhibits a spirit of carnality and immaturity wholly unbecoming to the profession we make. We need each other as the eye needs the mouth and as the hand needs the foot. Brethren who use one container and those who use multiple containers all share in the same grace of God and are in the communion of saints. They may disagree about details of expressing that communion from one congregation to another but this need not affect the communion or fellowship. The communion of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus is one thing, the mode of distributing the elements indicative of it is a wholly different thing. It is not sharing in the same opinion about passing the fruit of the vine that makes us one but the fact that we all share as branches of the One Vine.

It would be sinful for me to go into an area where brethren have personal convictions as to the use of one container and wreck their peace and wreak havoc by insisting that they have multiple containers as the price of fellowship with me. If I have faith (personal conviction) about such matters I must have it to myself under such circumstances. They are men for whom Christ died.

They are the work of God. I must not destroy the fellowship which He created over an incidental as to its demonstration. The love of a man for his wife is more important than any demonstration of it, and so must be our love for one another. Certainly we should seek to grow in an exhibition of love and fellowship but first we must possess it, for one cannot grow in something which he does not have.

Obviously the problem will be greater for a consecrated brother who has a deep conviction as to one container when he is among those who regard it as an incidental matter. It seems to me that it will help us all if we cease to categorize our divisive problems as matters of faith and matters of opinion. When we do this we automatically separate ourselves into two warring camps. One is then regarded as faithful to Jesus, the other as a betrayer of the faith, based upon an honest conviction as to the thing under discussion. But fidelity to the Lord cannot be measured by such a criterion. We cannot measure its magnitude by such a rule any more than we can determine the content of the Pacific Ocean with a gallon bucket.

We have borrowed the slogan, "In matters of faith unity, in matters of opinion liberty, in all things charity." In reality, however, there are no matters of opinion, as we apply the slogan, for someone regards everything as a matter of faith which others regard as a matter of opinion. The result is that love is exhibited in nothing for fear we will deny the faith.

If we could cease to classify our divisive problems as matters of faith and matters of opinion and regard them as "matters of understanding" it would help greatly to remove the barriers of division. This would make our honest attitude toward these things not so much a matter of fidelity to Christ Jesus as a matter of spiritual growth. One can be tolerant of others in their lack of maturity when it would be difficult to make allowances for those who are untrue to Jesus.

Faith could be left in the realm of acceptance of Jesus and trust in Him as our Savior and Lord. Our differences in Him would be distinguished from questions about Him. There is a distinction between what is requisite to come into Christ and what is necessary to grow up into Him in all things. We should not make every issue in life as important as life itself. Certainly every problem of association is not a matter of life and death. No partisan peculiarity about the method of showing the Lord's death must ever become as vital to us as the fact of that death and its purpose as relates to fellowship.

### **Brotherhood in Christ**

To some of my brethren it is very important to use only unleavened bread. To others it is very important to use only fermented wine. Still others regard the manner of breaking the loaf or the use of one container for the fruit of the vine as important. There are other details which are also regarded as important by many saints. Now none of these things are unimportant to me, but they are not important to me because of any intrinsic value I attach to them, but simply because they are important to my brothers — all of whom are very important to me because Jesus died for them. I cannot be unconcerned about anything which concerns one for whom Christ died. It is not that these things give validity to brotherhood or that brotherhood gives validity to them. Rather it is brotherhood which gives validity to *the concern* which brethren feel for such matters.

The personal scruple a brother holds may not seem important to me, but the brother who holds it, or is held by it, is important to me. The word *scruple* literally means “a little pebble in the shoe.” It does not take a large pebble to cause a brother to limp. Nothing may appear less important to me than a small rock in the shoe of a companion, but, at the same time, nothing appears of more significance unto him. I am not obligated to respect the pebble, nor to limp because he does. But if we are brothers I will sympathize with him and will slow down my pace so we may walk together. It may be urged that I should help him remove the pebble. This is true, but there may be complications.

I certainly am not free to remove it by force, and it may be that I shall first have to convince him that it is a pebble which is causing the difficulty. Moreover, even after it has been removed, the effect of it may linger for a long time. One who has had a rock in his shoe all his life may still limp for some time after it is gone. This is especially true if he has always been taught that such a condition is normal and the only correct way to walk. Long after a scruple has been intellectually discarded it may be emotionally retained, and I may have to walk slowly in order to walk lovingly with my brother. Under such circumstances it will help me immeasurably to realize that Jesus is my pattern. I can receive my brethren as He has received them — *and me!*

The Lord’s Supper is not observed in memory of a law, a precept or a code. Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” My task is not to lay down laws governing the Supper but to live up to the love which it entails and embraces. I shall not conclude that brethren cannot remember my precious Lord when they deviate in some detail from our method of observance. I shall allow Him to be the judge as to motivations and achievements of their hearts.

If my human judgment causes me to err in my attitude toward maintaining brotherhood, I prefer that it is in the direction of mercy and leniency rather than slanted toward stringency and implacability. The former will make it possible for Him to be merciful unto me in the Great Confrontation when I shall need mercy the most. I am no longer concerned about answering to a small clique of my brothers for an exhibition of love to all. I am concerned with answering to Him about limiting to some of my brothers that love which He exhibited for all. He is my pattern! Let me close with this quotation from David Lipscomb:

The truth is, I have always tried to keep free from partisanship in religion and other things, and am glad to recognize and encourage every truth that exists among any people, and, instead of repudiating it, I would make it a starting point to lead on to other and fuller truth. In doing this, there is no compromise of truth; but we follow the example of Jesus and Paul, who seized and encouraged every truth, found among Jew or Gentile, as a ground and starting point whence to lead them to more and fuller light. Paul quoted and approved what of truth heathen poets and philosophers taught, and sought from this truth to lead them up to fuller truth of God.



## Chapter 5

### SOURCES OF OUR PATTERNS

I find myself almost reluctant to write on the subject which clamors for discussion in this issue. I could wish that I might deal with what I regard as a mistaken view of the apostolic letters without reference to particulars because I have no desire to be critical of my brethren. Certainly I do not wish to appear supercilious. I realize that I am lacking in knowledge upon many things. I have much to learn.

But fairness and candor demand that I not speak in riddles or dark sayings. And this requires that I deal in specifics and provide examples of that to which I allude. I am convinced that all of the two dozen factions designating themselves as “Churches of Christ” feel that they have discovered and correctly interpreted “the pattern” set forth in the new covenant scriptures. They have argued and debated with one another, made charges and counter-charges, and all have thought they were loyal to the Book.

The fact is that our brethren defend some twenty-five different “patterns,” and each disputant is thoroughly convinced that his alone is *the pattern*. The absurdity of men standing up and quoting the same passages, and finding justification for their varied and opposite views while proclaiming that the Word is so plain that even a blind man can see it, seems lost upon everyone except those thinking persons who are outside our movement.

I do not think that God intended to give us detailed prescriptions for every minute detail, so I can look with a great deal of charity and compassion upon those who become so worked up they cannot see their own inconsistencies. But this cannot cover up the fact that the party spirit is a work of the flesh and betrays men into all kinds of false ideas and unlovely attitudes. The great danger is that when men believe that God provided a specific detailed pattern they must find one for everything. To fail would be to charge God with neglect or imperfection.

I can recall how we used to stress that the priests and Levites had to count every tent peg in the tabernacle and they were responsible for seeing that everything was in its place according to the pattern shown to Moses in the mount. We compared that to our life under Christ and reasoned that we had to get every item just so, or fire would come out and consume us. But we overlooked the fact that the Lord pitched the true tabernacle, and not man, and we were not given a pattern in advance at all. Our heart is now the holy place. It is the sanctuary of our God. Our only pattern is a person!

Since God did not provide us a pattern we set in to provide him one. That is where we went astray. We took the apostolic love letters and warped them into a code of jurisprudence and immediately started judging our brothers and measuring them by ourselves. What we call “the pattern” is not really derived from God’s revelation at all. We created the pattern and then searched the scriptures to find justification for what we already had.

Most of our patterns consist of a combination of elements derived from three sources: (1) Cultural and environmental factors; (2) Reactions to other religious groups whom we consider as apostates or compromisers; (3) Misconception and misapplication of scriptural passages lifted from their contextual setting and used to establish our preconceptions and presuppositions.

## Cultural Factors

Few of my readers will remember it, but I well recall what a hassle arose in our movement when men began to stand for prayer. In the simple rural climate of our day, men always kneeled, regardless of which sect was conducting the revival. It was argued that no one would address an earthly monarch on his throne while standing proudly before him, and how much more should we kneel before God. Tracts and booklets were written on “The Posture of Prayer.” I have some of these in my files even yet.

The scriptures were searched for passages showing that men kneeled and elaborate answers were prepared to refute those who declared that the bodily attitude made no difference. The three guns in the battery of restoration weapons — command, apostolic example, and necessary inference — were all trained on the dissenters. Prejudice was aroused by insinuating that pride was gripping men’s hearts and they were becoming too haughty to kneel. Suspicion was created when it was pointed out that standing for prayer originated among us in “city churches” where men no longer wanted to risk soiling the knees of their expensive tailor-made trousers.

I remember a debate in which one disputant triumphantly read, “And Solomon *stood* before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven” (1 Kings 8:22). The respondent could hardly wait to reply, “And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, from *kneeling on his knees* with his hands spread up to heaven.” Touché!

Once, in our little rural congregation, an evangelist came from elsewhere to hold a “protracted meeting.” At the very first service he asked “Pappy” Davis, who always sat on the front seat, to lead in prayer as the audience stood. The old brother was equal to the occasion. “Sir, I’d rather kneel,” he said. And kneel he did while the whole audience, with the exception of the preacher, followed suit. It threw cold water on the whole meeting. We realized that we had “a liberal” *standing* in the pulpit.

One thing that kept the controversy heated up was the fact that the *Gospel Advocate*, commonly referred to as “The Old Reliable” was all for kneeling. David Lipscomb repeatedly pointed out that Smith’s Bible Dictionary and other authorities “tell us that standing in prayer was introduced among Christians first on Easter.” That did it! We never thought of questioning Smith’s Bible Dictionary and other authorities. We’d as soon have questioned the Sears-Roebuck catalog. We never learned who the other authorities were, but that made no difference. If Brother Lipscomb said they were authorities they were. There was no other authority who could identify other authorities with such authority as Brother Lipscomb.

And when we learned that standing in prayer was first introduced on Easter, we became convinced it was simply another part of the world conspiracy of the pope to capture us lock, stock and barrel, by infiltrating our pure worship with a pagan ritual, such as standing to pray. We already knew that every monastery had a well-stocked arsenal of weapons, and that the Knights of Columbus constituted a secret order to train men for the great “takeover” when the Protestants were sufficiently hoodwinked and myopic. Not being either, some of us thought the Lord might work it around so they would kill each other off, and leave the whole landscape to us. So those brethren who stood to pray and stubbornly resisted the pattern were regarded as dangerous and unstable. They were the victims of German rationalism and “the social gospel,” whatever that was.

All of this seems hilariously funny to our young people today, but it isn’t so humorous to me. I cannot forget the great and good men who were attacked clandestinely, branded and hounded by those who were so inferior to them both intellectually and spiritually, that they were not even in the same class. I recall how patiently some of them reasoned and taught when the subject came up. I also recall the anger and ire of those who blurted out, “If we don’t intend to follow what the Bible says about praying let’s just tear everything else out of it and go to hell with the covers clutched in our hand.”

All of that is gone now! We no longer fight stained-glass windows, spires, and carpeted aisles as signs of digression and worldliness. Some of our buildings even have crosses on them now. Once these things were symbols of departure from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus. In every meeting they were assailed. We were warned to flee from them as Lot fled from Sodom. They were “the unfruitful works of darkness.” We were not to have fellowship with them, but rebuke them.

We now stand in prayer without fear or qualm. The world about us changed and we changed with it. The Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, ceased to kneel in their “revivals,” so we quit kneeling in our “protracted meetings.” Of course, what really happened is that with increasing enlightenment from God’s word, and with better education, we began to see that ours is a life in the richness of the Spirit, and it is not necessarily affected by things. Not even such things as bodily posture.

