



As we continue through our series of half-hour studies we might hold with an unbeliever, we've now passed the point of conversion and moved onto instruction in righteousness. The goal is to teach that new Christian what they need to know in order to be faithful to God.

In this, the most obvious verse to start with is 2 Timothy 1:13. Here, Paul tells Timothy that he is supposed to hold to a pattern, a particular way of doing things that Christians are to imitate. The pattern is laid out in sound words, in the teaching of Jesus, Paul, and the rest of the apostles.

In recent years, this idea has come under attack. Many now claim that following the New Testament pattern for our work and our worship is no longer important. As long as we love Jesus, they say, everything else will work itself out.

Is that really so? As disciples of Jesus, should we concern ourselves with the cross and not with the tiny details of Scripture? Or, conversely, is there some reason why we should concern ourselves with the details too? In short, why should a new Christian—indeed, why should we—care about the pattern?

I've got three reasons for you this evening. The first is that caring about the pattern is CONSISTENT. Let's look here at a text that is familiar to many of us, Colossians

3:17. We're not to do some things or even most things in the