It suddenly dawned upon us that we were fighting about aisle carpets, kitchens and baptisteries in church-owned buildings,” and we had no pattern for “churchly real estate” at all. The first “church house” was not erected until 280 A.D., and then it was put up by some pretty shady theologians. It is very doubtful that it had a sign “Church of Christ — Romans 16:16” over the front door. No one knows where we got *the pattern* for a million dollar structure with the approved sign on the landscaped lawn. But it is a part of our westernized culture. We are doing our best to transport it to Africa and Japan so they will be sure to have the right name and the standard sign. But, at least we stand while praying for Africans and Japanese!

## Sectarian Reactions

One of the amazing things about the restoration movement is the fact that it so rapidly developed an exclusivistic sectarian attitude which shut its adherents off from meaningful contact with even

friends and relatives. Originally, the principal proponents of the restoration ideal were Presbyterians. They maintained a good relationship with all believers in the Son of God about them. The thought never occurred to them, as they gained new insights, to break their association with others who had not yet arrived at the same conclusions.

Late in life Thomas Campbell declared that philosophically he was a Calvinist and expected to remain such until he died. This made no flurry among those who came into the restoration movement holding other philosophies, for they could clearly distinguish between the good news which all held in common and their doctrinal deductions. The problem arose when lesser men, riding high in the saddle, began to draw lines and makes tests of union and communion out of opinions and interpretations.

By the time of my birth the partisan spirit was rampant. Men equated the restoration movement with the church of God, and to be in the church one must be in the new party in the community which had adopted as a distinguishing title, "Church of Christ." The preachers in demand were the "sect-killers." Some of them were tobacco-chewing, or snuff-dipping, Bible-quoting individuals who announced from the pulpit that they were going to "skin the sectarian preachers and tack their hides on the barn door with the bloody side out." Every night a challenge was issued for debate and notice was given that the sects were going to be run out of the community.

We were generally poor, limited in education and resources, and it gave us a sense of status to realize that our little group was the special object of God's love and mercy, and that, in the last great "roundup in the skies" we would march triumphantly through the pearly gates while our neighbors, from whom we borrowed flour or sugar when company came, would all be driven to the flaming pit. They had hearkened to their preacher instead of to ours. I do not think we worried that so many would go to hell. It was God's will. They deserved to be punished because of their ignorance. We could not tolerate ignorance!

One result of all this was a development of a pattern as a reaction to sectarians. Those who came in with us under the kind of preaching which was popular knew little about grace and mercy. They knew less about the Holy Spirit. They were not so much led into "fellowship with the Father and Son," as into membership with the Church of Christ. They were fleeing from sectarianism, renouncing everything pertaining to it. Anything which "sectarian churches" practiced was wrong, or they would not practice it. We purposely chose other methods which thereupon became right or we would not have adopted them. All that remained was to search the scriptures to find where God authorized what we were doing. I do not recall any failure to find endorsement for our action.

A good example has to do with the method of "taking up the offering." Few among us in this day recall what a furor was caused in some areas when brethren began to pass offering plates. Early restoration congregations never did this because it was sectarian. The sects all "passed the hat." This was literally true. In my childhood days the Baptist and Methodist folk would send their collectors among the audience passing felt hats lifted from the hat-rack for the purpose. When they became a little more stylish they passed collection plates with felt noise-arresters to deaden the sound of dropping quarters.

When time came for this “item of worship” in our congregations, the brothers and sisters all marched up to the front, singing “There’s An Eye Watching You,” and laid their contribution on the Lord’s Table, returning to their seats by the way which they came. It was quite a procession. Sometimes there was a great deal of milling around in front when they converged on the table from two aisles. It was further complicated in some places by the fact that the marchers all took time to shake hands with the brethren on the front seat as a sign of fellowship.

As we grew in number and in sophistication, and began to crave less noise and more solemnity, changes began to be advocated. These did not come easily. Brethren mounted the pulpit to show that God had a pattern for doing everything, and we dare not deviate. We were reminded that the ark had to be made of gopher wood. We were again told of what happened to Nadab and Abihu when they offered strange fire. When such brethren were asked for scriptural grounds for marching up and laying their money on the table they were undaunted.

One of them pointed out that the symbol on all of our currency was the eagle, and that we were plainly taught that, “Where the carcass is, thither shall the eagles be gathered together.” He elaborated upon the fact that a carcass is a dead body, and the body of our Lord was upon the table. A schoolteacher spoke up and asked, “How will this affect other nations and countries where they have a lion or unicorn on their coinage?” The speaker was stumped. He probably did not know what a unicorn was. It had never occurred to him that God had a people elsewhere. America was the promised land, the special area of divine favor.

Later, when we were discussing the problem, one skeptic referred to the argument and said that in order to justify the speaker, the passage would have to read, “Where the carcass is, thither shall the buffaloes be gathered together.” He never gave more than a nickel at a time, and our five cent pieces all had a lordly buffalo engraved upon them in those days.

I was present in one meeting where a preacher who specialized in lecturing upon and explaining the Revelation letter was asked to express himself about the encroaching sectarianism as evidenced in passing the hat. He arose and said that he was perfectly willing to abide by the scriptural pattern. Here was his argument. “My Bible says upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store. Where is him? Him is Christ, and his body is on the table. My advice is to continue to lay by him. If God had wanted a hat passed, he would undoubtedly have said so, for they had hats when Jesus was on the earth.”

Gradually we began to overcome our provincial and parochial attitudes, and to outgrow our fears of becoming like sectarians. We began to get bathrooms in our homes and the demand began to be heard for rest rooms and toilet facilities in our meetinghouses. When children began to sleep in their own little beds at home we began to put in nurseries and cry-rooms like the sects. Our babies became angry and screamed as loudly as sectarian babies, even in holy places.

And so it came to pass that we began to take up the collection in shiny plates. It did not come easy. In one congregation, two families I knew, always passed the plate by in cool indifference. After dismissal they marched up and laid their money on the table. They were resolved that when Jesus came he would find faith on the earth. After about a year of this they decided that their action bespoke stubborn pride. They “went sectarian” like all the rest of us.

This all seems ridiculous to the “new people” and the “now generation” among us, and of course it is. But please do not get me started. I think I can point out several things to which we cling simply because of a reactionary policy. These constitute a negative pattern on an affirmative basis. In decades to come perceptive minds will look back upon our day and conclude that we had not come completely “out of the bushes” in 1970. It is a little risky for any generation to assume that it has arrived while all others have departed.

### **The Lifted Scriptures**

I doubt that anyone would argue against the proposition that when men resort to misuse of the scriptures to sustain a position, that position is indeed weakly defended. And the more scriptures must be wrested from their context to make a point seem plausible, the weaker that point is. In spite of the fact that hundreds of my beloved brethren will disagree violently with what I say, I must confess that I do not think God intended to provide a pattern for the way a congregation should give instruction in the word.

It is my very honest conviction that the debate about classes and Sunday schools is over an artificial issue. It is a “tempest in a teapot,” a contrived issue without foundation. The fact that it has been blown up to such proportions as to rend the saints of God into two actual camps is almost unbelievable. I have several debates on the matter in the long shelf reserved for such volumes of controversy. I have a drawer full of tracts and booklets on both sides. I have read them all. Some of them I have read more than once, some many times.

I have tried to be honest in my reading. As always I have sought to place myself in the place of the writer or speaker, to understand his motivation as well as his reasoning. And I always come up with a feeling of sadness that such matters must become walls between brethren and barriers to sharing. I do not really take one side or the other. I cannot see that the Holy Spirit created either by anything he said or intimated. I rejoice when the Word is taught, whether with classes or in one group. Those who teach in either fashion are my brothers.

Once when I was in Georgia a brother attended one of my studies. He insisted on going to the same place that I went for luncheon. He wanted to share with me a great truth he had found. After years of preaching he had come to see the full force of Paul’s statement in Ephesians 2:6, “But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us ... hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places.” Paul was laying down a principle which made it a sin to have classes. The “heavenly places” were the houses devoted to worship. Here God ordained that we sit together and not divide the assembly.

For a little while I thought he was joking, making a parody out of foolish arguments he had heard. Then I saw he was dead earnest, presenting this as undeniable proof that classes were sinfully wrong. I pointed out that the context was wholly out of line with his view and told him I was “sitting together in heavenly places” with Christ while lying on my bed or standing on the street corner. He became intensely worked up because I did not have sense enough to distinguish between sitting, standing or lying down.

Years ago, out in Kansas, a brother came to talk with me about the grave sin of dividing into classes to study the Word of the Lord. He quoted for me, Deuteronomy 32:2, where God says, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." He contended that we should teach as it rained, showering it upon every one and letting the little ones assimilate what they needed and could get, while the older ones drank in more. I asked him if he thought that the mode of teaching was the point at issue with Moses. He thought it was the very reason the passage was included in Deuteronomy. God foresaw there would be people like myself who would take little children aside to teach them and he "showered" his disapproval upon such a method through Moses.

I would not think of debating with my brethren on the so-called "class question." To me there appears to be nothing which should command such time or effort. I do not think God is concerned with whether we teach in one class or a dozen. In our primitive one-room meetinghouses it probably would have been better to study in one group. It was difficult to concentrate with four classes going at the same time, especially with wasps flying around, or an occasional sparrow flitting about just over your head. But this was also the day of one-room public schoolhouses. When better school buildings were erected and more efficient educational methods were discovered we simply appropriated them and made them applicable to Biblical pedagogy.

I can honestly say I am not perturbed by the oft-cited fact that the Sunday-school movement began with Robert Raikes, and not with the apostles. I have no doubt that this great and generous man established the first such schools at Gloucester in 1780, as a means of furnishing both secular and religious education to children whose employment in the factories made it impossible to attend weekday schools. I am glad that he did what he could for these poor waifs who were chained like galley-slaves to the whirring looms.

I suspect that God wants us to discover new ways by which to make his truth known to the culture in which we labor. Just as the economic state in England in the last half of the eighteenth century gave rise to the Sunday-school movement, I think our own will probably gradually discard it. I will not mourn its demise as I do not deplore its inception. It is simply a tool devised to fit a need. Other and better tools will have to be created to get our task done in this age. In many places the standard Sunday-school is childish, immature and invalid. It is a place to retreat from reality by monotonous mouthing of irrelevant material.

The fact that the apostles did not advocate this approach is of little real significance. They simply adopted the methods of teaching then in vogue and employed them without intent to bind them irrevocably upon all ages and climes. The synagogue was primarily responsible for the system which was continued in the Messianic communities. That system was not intended to be a pattern but a practical expedient for that time and place. None of us know how Paul would outline the work if he could return to Louisville or Lansing in our day. We must do our best to meet the demands of our day and to supply the deep needs of men and women whom we daily meet, using such tools as are available unto us.

So long as brethren think that God intended to provide us a microscopic pattern with all details filled in, we will be searching through our factional microscopes and arguing minutiae. If we

realize that we have general guidelines and not a rigid set of regulations we will be free to work as best we can in whatever situation we confront. If I believe this I cannot bind a “must be thus” as to a method of teaching upon others, because God has bound none upon me.

If my brethren in a certain place deduce from the scriptures that they should not have classes, I will accept this and will not try to undermine or proselyte from them. It may be God’s will for them that they work in this fashion. I will help them in every way that I can. My love for them will not be affected by the method they use to teach his blessed truth. Certainly I will not put up some of the silly and ridiculous arguments about when “the worship” begins and when it ends, that have been advocated and indulged by partisan class defenders in the past. Such nit-picking is not for me!

If my brethren in another place sincerely believe they can best instruct those who come to them, through use of classes, I will accept this as God’s will for them. If they ask me to teach in any group I will share what I have learned and seek to edify those who listen. I will gain nothing by whetting their prejudice against brethren who do not have classes. I shall seek to help them overcome such feelings and regard others of God’s children with love and kindness, allowing them the liberty to work in the manner that commends itself to them as best.

I believe that a great part of such problems stems from an anti-intellectual attitude which resulted from our frontier heritage. We were afraid of men who broadened their intellectual capacity. I can recall when a man was suspect who had even a lesser college degree. Formal education belonged to the world, the realm which one must not love or court. “Where ignorance is bliss, ‘tis folly to be wise.” We ridiculed those who were not satisfied to remain untutored without realizing that such ridicule was a subtle form of praise for those whom we could not confine in our own narrow caskets.

This was what caused simple brethren among us to oppose with such venom “uninspired literature” in our corporate study. Even little children must be taught the Bible only. No colorful aids could be used. Anything printed within the leather covers was acceptable, including concordances, dates or dictionary. It did not come from “another book.” As always, this created a lot of casuistry. Much of it was freely practiced by the preacher’s who cried loudest and longest about usage of uninspired helps.

Men who would not dare to take a volume of *The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus* into the pulpit, could copy from it and quote from it as part of a sermon outline. There was a difference made between a printed book and a hand-written copy of some of its contents. It never occurred to us that there was not one bit of difference between what a preacher said orally, and what he would include in a quarterly which he wrote. The sects used quarterlies. That placed them under a ban for “the Lord’s church.”

There are some factions among the heirs of the restoration movement to this very day whose members are discouraged from reading anything not produced by “loyal brethren,” that is, by men approved by the party “somewhats.” In some cases there are so few men who are qualified to write that many of the members never read anything except the partisan journal which is the official mouthpiece. A great deal of the space is taken up in each issue reporting a weary round



of “gospel meetings” by the same preachers, men who have been approved by the editor, and who will indulge in back-patting for one another. There are generally articles dealing with the “major issue,” written by some who want to prove they are still sound, and rehashing the same worn-out and frazzled arguments based upon a misunderstanding and misapplication of the same scriptural passages.

Such factions become inbred in their thinking. They develop a kind of sterility. They dare not think fresh thoughts. They abdicate the human family to take on the nature of parrots. The only thing which keeps them going is the flurry caused when someone learns something new and worthwhile and is “written up” as a liberal by the defenders of the status quo. These groups are seeing a gradual erosion of their forces. Young men and women can no longer engage in the kind of dishonesty which causes one to close his eyes to facts in order to remain “high and lifted up” on the sectarian totem pole.

There will come a great realignment of our forces which will ignore the battle lines of yesterday. Young people are coming to realize that most of the tests of fellowship have no validity at all. They are activities in absurdity. Brethren will gain the courage to reject the narrow and provincial limits prescribed for the kingdom of heaven by religious politicians whose financial and social well-being depend upon keeping Christians apart.

The Holy Spirit will come to be recognized as the divine agent to promote “peace on earth to men of goodwill.” The great crises which demand the best all of us can give will drive us to find the path to unity. More and more we will come to see that God has not imposed upon us a rigid and stereotyped pattern, but has given us guidelines within a historic situation. We must use these as a starting-point. We must work toward maturity within their framework.

I am moved to insert here a statement by Fenton John Anthony Hort, in his book entitled *Lectures on the Early History and the Early Concepts of the Ecclesia*. Dr. Hort is best known as a collaborator in the Wescott and Hort *New Testament in the Original Greek*. Will you thoughtfully read the following?

In this as in so many other things is seen the futility of endeavoring to make the apostolic history into a set of authoritative precedents to be copied rigorously without regard to time or place, thus turning the Gospel into a second Levitical code. The apostolic age is full of embodiment of purposes and principles of the most instructive kind, but the responsibility of choosing the means was for ever left to the Ecclesia, and every Ecclesia, guided by ancient precedent on the one hand and adaptation to present and future needs on the other. The lesson-book of the Ecclesia, and every Ecclesia, is not law but history. (The Ecclesia, pages 232, 233).

We are coming to see that, in many cases, the pattern we have espoused is not derived from the sacred scriptures at all. It is merely an unwritten creed, hallowed by usage and hardened by debate. As the Word is read and searched through eyes from which the scales have fallen, there will dawn on the consciousness of students that the whole so-called pattern for our two dozen minor sects has been conjured up in the imaginations of men, being read into the scriptures rather than found in them.

Members of the Church of Christ should face up to the question of what the apostle Paul would do if he returned to earth and came to the United States. With which of our partisan factions would he identify or “place membership”?

To which partisan journal would Paul report his preaching tours? Which one would he join as a staff writer? The Gospel Advocate? The Firm Foundation? The Old Paths Advocate? Gospel Tidings? Gospel Guardian? The Christian? The Christian Standard?

On which college lectureship would he participate? Abilene Christian College? Florida College? Would he address the North American Christian Convention? The World Convention of Churches of Christ?

Would Paul and Silas create a separate and exclusive party over Bible classes, individual container’s, support of Herald of Truth, or instrumental music? Would they set at nought a brother over orphan homes? Would they destroy a brother for whom Christ died over the use of fermented wine in the Lord’s Supper? Would they fracture and splinter the heirs of heaven into clashing clans and rival parties?

Would they spend their time emphasizing the same issues which we elevate above the cross and count as more worthy than the blood of the Son of God?

Is it not time to crucify within our hearts that work of the flesh which causes us to hold aloof from so many thousands of God’s precious children, and to build bridges across our senseless chasms? Let us ignore our silly walls and barriers. Let us cross freely back and forth through them. Why should we perpetuate the stupid and asinine feuds into which our father’s were lured by the siren call of pride and ambition. Why should we continue our futile and farcical clashes, marshaled for civil war by the sound of rival trumpets?

Let me make it clear again to all who read this, that I am in the glorious fellowship of the Spirit, with every child of God in this whole wide world. No partisan leader will con me into believing that he alone has discovered the key of all knowledge and that his faction has a copyright on the real Simon Pure, unvarnished truth of heaven, to the exclusion of all others. I shall allow no one to do my thinking on earth who cannot be responsible for it at the judgment. This is my declaration of independence, and “if this be treason, make the most of it!”

## Chapter 6

### THE MONEY PATTERN

The members of the Churches of Christ have been taught that in the new covenant scriptures it was God's intention to provide for us a blueprint with meticulous specifications governing every item of corporate praise and life. They have conceived of our highest aim and chiefest duty as being the careful scrutiny of that blueprint to determine the divinely perfect law of procedure and the implementation of the exact course in our lives. It has been constantly held forth that this is the only foundation for scriptural unity and upon no other basis can oneness ever be achieved.

Unfortunately for such a postulation, candor requires an admission that it has produced the very opposite result. There are now two dozen different kinds of "Churches of Christ," and each one of these believes that it has discovered and adopted the pattern, while all of the others are either too liberal to care for it, or too ignorant to understand it. Which of these more than twenty separate factions has recaptured "the scriptural pattern," so that its adherents can be in the favor of God, while all others are to be damned for their obduracy or imbecility? Which is "the loyal group?" Which is "the faithful church"?

Why is it we are divided into warring tribes? Is the blueprint so obscure that it cannot be seen? Is the language so ambiguous it cannot be understood? A united chorus composed of every faction proclaims that "the way is so plain that a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein." Does one party have a corner on the intellectuals in the disciple brotherhood? If so, which one has collected all the brains? Are all of the honest brethren in one faction? If so, which one has all of the men of integrity? Which twenty-three, or so, are composed wholly of scoundrels and reprobates?

Why are we divided over the pattern in scripture? Our strife-torn schism-ridden groups cannot answer. I suggest that the reason we are divided over the apostolic pattern is because there is none. We have been pursuing a will-o-the-wisp, a nebulous invention and figment of our own imagination. Our pattern is a person, and the purpose of scripture is not to involve us in surveying areas, marking out plots, and measuring boundaries, but to bring us to him in a vital relationship which is known as eternal life.

Our problem lies in the fact that we are hooked on the blueprint idea, and because we believe it must be there we infuse it into the scriptures. Every one of our parties declares it has the blueprint, and every party has a different one. The partisans in every group have marked out a trail of passages which they have followed in journals and debates until they can cold-trail in the dark and never miss a crook or turn, and there are a lot of both!

It is astounding that brethren in the Lord can sign propositions for debate and affirm that two positions diametrically opposed to each other are scriptural. Frequently the wording reads "The scriptures authorize," and on Monday and Tuesday nights they authorize one thing, while on Thursday and Friday nights they authorize the opposite. Wednesday night there is no discussion in order to permit all of the interested ones to attend prayer meeting at "the loyal church."

If it were not so tragic and sad it would be laughable to see how brethren locate their patterns in God's Word. A good example is in debate on the use of classes in teaching. In one such discussion the affirmative located classes in the order observed in creation, the feeding of the five thousand, and the instruction of the twelve men in Ephesus who knew only the baptism of John. Although the man who thus reasoned was one of the chief debaters in the segment, he referred to his opponent as one of a group of "third-rate preachers, uneducated, untrained and riding a hobby so they can be the biggest men in their bunch."

Men must resort to this kind of unscrupulous quibbling so long as they hold that the purpose of the apostolic letters was to spell out in detailed fashion the method by which we were to carry out God's will in all ages until our Lord returns. They can never walk in the Spirit, but always in the letter. And where there is no letter they must provide one, else they cannot walk at all. In the final analysis, and carried to its ultimate, this will mean the rejection of every means for disseminating the truth which was not available in Palestine during the time of the Caesars. And this means fossilization!

We have been the victims of *eisegesis*, rather than the recipients of *exegesis*. The last word means to get out of the word what has been inspired, or breathed into it of God; the first to inject into it one's own views and explanations. It makes no difference how sincerely our brethren desire to follow Jesus and to please God, it still remains that they have devised and bound upon others unwritten creeds and done so under the guise that these are authorized by the sacred scriptures.

In spite of the fact that I know in advance that I shall invite vitriolic attack in partisan journals I am going to illustrate what I mean by pointing out the fragile basis upon which a recent split has occurred in the ranks of believers within the "Churches of Christ." The point at issue has been dubbed by such terms as "institutionalism" and "centralization." Although there are many ramifications, the fight has been primarily over whether it is scriptural to support orphan homes, homes for the aged, etc., out of the treasury, when such eleemosynary institutions are not the sole work of the local congregation and under its oversight. Allied to this is the question of whether it is scriptural to send contributions from other congregations to a congregation in Abilene, Texas, which produces and supervises Herald of Truth, a radio and television program which is a propaganda medium for Churches of Christ.

In oral and written debates, as usual, brethren on both sides have been driven to enunciate extended views which, in some instances, have become tests of orthodoxy in the faith. It is now alleged that it is wrong for a congregation to take money from its treasury to help any person who is not a member of the Church of Christ, although individuals may aid any one at any time. A side issue has been the question of providing kitchens in the "church buildings" and eating within these corporately-owned structures.

In many areas the community of saints has been divided and rival meeting-houses erected. A constant barrage of attack has been maintained on the air waves. Families have been riven by the civil war, debates held between brethren and the factional spirit crystallized into a concrete work of the flesh. Those who oppose the institutions are referred to as "antis" and hobbyists, those

who endorse them are branded as “liberals.” Dire predictions of the future are made by the prophets in both camps.

Each faction has its own partisan periodicals, its own colleges, and its own brotherhood. Each maintains its sectarian recognition and its sectarian exclusiveness. The party “lectureships” feature only “sound men,” with the soundness being measured by the degree of adherence to the party line, as judged by the “somewhats” who have maneuvered themselves into a position where they can control policy at least on a relative scale.

Preachers on both sides believe they are in harmony with God’s plan and purpose, and that the scriptures authorize what they are doing. Both sides profess to be able to give “chapter and verse” for their position, and frequently they both give the same “chapter and verse.” Not being allied with either faction it is possible for me to look at all of these struggling brethren with a great deal of compassion, and to assess the real problem without the emotional involvement.

A perceptive observer will soon recognize that the whole thing centers around how a community of saints may spend its money, and I am quite convinced that the real hang-up stems from a mistaken view of both groups over what constitutes worship of God. Both believe that worship has been reduced to a series of acts performed on the first day of the week, one of which consists of giving money into an institutional treasury to be dispensed by certain functionaries without consent, or even approval of the expenditures by the contributors.

### **Unwarranted Assumptions**

I trust it will not shock you if I say that the entire thing may be a mere cobweb constructed of gauzy filaments of human imagination. In the first place the word “worship” is never once applied by the scriptures to anything we do on the Lord’s Day morning. The term “acts of worship” is not in the Bible. The word of God knows nothing of the expression “the worship.” It was dreamed up to designate a legalistic arrangement of which the Holy Spirit said not one word. The idea of “five items of worship” as the divine plan, has been sucked out of a factional thumb.

Pursuing the thought further, the concept of a public collection from the members of the body every Sunday is based upon an interpretation which may be as full of holes as a sieve. It results from taking a specific instruction for meeting a historic emergency, and elevating it to a general and universal law, which is then bound as the will of God on a weekly basis. Let us study 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and see what it really includes.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.

Out of this has grown a whole flock of assumptions which have been bound as dogmatic requirements. The giving of money every Sunday is an act of worship, or one of the “five items of worship.” It is a sin to take up a collection at any gathering of the saints other than on the

Lord's Day. Every one is under command to give or he will be judged as falling short of his duty. There must be a "church treasury" and a "church treasurer." Money placed in the "church treasury" cannot be expended on the needs of "outsiders" but must be given only to the saints.

I challenge this whole system as a creedal fabrication read into God's word. It is a clear-cut example of what happens when men institutionalize the work of God. I want to deal with this doctrine which has been devised, openly and without fear of what men shall do unto me. I want my readers to see how easy it is to be brainwashed by tradition.

This was a special collection. It was *the* collection for *the* saints at Jerusalem. When Paul and Barnabas were in Jerusalem for the appeal to the apostles and elders on the subject of circumcision, and the question was resolved by a compromise, James, Peter and John urged them not to forget the poverty-stricken Judean saints. "Only they would that we should remember the poor, the same which I was also forward to do" (Galatians 2:10).

Thus, It came about that sometime later Paul urged congregations in the Greek world to gather up what they could that it might be conveyed to Jerusalem "to minister unto them in carnal things." Accordingly he gave instructions to the congregations in Galatia, and later repeated them to the saints in Corinth, advising them as to the best manner of handling the situation.

If this was an "item of worship" why did the apostle not bind it upon these congregations when he planted them? Why did he let them go for several years without saying a word about "systematic giving," and then only mention it when a special occasion arose? Do you realize that there is not even a hint that the congregation at Corinth ever "passed the hat" from the time they began meeting until they received the apostolic letter? Do you realize that everything they collected was turned over to Paul and his co-laborers to be taken directly to Jerusalem? Do you know there is not even a suggestion that they ever collected another penny after this time?

A lot of my brethren are great advocates of "the authority of silence." If God specifies a thing there must be no deviation, no addition, no substitution. Now, nothing is clearer than the fact that 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 specifies that the collection laid by in store upon the first day of the week was for the poor saints, and was to be taken to Jerusalem. On what ground can men justify taking part of the money which they affirm is collected under this specification, and use it to purchase elaborate meetinghouses, parsonages, automobiles, and just about any other thing they want. Don't write and give me "the line" that is used to explain it. I already know the whole casuistic bit! But brethren who can parlay "poor saints" to include a million dollar building, landscaping, and a minister's salary, ought to have no trouble getting one "little instrument" into singing. The fact is that the argument on silence can always be bent to include what we want to get into it, and then snapped back to flip out what we do not want. There is nothing in all of our history which has been quite so downright deceitful as the so-called "law of silence." The "law of exclusion" always exempts what we have or want.

The truth is that there never was a command of God to place money in a "church treasury." The word "order" is from *diatasso*, to appoint, arrange, enjoin, charge, etc. As Albert Barnes puts it so succinctly, "It does not mean that he had the authority to *tax* them, or that he had *commanded*

them to make a collection. But that he had left directions as to the best *manner* and *time* in which it should be done. The collection was voluntary and cheerful in all the churches.”

Writing about the very same matter, Paul says plainly, “I speak not by commandment” (2 Corinthians 8:8). In spite of this, I was taught all of my life that we are commanded to lay by in store every Sunday. Actually, the collection of which Paul wrote was a spontaneous desire of the givers. He simply wrote to tell them the best way to take care of the matter. “For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution of the poor saints which are at Jerusalem” (Romans 15:26). If this was a “certain contribution” which the brethren determined to send, on what grounds do men reason that it was a perpetual and continuous practice to take up a contribution?

Paul said that the brethren in Macedonia actually prayed him with much entreaty to receive the gift, and take upon him the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. There probably never was a contribution taken except to meet a need, and the people who contributed knew in advance what the need was and gave to meet it. All of this talk about “giving of your means” every Sunday as a legalistic requirement of heaven and to build up a bank account for the institution is just so much froth dreamed up by the religious Establishment for the perpetuation of its own image! Don’t get fighting mad at that until you think awhile.

### **The Church Treasury**

It has always been assumed that Paul was instructing the brethren to bring money to a public gathering each Lord’s Day and hand it in to be placed in “the church treasury.” This is not as certain as many preachers would like to make it sound. The book says for each one to “lay by him” in store. The Greek for “by him” is *par eauto*, and indicates that the laying by is to be done at home. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*, plainly says, “by him, that is, at his home.” *Green’s Lexicon* just as plainly puts it, “with one’s self, at his home.” The term is closely associated to the original in John 20:10, “Then the disciples went away again unto *their own home*.”

Faced with the overwhelming evidence of the original term, the commentators have generally sought to be honest in explaining the passages in the light of the apparent meaning. This is so in spite of the traditions of the religious world, and in spite of the questions that are sometimes raised. I propose to give you the result of a little of my own research, although time and space will not permit of my going into the matter thoroughly.

Albert Barnes writes: “Let him lay up at home, treasuring up as he has been prospered. The Greek phrase, ‘by himself’ means, probably, the same as at home. Let him set it apart; let him designate a certain portion; let him do this *by himself*, when he is at home, when he can calmly look at the evidence of his prosperity.” Those who are interested in pursuing this investigation should by all means read further in *Barnes Notes on the New Testament*, and note his attempt at modification.

In Meyer’s *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians*, the author translates thus: “*Kata mion sabbaton*, on each first day of the week. *Par eauto*, at home. *Par*

*eauto titheto*, cannot refer to the laying down of money in the assembly. Let him lay up in store at home whatever he succeeds in.”

G. G. Findlay, B.A., in *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*, says: Verse two refers to the rule previously laid down for Galatia; On every first day of the week let each of you by himself (at home) lay up, making a store (of it) whatever he may be prospered in.

F. W. Grosheide, Th.D., in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, writes: “Upon the first day, i.e., on every Sunday. The reference is not to the church services but to a personal assignment which everyone had to perform. But the fact that Paul speaks of the first day of the week and calls that the day for the collection implies that Sunday was destined for the special service of the Lord. Paul trusts the Corinthians; he does not ask them to hand in their collection on a weekly basis, they are allowed to keep the collected money and thus little by little a sufficient amount will be saved up.”

Dr. Herman Olshausen, in his *Biblical Commentary*, says: “Certainly it may not be inferred from this passage that collections took place among the congregations on the Sabbath, for it was Paul's intention that each should make a suitable contribution at home.”

R. C. H. Lenski has a rather lengthy discussion of the passage in his *Bible Commentary*, as follows:

The term *logia*, “collection,” is used only here in the New Testament, but it was discovered in the ostraca and the inscriptions found in Egypt and elsewhere and is there used in the sense of religious collections for the altar of a pagan god, etc., ... Each member is to deposit with himself each Sunday the amount of his gift for that week and preserve it as a store or treasure, *thesaurizo*. The participle completes the idea of the main verb: “let him lay by treasuring up.”... Each member is to keep the growing amount by him, *par eauto*, in his own home, and is not to deposit it with the church at once. The probable reason for this advice is the fact that at this early date the churches supervised by Paul were not yet organized to the extent of having official treasurers who were duly appointed to take charge of congregational funds ... Paul's purpose in ordering contributions from Sunday to Sunday is that, when he finally arrives in Corinth, the work may be entirely done. The plural *logiai*, “collections,” refers to the accumulations made by the individuals; each would have his *logia*. The present tense *ginontai* accords with this: the collections are not to proceed after Paul arrives. Then it will be necessary that each individual simply bring in his accumulation.

Marvin R. Vincent, D.D., in his *Word Studies in the New Testament*, says: “Lay by him in store. Literally, put by himself, treasuring. Put by at home.”

Arthur S. Way, in *The Letters of Saint Paul*, writes, “On the first day of the week, let each of you set apart a certain portion of his profits, forming a little hoard, so that the raising of the contributions may not be postponed till my actual arrival.”

F. Godet, in his *Commentary on First Corinthians*, has this: “The words *by him*, denote an act done by each in his own house, and not, as some have thought, a gift bestowed in the church and known to the giver only.”



W. E. Vine in his *Commentary on First Corinthians*, writes thus: “The storing was to be private, wherever the believer lived. The amount was to be allocated by each giver according to his gains the preceding week, lit., ‘whatsoever he may be prospered’ (i.e., by God). No actual proportion was laid down; a tithe would be little for some, too much for others. Each would see week by week what income he had received through his calling, and store accordingly, so as to avoid immediate decisions or claiming debts or selling goods, in order to make collections when the Apostle came.”

Marcus Dods, D.D., in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, says: “It is expressly said that each was to lay ‘by him,’ that is, not in a public fund, but at home in his own purse, what he wished to give.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* says: “The Greek phrase implies that the laying up was to be done *at home*, but when the money was accumulated, it was doubtless brought to the assembly and handed over to the presbyters.”

*Scott’s Bible Commentary* says: “Some are of opinion, that the sums, thus set apart, were brought to the treasury of the church at the time; but the words do not seem to admit of this interpretation; and if each separately laid by the sum which he purposed to give, the whole would be brought together at once, when necessary, without any trouble in soliciting contributions.”

John Peter Lange, D.D., in his *Commentary on the Bible*, writes: “*Par eauto*, at home. The phrase is therefore conclusive against the prevailing opinion that the collection was taken up in the church. It was an individual and private affair (this is confirmed by the exhortation in allusion to the same subject, in 2 Cor. 9:7, Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver. — Stanley).”

*The Comprehensive Bible Commentary*, says: “Some of the Greek fathers rightly observe here, that this advice was given for the poorer among them. They were to lay by, from week to week, and not bring into the common treasury, that by this means, their contributions might be easy to themselves, and yet grow into a fund for the relief of their brethren.”

*The Critical Commentary*, edited by F. C. Cook, M.A., Canon of Exeter, has this: “Rather storing up whatever he may prosper in, that when I come no gatherings may take place, for then will be the time not for collecting, but for producing the sum of what has been week by week hoarded at home in profits from trade.”

D. D. Whedon, D.D., in *Commentary on the New Testament*, writes: “Lay by him in store, so keeping a little savings bank at home, and bringing the whole to the church when Paul arrives.”

Despite the fact that Rome has been accused of seeking to get all the gain possible into her coffers, the commentators in *A Catholic Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, kept faith with the original as they wrote: “‘First day’, i.e., Sunday. ‘With himself,’ by him, in his own keeping. It was not then to be handed in at Mass, apparently.”

## A Dissenting Voice

One outstanding commentator, while admitting that most others make the treasuring up a private affair at home, files his objection to such an arrangement. Charles Hodge, D.D., in his *Commentary on First Corinthians*, says:

Every one was to lay by himself, i.e., most modern commentators say at home, *par eauto*. Compare *pros eauto* in Luke 24:12; see also John 20:10. The direction then is that every one would lay aside at home whatever he was able to give, thus treasuring up his contributions. To this interpretation it may be objected that the whole expression is thus obscure and awkward. 'Let every one at home place, treasuring up what he has to give.' The words do not mean to lay by at home, but to lay by himself, i.e., let him take to himself what he means to give. What he was to do with it, or where he was to deposit it, is not expressed. The word *thesaurizo* means putting into the treasury or hoarding up, and is perfectly consistent with the assumption that the place of deposit was some common treasury and not every man's house. If Paul directed this money to be laid up *at home*, why was the first day of the week selected? It is evident that the first day must have offered some special facility for doing what is here enjoined. The only reason that can be assigned for requiring the thing to be done on the first day of the week, is, that on that day the Christians were accustomed to meet, and what each one laid aside from his daily gains could be treasured up, i.e., put into the common treasury of the church.

I am sure that Charles Hodge will become the hero of my brethren, who generally feel that the best commentator is the one who agrees with them. We like to have our practices condoned rather than condemned, and no one is more popular than the man who tells us that what we are doing is the scriptural thing. However, I should like to speak a word of warning for those who are prepared to adopt Mr. Hodge as a patron saint" of giving, for John Peter Lange, replied to the above, in these words:

This is well argued in behalf of the solemn observance of the Lord's Day; but we can no more change the meaning of *par eauto* than we can parallel phrases in other languages. They are idiomatic expressions for "at home" and honestly require that we should so interpret. This is the rendering which even the ancient Syria version gives it.

In one of the previous quotations, reference was made to the Greek fathers, and their interpretation of the passage. We should like to share with you the words of John Chrysostom (about 375 A.D.) in his *Forty-third Homily on First Corinthians*. His words are:

He said not, "let him bring it into the church," lest they might feel ashamed because of the smallness of the sum; but having by gradual additions swelled his contribution, let him then produce it, when I am come, but for the present lay it up, saith he, at home, and make thine house a church, thy little box a treasury. Become a guardian of sacred wealth, a self-ordained steward of the poor. Thy benevolent mind assigns thee to this priesthood.

Have you read other versions of the passage in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4? Since it is helpful and enlightening to pursue this form of investigation, we submit herewith the verses as translated in some of them. We hope they will be helpful to you in your honest research to determine the meaning of the passage.

*Concordant Literal New Testament*: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, even as I prescribe to the ecclesias of Galatia, thus do you also. On one of the sabbaths let each of you lay aside by himself in store that in which he should be prospered, that no collections may be occurring then, whenever I may come.”

*The New Testament in Plain English* (Charles Kingsley Williams): “On the first day of the week let each of you put aside and save something from his earnings; so that the money has not all to be collected when I come.”

*The New English Bible New Testament*: “Every Sunday each of you is to put aside and keep by him a sum in proportion to his gains, so that there may be no collecting when I come.”

*The Authentic New Testament*: “The day after the sabbath let each of you put by savings as he has prospered, so that collections do not have to be made when I come.”

*The Modern New Testament* (George M. Lamsa): “Upon the first day of every week, let each of you put aside and keep in his house whatever he can afford, so that there may be no collections when I come.”

*The Modern Speech New Testament* (Richard Francis Weymouth): “On the first day of every week let each of you put on one side and store up at his home whatever gain has been granted to him; so that whenever I come, there may then be no collections going on.”

*The Twentieth Century New Testament*: “On the first day of every week each of you should put by what he can afford, so that no collections need be made after I have come.”

*The New Testament in Modern English* (Centenary Edition): “On the first day of each week let each of you put aside something, keeping it in store as he may prosper, so that when I come there may be no collections going on.”

*The Revised Standard Version*: “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come.”

### **Some Observations**

Whether we like it or not, there is not one indication anywhere in the sacred scriptures, that any congregation of saints ever took up a public contribution every Sunday. Obviously the congregations in Galatia and Corinth did not take up an offering when Paul planted them, or for several years afterwards, and then the language used indicates that individuals simply laid up a sum privately each week, and kept it until the apostle came, when they turned the whole amount they had saved over to him to take to the relief of the poor saints for whom they had been laying by their weekly sums.

In spite of this I was taught as a child, and even taught it myself as I grew older, that all of our giving had to be done “through the church.” We were even led to believe that if there was a needy person in the community we should give our contributions for relief into the treasury and

let it be dispensed from it “so the church could get the glory.” Sometimes, after we put it in, the brethren would not pay it out. The church wanted the money more than it wanted the glory. We were told that it was a sin to take up a contribution on any other day of the week than Sunday, and we advertised this fact in the newspapers to prove our loyalty. Of course, we could bring clothes for orphans on Wednesday night, but not money. How silly can you get?

Stress was placed upon the term “every one” and we believed that, since this was an “act of worship,” every individual had to personally put something in the plate with his own hands. Thus, a husband would provide his wife with a token amount to put in so she could “worship.” Even little boys and girls were given a penny or nickel so they could early learn the importance of “giving to the church.” This was one “item of worship” that even the vilest sinner could participate in, for I never knew anyone to receive his money back on the basis that he could not “participate in the worship.” Money makes a lot of difference, as the world learned when the pope sold indulgences. But I now realize that our whole scheme was dreamed up by visionaries, and represents only an illusion based upon an institutional image. But I can never get out of my mind the case of an elderly widow who told the elders when they visited her, that the reason she had not been in attendance, was that she didn’t have “anything to put in” and knew that her “worship” would not be acceptable if she left out an item. So she stayed home rather than be embarrassed by her lack of finance.

I plead that you do not misunderstand what I am saying. It is no sin for brethren to pool their resources to carry on any work which they regard as acceptable. They may take up a regular contribution on Sunday, or any other day, and they may select one of their number to act as treasurer, and to give an account of receipts and expenditures. Indeed, I am of the opinion that such a method, while not the only one which might be employed, may be the best in our present state of affairs.

What I am saying is that it is an outgrowth of human rationalization, and has no more direct scriptural warrant than a lot of other things that we do. To declare that this was a heavenly program, properly prepared on high and presented to us in the sacred scriptures as the divine *law* for giving money is just not true. And to threaten men and women with hell because they prefer to put their funds where human needs are evident, rather than in the institutional bank account, is as bad as popery in its blackest moments.

A realization of this will free some of my sisters in the Lord from the role of second-class citizens in the majestic kingdom of the Father. I know school-teachers, secretaries, clerks and saleswomen who give money into the church treasury and are not even allowed to attend a business meeting where the expenditure of their funds is discussed. If that is not taxation without representation, I do not know how you could have it. My advice to these faithful sisters is to spend their money in helping the needy and where they can see how it is used. They can give their share of the funds needed to pay the light bill, heating costs, and upkeep of the building, but otherwise let them dispense their alms without allowing someone else to determine how their money will be spent, while they are gagged and muzzled by tradition. This is plain talk, but it is long overdue. Why should any member of the body in good standing be refused admittance to a business meeting of “the church.”

Let us be honest with God and one another. We have banded ourselves together through mutual love for our Redeemer to do a work. It requires finance to accomplish that work. It is only fair that all of us should share in communal ventures to the extent of ability, and under our present wage system, Sunday is as good a day as any for replenishing the community funds. It is more convenient because we meet on this resurrection day to share in the fellowship of the body and blood at the family table.

What I am saying is that we should quit saying that “passing the plate” for money every Sunday is the divine pattern. We should stop the silly and inane statement that this is “a prescribed item of worship.” What we are doing is reading into the scriptures what we are already practicing, and while the thing we are doing is not wrong, it is certainly wrong to misuse and misapply the scriptures. We ought not to wrest the scriptures to sustain even what is right.

The real tragedy comes when brethren in the Lord start with an unsubstantial and fictitious theory, as a basis for erecting a structured concept, over which they split and fragment the saints. This has happened in recent years when men have postulated a myth concerning “the church treasury,” which they have enforced with laws and statutes that are mere figments of fertile imaginations.

Right now the congregations of Christians in the United States are riven from stem to stern over how to take care of the poor and distressed. Debates as to what can and cannot be done “out of the church treasury” have fomented hate and hostility. It is possible that the whole thing is based upon sheer conjecture. There is reason for grave suspicion that the primitive community of saints ever had a financial drive, a budget, bank account, or treasury. When you are an underground movement meeting in caves and catacombs it is a little risky to sneak in every Monday morning with your deposit slip filled out.

I question whether God ever intended to lay down a hard and fast rule to regulate our method of caring for the poor. Certainly there are several different ways sanctioned and practiced by our Lord and his apostles, and no one seemed to get hurt over any of them, except Ananias and Sapphira. It would do well if preachers who elect themselves as brotherhood regulators would haul down their signs, and allow congregations of saints to handle their own affairs. The projection of a mythical pattern promulgated as God’s precise program for all ages can only create unnecessary strife, and the exportation of our foibles to foreign lands will only serve to confuse humble natives. Let God be God!

## Chapter 7

### THE NAME PATTERN

A number of years ago, the grace of God made it possible for me to labor in Red Cloud, Nebraska, a lovely little city where some of my best friends reside. I did a great deal of “personal work,” as it was called, visiting from house to house and inviting the residents to attend the nightly meetings at which I was speaking. It seemed apparent that I needed printed material to leave with them which would clearly distinguish between our little group as the true church, and the sects to which they gave allegiance, which were outside the pale.

It appeared obvious that the quickest and best way to do this was to point out the difference in the religious titles which we wore. Anyone who was not too blind to read a signboard could see that we were the Church of Christ, and could as readily determine that no one else was. It was all very simple. Those who met behind our signboard were in Christ. They belonged to him! Those who met behind other signboards were not in Christ, but had been captured by Satan.

So I wrote and had printed a tract under the heading, “Whose Name Shall the Bride Wear?” It became very popular indeed with those who thought they were the bride. Eventually more than fifty-thousand copies of the folder were distributed. Several years later I came to realize that what I was doing was actually more sectarian than those whom I was seeking to reach. Like a flash out of the blue it dawned upon me that the called out ones had no official title, no party name. To promote and defend such a title was simply to make a denomination out of the group of believers who appropriated it and trusted in it.

The very word denominate, from the Latin *de* and *nominare*, to call by a name, means, “to give a name to; designate by a name or title; to call by a distinctive name or designation.” Any group which selects and appropriates to itself a specific name, title or brand, is a denomination, whether the title it selects is from words found in the Bible, or composed of words not even mentioned in the sacred volume. The source of the title has nothing to do with the act of denominating, and any group which denominates itself is a denomination. Since it thus segments itself it is also a sect.

The *ekklesia* of God had no specific name in its inception. The saints were corporately designated only by simple nouns. All of these describe a relationship. Not a one was used as an exclusive title. This is obvious, or there would have been only one. As to functional unity they were the body of Christ, as to divine origin the churches of God, as to present authority the churches of Christ. In relation to government they constituted the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of God’s dear Son. In relation to heritage they were the church of the firstborn ones whose names were enrolled in heaven.

To select any one of these terms such as church of God, church of the firstborn, or church of Christ, and make it the means of identification for a specific group in the realm of believers in the Messiah is to create a denomination, by the act of denominating that group. And to do it in order to define boundaries and to separate those Christians under the title from others who are not under it is the very essence of sectarianism.

Some very canny and contriving politicians among us have come up with the idea that by writing “church of Christ” instead of “Church of Christ” we will avoid sectarianism. But sectarianism is an attitude of the heart and not an accident of spelling. A group can be as narrow and exclusive under a little “c” as they can under a big one. Making criminals wear short pants will not reform them.

It bugs some of my fellow-editors because I refer to “The Church of Christ” in my articles just as I do to “The Church of God” or “The Baptist Church.” They want me to try and fool the two latter groups by using a little “c” on *our* church. But if the Church of God started writing their title “church of God,” these editors would still blast away at them as sectarians. Our problem is not with the alphabet. It is with the Alpha and Omega. We want to stake out an exclusive claim on him and get him in our corral.

At the same time we are in a real quandary because of our own divisions. Not only must we make sure that no one confuses us with other groups of believers but we must also be certain that people do not get us mixed up with others of our own brethren. So we erect signs reading: Church of Christ (Vocal Music), or Church of Christ (Christian). This means we are denominational out of parenthesis and sectarian within it. It is bad enough to be singularly denominational as Methodists and Presbyterians. But we double the dose and go them one better.

Sometimes this back-fires. Instead of clarifying it confuses. A college professor who makes no commitment to Christ mentioned to me an advertisement he had seen on “the church page” of a northern newspaper which read: Church of Christ (One Container). I explained that these brethren used one container in passing the fruit of the vine in the Lord’s Supper. As an economist and business consultant he had been working on the idea of *one container* loaded with a commodity at a factory and sealed for shipment across the ocean where it could be opened only by the consignee. He had wondered if the group to which he alluded had encapsulated themselves and sealed themselves in an insulated container, expecting to be transported *en masse* to the glory world. I told him that he was probably not too far off, at that!

### **A Fact of Scripture**

At the very outset we have to face up to the fact that the term “church of Christ” is not even found in the scriptures. It is just not there. The nearest we can come to it is “The churches of Christ salute you” (Romans 16:16). But in the very same chapter the writer mentions “the churches of the Gentiles.” He apparently refers to the same people. But I have yet to see a sign in front of one of our edifices reading, “The churches of the Gentiles” (Romans 16:4).

Our sophists have no trouble getting around the fact that the official title is nowhere found in the Bible. Such trivial omissions as “the name of the church” do not bother debaters who speak where the Bible speaks, and frequently where it doesn’t. So there is a stock argument that is triumphantly hauled off the shelf and exhibited on the pages of orthodox journals. “Where there is a plural, there must be a singular.” If there are churches of Christ there must be a church of Christ! This settles it!

Unfortunately, this argument is as leaky as a cracked gourd dipper. I mean it will not hold water. You cannot reason from a plural which represents all to a singular component of that plural which also represents all. A plural represents the total of those units involved in it, and any single unit cannot possibly embrace them all. When Paul wrote “The congregations of Christians salute you” he knew there were individual congregations in a lot of places.

I am not saying that there is no such thing as the church of God, the church of Christ, the body of Christ, the kingdom of heaven, or the temple of God. I say there is! All I am saying is that the Holy Spirit did not apply to it the term *church of Christ* which we have argued (at least since 1906) is the scriptural title. We’ve lambasted others for having an unscriptural name and now our own denominational chickens are coming home to roost. I intend to help them find where the roost is located.

But did not Jesus say, “Upon this rock I will build my church?” Indeed, he said it and he did it. It is his church. But this statement only shows possession. It says not one thing about the name of that church. It tells us to whom the church belongs but provides no name for it except the simple noun “church.” If I say, “Upon this lot I will park my car,” you know to whom the car belongs but you do not know its name. You could not tell whether it was a Ford, Chevrolet or Plymouth.

And that is just the point. There is only one church. There never was but one. There never will be another. The church is a divine creation and not a human organization. A man can no more make another church than he can make another Holy Spirit. “There is one body and one Spirit.” The church does not need to engage in the identification race with sects. It does not belong in that category. When it gets hooked on the signboard hang-up it gets on the sectarian level. The church on the rock is not “The Church of Christ” down the street from “The Baptist Church” or up the street from “The Presbyterian Church.” It is the whole body of called-out believers in the community.

The body of Christ, the kingdom of God’s dear Son, is not the church in town which *does not* have an instrument, or *does not* have classes, or *does not* have individual cups, or *does not* contribute to Herald of Truth. The body of Christians in any locality is made up of every saved person in that area. It is not the church of God because of what it does not have, but because of what it does have.

## **The Name of the Bride**

Perhaps I’d better get on with listing some of the mistakes I made in my tract about the name of the bride. The whole argument falls as flat as a Swedish pancake when one realizes that the idea of a wife being called by the name of her husband is a product of western culture. And it is of relatively modern origin. Even now it is not the custom in many parts of the world.

Certainly such an idea is foreign to the Bible. In both the old and new covenant scriptures wives were called by their own names. Thus we read of Sarai, Abraham’s wife; Rachel, Jacob’s wife; Joanna, the wife of Chuza; Felix, and his wife Drusilla. No one ever reads of Mrs. Zechariah, or of Mrs. Aquila.



Even if the bride wore the name of her husband, the term “church of Christ” would not be that name. Christ is not the name of our Lord. It is his office or prophetic function. He is Jesus *the* Christ. He is the Christ because he was *christed*, or anointed, just as John the Baptist was so designated because he baptized. When you read of Simon the tanner, you do not think of tanner as being his last name. You certainly would not call his wife “Mrs. Tanner.” Nor would you have addressed the wife of Simon the leper as “Mrs. Leper.”

Our Lord’s name is Jesus. The angel said, “Thou shalt call his name Jesus” (Matthew 1:21). When he was born Joseph “called his name Jesus” (Matt. 1:25). Paul declared that God gave him a name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow (Philippians 2:10). If the church is to wear the name of the bridegroom, she should be called “Mrs. Jesus.” The term church of Christ is no more the name of the bride than body of Christ, kingdom of Christ, or flock of Christ. Body, kingdom, flock and church are all just common nouns.

If a congregation decided, in its ignorance, to try and be “scriptural” and put up a sign reading “Church of Jesus” the tourists from Texas and Tennessee, looking for “a faithful church with which to worship” before going to the zoo, would not even slow down. Is it not peculiar that the very same people who argue that church of Christ is the name of the bride also argue for spelling church with a lower case “c”? If that is the name of a bride or wife, it is a proper name. No one writes “nell ketcherside” when addressing my wife. Of course, our brethren are not especially noted for consistency, because they generally take a position first and then try to cook up arguments to fit it. They also bend a lot of scriptures around in some funny shapes for the same reason.

Actually, of course, if you want to be really technical, the church is not yet married to the Lamb. And when the wedding feast occurs she will not be called Mrs. Lamb. John places the wedding at the close of events as we now know them. “For the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7). When the ceremony begins the bride will be attired in white linen made up of the righteousness of the saints. I am helping work on the trousseau now, although I am not too good at it, and God’s grace will have to unravel a lot of my errors. But I am looking forward to the event for, “Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” That is one banquet I do not want to miss.

Christ wants to present the church to himself “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” If the wedding gown is to be woven of the righteousness of the saints, it is obvious to me that I will need a lot of spot remover, and a considerable amount of ironing out. I have had a lot of spots and wrinkles in my life. And I have never even thought of being without blemish. This once worried me a lot, because deep down inside, I knew I did not have what it took. I was trusting to legal rectitude to save me. But every time I tried to smooth out a wrinkle I generally made a couple of bigger ones.

Then I learned the magnificent secret from Paul. I had been trying to stay pure while dabbling in garbage. Legal rectitude will not get the job done. It only frustrates. It makes a pretender out of you. Paul said, “I count it so much garbage, for the sake of gaining Christ and finding myself

incorporate in him, with no righteousness of my own, no legal rectitude, but the righteousness which comes from faith in Christ, given by God in response to faith” (Philippians 3:8, 9).

I am now incorporate in him. What a burden this has lifted off my heart. I am now riding with God and I leave the driving to Jesus. I am relaxed and I can lean back and enjoy myself and watch the scenery go by. In my life there is a lot of it to watch. I am still human and once in awhile when we are on a hairpin turn I may get butterflies in my stomach, but I really am not afraid as long as Jesus is at the wheel.

Best of all, I know that every person on this whole wide earth who has been received of the Father, and who has been given that righteousness which comes by faith, is my brother. We do not have all of these behind our signboards. I do not even know who they all are. “But God has laid a foundation, and it stands firm, with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows his own.’” “Some day I shall know them also. And what a glad day that will be!

As for now, I am content to be in him and to try in my weak way to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven me. I consider every sincere, conscientious believer in the Messiahship and divine Sonship of Jesus of Nazareth, who has validated his faith in this sublime proposition by obedience to our Lord in baptism, as being born again. He is a part of the new humanity. He is a child of God. He is in the church of God, the church of Christ. He has been added to the one body. He may not be in “The Church of Christ” listed among the other denominations in the United States census.

You see, I am not simply opposed to sects. I am opposed to *sectism*, the nefarious spirit which breeds and begets sects. I am as opposed to it among *us* as I am among *them*. The whole sectarian mess created by vain wranglings about names, opinions and words, is as abhorrent to me as I think it is to God. I do not believe we can overcome and overthrow the sectarian temple by adding another brick of our own to the imposing structure. Let me draw upon a statement from Alexander Campbell which may serve to enlighten you further as to my position.

Dear sir, this plan of making our own nest, and fluttering over our own brood; of building our own tent, and of confining all goodness and grace to our noble selves and the “elect few” who are like us, is the quintessence of sublimated pharisaism. The old Pharisees were but babes in comparison to the modern: and the longer I live, and the more I reflect upon God and man — heaven and earth — the Bible and the world — the Redeemer and his church — the more I am assured that all sectarianism is the offspring of hell; and that all differences about words, and names, and opinions, hatched in Egypt, or Rome, or Edinburgh, are like the frolics of drunken men; and that where there is a *new creature*, or a society of them, with all their imperfections and frailties, and errors in sentiment, in views, and opinions, they ought to receive one another, and the strong to support the weak, and not to please themselves. To lock ourselves up in the bandbox of our own little circle; to associate with a few units, tens, or hundreds, as the pure church, as the elect, is real Protestant monkery, it is evangelical pharisaism.

Occasionally, since the days of Alexander Campbell, there have arisen men who have seen the true nature of our own sectarian spirit. One of these men was G. C. Brewer, and he evidenced

his knowledge in an address during the Abilene Christian College Lectureship. We take this quotation from that speech.

It is never wrong to speak of the church as the church of Christ or the church of God, or the church of the first-born, but to repeat what has been said before, to exalt any one of these into the patented name of the church is to sectarianize that expression. If we have not done that very thing with the expression church of Christ then why do we not vary our terms in speaking of the church? Why is every deed made to the Church of Christ? Why is "Church of Christ" put upon every cornerstone or front of every meeting house? Why does the "Church of Christ" have a literature series? So fixed and uniform is this designation that if we would insert the name Jesus in the expression it would cause confusion. If a disciple were in a strange city and while looking for the meeting place of the saints he should come upon a house with this inscription, "The Church of Jesus Christ," if he did not pass it up he would hesitate and make further inquiry before he entered that house. He is looking for a church of the Lord but he is not looking for this particular one. He is looking for the one that wears the stabilized, invariable name, "Church of Christ." A name which therefore, distinguishes it from the church of Jesus Christ, or the church of God, or the church of the saints and all other of the Lord's churches, implying, of course, that he has several. To use the term church of Christ to include any limited number of saints or to make it the name of the church is to sectarianize the expression.

Brethren, I do not expect you to get this point without some suffering but if you will endure the necessary pain caused by forcing the needle through the skin by which you get this anti-sectarian serum your suffering will then be over and your spiritual condition will soon be much better. So mote it be.

Apparently, the brethren were not willing to endure the pain and the shot did not take. They are still as sectarian as before our brother spoke. After listening to some of the sectarian pap produced in the lectureship for the past several years, I suggest that the new director take one session and read the speech delivered by our late brother Brewer. Perhaps another injection will work the desired effect and inoculate us against further sectarianism manifested among a great many of us.

We must expect no sudden recovery. There will be no miraculous healing. The sectarian spirit dies slowly and lingeringly. The ghost will not be given up but with agony and suffering. We cling to it longingly. It pampers our pride. It speaks of safety and security, the protection provided by a prison. We love our parties. We are grateful for our walls and sequestered monastic paradises. So long have we basked in our own righteousness that we are frightened by freedom. We have trusted in our signboards rather than in a Savior. And we have sought to sanctify them by scripture.

For this reason, in our next issue, we shall take those passages which have been projected as proof of a particular title and show how they have been twisted, warped and wrested, to create a *name pattern* with which to belabor other believers and to exhibit our own factional feelings and partisan programs. We sincerely trust that you will not overlook this examination of the sacred oracles of God.

## Chapter 8

### A SECTARIAN NAME

The body of Christ, composed of all the called-out ones, has no official denomination or designation. The sacred scriptures employ no exclusive term or brand by which to identify that body. It is variously described, defined and denoted by a number of common nouns. The selection and exaltation of any one of these as the recognized title is sectarian and partisan. It is a work of the flesh. This was clearly understood by the reformers who preceded us. For example, M. C. Kurfees, speaking at the Abilene Christian College Lectureship in 1921, said:

In the present divided state of the church and under the influence of parlance growing out of a denominational environment, it is difficult to avoid being sectarian or denominational in our speech; and hence there is a growing tendency today to sectarianize even the term 'church of Christ' This is invariably the case when it is used, as it frequently is nowadays, to mean merely those people of God who do not work through missionary societies and do not use instrumental music in the worship, and to exclude other children of God who make the mistake of working and worshiping in the said ways. The church of Christ in any city today, using the term in accordance with Biblical usage, includes all the children of God in the said city; and until these principles are observed, the primitive church, in its constitution, its doctrine, its faith, and its practice will never be fully restored. Let us plead for the spread and recognition of these principles and for the complete restoration of the primitive church.

That kind of talk is no longer indulged in the lectureship. The reason is clear. Our brethren had now rather be sectarian than right. They have "withdrawn fellowship" posthumously from Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, Tolbert Fanning, David Lipscomb, J. W. McGarvey and M. C. Kurfees. These "liberals" have been cast out of the synagogue *in absentia*, and one loyal theologian in Colorado said that if Paul had been a member of his congregation when he allowed James to talk him into going into the temple with the Jewish brethren who were zealous for the law, he would have called him on the carpet to confess his wrongs. If he had refused there would have been one apostle no longer in the foundation of "The Church of Christ." You are not even safe now after you are dead!

One of our notable traits is to search the scriptures to justify what we have already adopted. In no other area is this practice more prevalent than as it relates to "the name of the church." We really put the wire-stretchers to work on this one. One of the favorites is Acts 4:12, where Peter said, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Of course, Peter was not talking about the name of the church. He was talking about the name by which he had healed a lame man. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6). To the startled multitude, he said, "The God of our fathers glorified Jesus ... and his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know" (Acts 3:13, 16). To the belligerent council he said, "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well."

We are not saved by the church. We are not saved by the name of the church. The church has to be saved. “Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior” (Ephesians 5:23). As Peter said, “There is salvation in no one else.” His name is Jesus. He is the Christ. He was from Nazareth. But you just put up a nice neon sign with the insignia “Church of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Acts 4:12),” and see how many Texas license plates you count in your parking lot.

Did you know that Peter and John were not *Christians* when they healed the lame man? Do you realize there was not a single *Christian* in the whole congregation at Jerusalem then? If you had been on a “personally conducted holy land tour” at that time, and had slipped up and asked Peter if he was a member of the Church of Christ, he would have jumped like he would if you told him he was “the first pope.” Sectarianism plays funny tricks with men’s minds. It also destroys their moral integrity.

I am about convinced that the King James Version is responsible for most of our ludicrous arguments. Actually, the word “church” shouldn’t even be in the Bible. It isn’t a translation of *ekklesia*, and never was. Fenton John Anthony Hort, of Hort and Wescott fame recognized this. He gave up trying to find an Anglo-Saxon equivalent as he explains in “The Christian Ecclesia.” Alexander Campbell knew it. He never used the word in *Living Oracles*, always employing “congregation” instead. Perhaps the word “community” as used in *The Authentic Version* is the best of all. “Convey my regards to one another with a chaste kiss. All the Christian communities send their regards” (Romans 16:16).

When our brethren are confronted with the fact that the term “church of Christ” is not in the Bible, while the expression “church of God” is used repeatedly, they agree that it would be permissible to use that designation. None of them do it though. About a half dozen other parties beat us to that one and staked their claim before we got around to it. Now we cannot use it because someone on the highway might get confused and drop in under the impression that we really were “The Church of God.” If we had not come into the census so late in the game, our title would probably be “church of God,” and we would be quoting scripture to sustain it. The *Gospel Advocate* would be a Church of God paper, and Harding College would be a Church of God school, according to common parlance.

We have worked out some pretty good answers. They are shrewd ones if you do not study too seriously or investigate too closely. Take Acts 20:23, for example. “Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” It was Christ who shed his blood, so God is Christ here, and thus Paul meant “church of Christ” when he wrote “church of God.” All this, in spite of the fact that just seven verses back, and in the same speech, Paul clearly distinguishes between God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is pretty strong indication that the King James Version may be a wee bit misleading. *The Authentic Version* has it, “See to it that you tend God’s community, which he has acquired with the blood of his own (Son).” J. H. Moulton in a *Grammar of New Testament Greek* says, “I ventured to cite this as a possible encouragement to those who would translate Acts 20:28, ‘the blood of one who was his own.’” *The Concordant Literal Version* has it, “Shepherding the ecclesia of God, which he procures through the blood of his own.”

We used to make quite a play on this verse by using the deed to a piece of property and showing that the one who bought and paid for it would want it recorded in his name. It wasn't a bad illustration, but it would wreck our sectarian playhouse. As I pointed out last month, Christ is the office of Jesus, and not his name. He is Jesus *the* Christ. If Mr. Brown, the carpenter, had his property recorded as belonging to Mr. Carpenter, his heirs and assigns would be in a real predicament. Even so, in our illustration from the verse, we should have come out with "church of God" like Paul did. But we never did, we always got it adjusted and corrected before the recorder got hold of it.

I must not forget Ephesians 3:14, 15. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." It was easy to assume that this meant that the entire family bore the name *Christ*. But this argument is as shaky as a gelatin salad. First off, as pointed out by B. W. Johnson, in that perennial best-seller, *People's New Testament With Notes*, "The Father is referred to. The words, 'Of our Lord Jesus Christ,' are not found in the best manuscripts, and are omitted in the Revision."

That is a real blow! But there is another. The word translated "family" is in the plural. It should read "every family." The subject under consideration is the universal fatherhood of God, not the name of the one body. Paul bows the knee to the Father because of his sovereignty. He is the origin and source of all fatherhood. There is not a chain of lineal descent on earth, nor an order of beings in the celestial realm which does not owe its beginning to the Father. "There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist" (1 Cor. 8:6).

The Revised Standard Version has, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph. 3:14). This is consistent with the language of the apostle and we concur in it. Only those who are hard pressed to justify the existence of an exclusive sect would use this as our brethren have used it in the past. I am not interested in sectarian defense, not even our own. I am opposed to the very spirit of sectarianism.

The same observation needs to be made about the illogical mental gymnastics employed on Hebrews 12:23, where the apostle refers to "the church of the firstborn which is written in heaven." Sermon outline books jump on the word firstborn, and then hie away to Colossians 1:18, where Jesus is referred to as the head of the body, the church. "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." The chain of reasoning is simple. Jesus is the firstborn, the church is the church of the firstborn, therefore, the church is "the church of Christ."

But the word for firstborn in Hebrews 12:23, is plural, the firstborn ones. It cannot refer to Jesus. The writer is addressing Hebrews who knew that under the covenant, the firstborn belonged to God (Exodus 13:12). The church is made up of those who are God's own people. It is "the church of the firstborn ones whose names are enrolled in heaven." The reference is to the constituency, and not to Jesus as the head at all.

There is no official title for the *ekklesia* of the new covenant. Only common nouns are used to identify it and these are nouns of relationship. In a corporate sense the saints are referred to by such words as church, flock, temple, family and body. But church of God is no more the official

name than flock of God or temple of God. The expression “church of Christ” may be employed as a name of the church. It must never be employed as the name of a church!

When I speak of the church in Saint Louis, I am not limiting the term to a special party in the religious realm bearing the designation “Church of Christ.” I refer to every child of God, every born-again believer, every member of the new humanity in this teeming metropolitan center. They are not all meeting behind signboards bearing the caption “Church of Christ.” God’s sheep are still a scattered flock. Some are wandering on sectarian hills. Some are caught in sectarian thickets. Some are feeding at troughs where they must subsist on fodder flavored and seasoned with sectarian salt.

But if they are in his family they are my brothers and sisters. I love them all, not with that cold detached love of the partisan who seeks to love by rote or letter of the law, but with a warmth and compassion which recognizes my own ignorance and regrettable shortcomings. The body of Christ is greater than any of our parties. It is greater than all of them put together. It is greater than any movement of the body or in the body which seeks to reform its constituency. It is more majestic than any restoration movement!

Let me be clear and bold in my declaration. There are those who spend their time going over what I write with a fine tooth comb, seeking for scraps of information with which they can attack me in the minds of prejudiced readers. Allow me to save them the trouble of such meticulous research. I believe that there are Christians in the sects of our day. I believe that these are in the church of God by divine appointment, and in sectarian pastures through personal choice, influenced by tradition, teaching and early training. Our task is not to unite sects, but the Christians within them. We can never accomplish this task by creating another sect. It makes no difference whether such a sect is designated by a term lifted from the scripture or the English dictionary, sectarianism will never be overcome by creating additional sects. It is sectarianism against which I shall test the steel of my sword blade, and if that sectarianism is our own, it too must go!

## Chapter 9

### THE APOSTOLIC ATTITUDE

Tradition binds men to their past and often blinds them for their present and future. And every movement, political or religious, which survives for two generations, develops a tradition, a handing down or giving over from the prior generation to the successor. Traditional ways of looking at things may be bad, or they may be good. Often they are neutral and are neither bad nor good, being merely an approach taken to problems which have arisen.

Traditions become harmful when they shackle us to our own past and preclude any honest search for new truths and deeper insights. It is then we resent those who dare question our established position and regard them as heretics. Yet every advance in perception and understanding has been made by men branded as heretics. There has never been a reformer who has not been so castigated. We owe our gains of today to the heretics of yesterday. The heretics of today will be the heroes of tomorrow!

When Alexander Campbell was preparing to launch the journal which he designated *The Christian Baptist*, he said in the preface,

It is a rarity, seldom to be witnessed, to see a person boldly opposing the doctrinal errors or the unscriptural measures of a people with whom he has identified himself, and to whom he looks for approbation and support. If such a person appears in any party, he soon falls under the frowns of those who think themselves wiser than the reprover, or would wish so to appear. Hence it usually happens that such a character must lay his hand upon his mouth, or embrace the privilege of walking out of doors. Although this has usually been the case, we would hope that it would not always continue so to be.

I also labor in that same hope.

It is a tradition with many of my brethren to regard the apostolic letters addressed to communities of saints and individuals as a meticulous pattern for every act of service and devotion to be rendered unto the Father until the return of our Lord. Their attempt to implement this tradition has fractured and fragmented them into more than a score of hostile parties and made them the most divided religious movement on the contemporary American scene.

Their very attitude toward the sacred scriptures will continue to split and splinter them. The only way to avoid such a dismal future is to freeze all knowledge at the current level and place a moratorium on all honest attempts to learn. If we are under law, and our “clergy” are the lawyers, interpreters and enforcers, then there is no freedom in Christ Jesus. The dullest conformist will be more faithful than the most brilliant and sacrificing researchist.

I deny that we are under a legalistic code of statutes, specifications and judgments. Such a system belongs on the other side of the cross. “Christ is the termination of law as a means of justification for every one who has faith” (Romans 10:4). And I have faith! Law was to last only until faith came. “Before faith came, we were confined under law, kept under restraint until



faith should be revealed” (Gal. 3:23). You are either under law or under faith. Take your choice. You cannot have both. Law does not rest on faith (Gal. 3:12). Christ has redeemed those that were under the law so they could receive the adoption of sons. I am in this category. Praise God, I have been redeemed and adopted.

The only law under which I serve is that of love, overwhelming love for my redeemer and adopter. I am not under law, but under grace. This is what God said. I accept it without quibble, quirk or question. It is my strength and my salvation. It is my hope! But if I am not under a written code, what is the purpose of the scripture? This is a legitimate question. I am obligated to face it squarely and unequivocally. My answer begins with this article.

## **A Vehicle and Agent**

The primary purpose of scripture is to bring me into a living vital relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord. It is the divine vehicle which transports me into his presence, a heavenly agent which introduces me to the author of my salvation. It is not familiarity with the machinery of the vehicle nor acquaintance with the agent which makes for life. I can know the agent all my life without ever having a personal relationship with the Son of God.

Indeed, if I think I have eternal life in the scriptures, I may become so devoted to them that I never come to him at all. He said this was possible. “You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness of me, yet you refuse to come to me that you might have life” (John 5:39). These words were addressed to the most intense students of the sacred oracles this world has ever produced.

They revered the holy scriptures, literally binding portions of them to their foreheads and on their arms. The very entrance to their houses had small containers affixed and in these were written verses from God’s word in exactly twenty-two lines. Josephus wrote, “If anyone should question one of us concerning the laws, he would more easily repeat all of them than his own name; since we learn them from our first consciousness, we have them as it were, engraved on our souls” (*Against Apion* 2:18).

Rabbi Hillel, whose school in Jerusalem Paul attended, said, “The more teaching of the Law, the more life; the more school, the more wisdom; the more counsel, the more reasonable action” (*Sayings of the Fathers* 2:5, 7). After the Babylonian exile, the Jews literally became “the people of the Book.” A. R. S. Kennedy says that the Torah in its written form then became “the regulating norm in very relation of life.” But they rejected Jesus of whom the prophets spoke.

If life could have been achieved by law, there was no necessity for the coming of Christ. The law given through Moses was holy and just and good. But the purpose of the law was to bring us to Jesus as the source of life. No law can produce life. “For if a law had been given which could make alive, righteousness would indeed be by law” (Gal. 3:21). Obedience to law for the sake of law does not make one good. And it cannot make one live. Life is personal. “In him was life” (John 1:4).

Searching the scriptures is one thing. Coming to Jesus in order to have life is a wholly different thing. The scriptures bear witness of Jesus. This is their function. But if we are not led into a life giving relationship with him all of our scriptural knowledge will go for naught. It will only serve to condemn us. It may be argued that this was true of the old covenant scriptures but not of the new. But John was speaking of his own epistle when he wrote, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."

Believing in miracles does not produce life. Believing in the record of miracles does not produce life. The design of miracles is not to save but to make credible the claims of Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. The testimony is one thing, the attestation another thing, and the belief of that testimony which establishes a personal relationship is still another. What is it to have life in his name?

In such usage the word "name" stands for the character, attributes and nature which constitute a person. Life in his name is life in his person. One may believe that the Bible is true and still not be saved. It is not intellectual assent to the veracity of a record which saves, even though that record has a divine origin. Rather, it is receiving him of whom the record testifies which spells the difference between life and death. "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12).

The good news, consisting of the facts related to Jesus, was promulgated in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost following his resurrection. This message was gladly received by some three thousand hearers who reformed and were immersed in the name of Jesus Christ. All of them being Jews, they continued to attend the temple together each day, although "breaking bread in their own homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts."

Being ignorant of many of the implications of their new relationship, they had to rely upon instruction of the apostles. They did not regard this as a new law and would have deeply resented it if someone had suggested that it was to supplant the law of Moses. In fact, they had no intention of abandoning the law or its forms and ceremonies. They expected to constitute a Messianic synagogue within the framework of Judaism. Years later, after some of the apostles had already been killed, they said, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20).

It is obvious that the apostles in Jerusalem did not think of their teaching as the laying down of a new law, and just as obvious that "the many priests who were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) did not so regard it. Upon one occasion, an eminent Pharisee, Gamaliel, a highly revered *teacher of the law*, came to the rescue of the apostles by suggesting that "this plan or this undertaking" might be of God (Acts 5:38). He would never have said this if he had thought of it as another law.

The apostolic teaching was not then, nor has it ever been since, a written code or law for justification. The apostle who wrote twice as many of the epistles as all of the rest put together, plainly states, "But now, having died to that which held us bound, we are discharged from the

law, to serve God in a new way, the way of the spirit, in contrast to the old way, the way of a written code” (Romans 7:6).

In spite of this, men seek to take the very epistles of Paul and warp them into a written code. A law requires lawyers to argue about inferences, meanings and deductions. It requires courts, trials, determination of guilt and assessment of penalties. It must create machinery to enforce conformity, to threaten reprisal and to close loopholes in boycott procedures. The lawyers are those who go to school to study legal matters and to become interpreters of divine meaning.

They bind “heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders.” They learn the keen distinction between swearing by the temple, which is nothing, and swearing by the gold of the temple which is binding.” They learn how to discourse fluently about giving God a proper measure of mint and anise and dill, and become authorities on sacrificing the smallest garden herbs for the glory of God.

### **The Way of the Spirit**

We serve God in a new way. It is a way of the spirit! We are no longer under the old way, the way of a written code. But if the apostolic epistles are not a written code, what are they? Lay aside your legalistic spectacles for a moment. Read them without a veil over your face!

One of them was a letter of endorsement for a runaway slave being sent back to his owner and master as a brother in Christ. One was a letter of thanks to a community of saints for a gift sent to an ambassador in chains. One was a letter to a young man with a weak stomach, who was sick a lot of the time, encouraging him to keep safe and intact that which had been entrusted to him. Another was a farewell letter to the same young man asking him to come soon and bring an overcoat and some books, especially notebooks for writing purposes.

Still another contained a reply to questions about conduct in marriage. One was a letter encouraging the recipients to leave the ranks of the unemployed and not to expect the imminent return of Jesus, nor use it as an excuse for “idling their time away, minding everybody’s business but their own.” These are not items in a written code. They are love letters to saints and brethren. They were not intended to make polished lawyers but perfect lovers.

The new covenant epistles were designed to assure those who received them of the love of the writers. “God knows how I long for you all, with the deep yearning of Christ himself” (Phil. 1:8). “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see for myself or hear about you from a distance, I may know that you are standing firm, one in spirit, one in mind, contending as one man for the gospel faith, meeting your opponents without so much as a tremor” (1:27).

The letter to the Philippians was not a part of “the gospel of Christ.” The Philippians had long since accepted the gospel, and had taken part themselves in proclaiming it from the first day until they received this letter (1:5). Contending for the gospel faith had nothing to do with arguing with brethren about the implication of anything which Paul wrote in the letter. By the absurd conclusion that the apostolic epistles are all part of the gospel of Christ, and a perfect

understanding of the epistles is essential to obedience of the gospel, we have wrecked all hope of unity in the body of God's Son. Too, we have done with the epistles what their writers refused to do with them. We have made them a written code and reverted to a pre-Calvary means of justification, living B.C. lives in an A.D. world.

It is now time for us to renounce our childish and immature traditionalism and grow up in Christ Jesus. This means simply to adopt the same attitude and spirit as the apostles had. It is best exemplified in the words of Paul. "I have not yet reached perfection, but I press on, hoping to take hold of that for which Christ once took hold of me. My friends, I do not reckon myself to have got hold of it as yet ... Let us then keep to this way of thinking, those of us who are mature. If there is any point on which you think differently, this also God will make plain to you. Only let your conduct be consistent with the level we have already reached."

The very next words are: "Agree together, my friends, to follow my example. You have us for a model; watch those whose way of life conforms to it." Amen!

If we can ever sense that Christianity is not a law but a life, that it is not a sacrificial code imposed from on high but the sharing in our lot of a God who came down from above, our fears will give way to faith, and our heartaches to hope. We will cease to ride herd on God's sheep and be willing to follow in the steps of the Shepherd.

## Chapter 10

### THE HAPPINESS PATTERN

The apostolic letters were not penned to produce eternal life but to inform those in Christ that they already had it. John writes, “This letter is to assure you that you have eternal life. It is addressed to those who give their allegiance to the Son of God” (1 John 5:13). Eternal life is the result of a personal relationship with the Son of God. The scriptures simply bear witness of this fact. “The witness is this: that God has given us eternal life, and that this life is found in the Son. He who possesses the Son has life indeed; he who does not possess the Son of God has not that life.”

There is as much difference between the apostolic letters and eternal life as there is between a birth certificate and physical life. No one considers that a birth certificate produces life although it bears witness to the fact that one exists. To this, the careless student objects that we are born of the word of God, and quotes, “You have been born anew, not of mortal parentage but of immortal, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23).

This objection falls flat, however, when it is remembered that Peter is not talking about the letters written to the churches, but about the gospel. “And this ‘word’ is the word of the Gospel preached to you.” Certainly the epistles of Peter were not included in the word by which “God’s scattered people” (1:1) were begotten, for they already had an inheritance laid up for them in heaven before Peter ever wrote them. The letters were sent to confirm that fact.

When the term “word of God” is used with reference to birth or begetting it never refers to an apostolic epistle. All of these were written to congregations or individuals already in Christ Jesus. When Paul writes that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17), he did not include the Roman letter, for it was written to those who had already been justified by faith, and who had received the Spirit that made them sons and enabled them to cry, “Abba! Father!”

The very context of Romans 10 shows that faith comes by the gospel.

How could they invoke one in whom they had no faith? And how could they have faith in one they never heard of? And how hear without someone to spread the news? And how could anyone spread the news without a commission to do so? And that is what the Scriptures affirm: ‘How welcome are the feet of the messengers of good news!’ But not all have responded to the good news. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message?’ We conclude that faith is awakened by the message, and the message that awakens it comes through the word of Christ.

Alexander Campbell wrote: “We preach, or report, or proclaim news. But who teaches news? Who exhorts news? We preach the gospel to unbelievers, to aliens, but never to Christians, or those who have received it.”

A modern theologian, Alan Richardson, Canon of Durham, agrees. In his *Theological Word Book of the Bible* he says,

In the N.T. preaching has nothing to do with delivering sermons to the converted, which is what it usually means today, but always concerns the proclamation of the 'good tidings of God' to the non-Christian world. As such it is to be distinguished from teaching which in the N.T. normally means ethical instruction, or occasionally apologetics or instructions in the faith.

The apostolic epistles do not comprise a written code. They were never intended to be a compilation of laws. They were written as love letters to "all who are dedicated to him" (2 Cor. 1:1). The purpose of the writers is carefully stated, "Do not think that we are dictating the terms of your faith; your hold on the faith is secure enough. We are working with you for your own happiness" (2 Cor. 1:24). If the apostles did not write to dictate "the terms of your faith," on what grounds do lesser and later lights take what they wrote and try to use it for just such a purpose?

The apostolic writings are guidelines to happiness. No one confuses the guide lines on the highway, provided for safety and convenience, with a statute book. It is recognized that such lines and signs are fixed by authority, by one of the higher powers. There are some no passing zones where one must never cross the center line, but in many places one must use his judgment and take the responsibility. He may "pass with caution" or "drive with moderate speed." The good driver is one who adjusts to circumstances and conditions.

The Living Way has marked out the way for us. In most cases we must use commonsense and judgment, tempering our actions according to the needs of our brethren, and being cognizant that the eyes of the world are upon us. Some things are always wrong. Others are wrong only under certain circumstances. "Happy is the man who can make his decision with a clear conscience" (Romans 14:22). Happy, too, is the man who allows another the liberty to decide without trying to impose his own judgment and opinion upon him.

In every generation there are those who have tried to play God with the lives of other men. They have taken general passages and given them specific application, finding in them a way to condemn what they have already decided is wrong. Under the guise of promoting "holiness" they have compiled their arbitrary list of things deemed unholy in contemporary culture and measured the character of men by their own yardsticks. They have legislated where the Spirit has not and claimed infallibility for their dogmas. Nothing is more unholy than for men to exalt themselves to the position of divine interpreters of the sacred oracles.

To drive out God's precious children because they cannot conform to partisan whims, fancies and rulings, and to elevate opinions to terms of union and communion, is to assume the role of false apostles, and not truly follow the leading of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. To turn epistles of grace into a lash with which to lacerate the hearts of the brethren is not to follow the example of one who wrote, "For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. What we pray for is your improvement."

Our pattern is Jesus of Nazareth. The good news about Jesus leads to faith in him. That faith implies more than intellectual assent to his role in history. It is belief that he is the Messiah of the prophets, the Son of God, the Lord of life. It is not merely belief on him, or in him, but belief into him, the kind of faith which involves commitment or surrender to him who is its object.

In him is life, eternal life. In him we become partakers of that life, sharers in his life! In him we grow up, maturing in the various aspects of life. It is here the apostolic epistles fulfill their role. They were written to saints who were ignorant of how they should walk, and often to those who knew but who had become cold and careless. One does not write to his children to produce life but to show them how to have a good life. One must never confuse a recipe for happiness with the sperm from which he is begotten.

The purpose of the apostolic writings is to bring us together, to aid us in being united. "Complete my joy being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord, of one mind" (Phil. 2:2). "Be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ Jesus forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). "Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).

When we take the scriptures and use them as a club to batter brethren into unwilling conformity, or when we quote them to justify our separations and divisions, we misuse and abuse them. The scriptures are for all, not for a clerical power structure. Every man must be allowed to approach the word of God for himself. The Christian armor is to be worn by every soldier in the ranks and not by an elite corps of self-appointed gladiators.

One exhibits no loyalty for the word of God when he twists and wrests the scriptures to make them do what they were never intended to do. To make them into a legalistic code to stifle thought and enforce rigidity is to do despite to the grace of God. Let the revelation of heaven be what God intended it to be, the means of teaching us to glory in the cross of Christ Jesus.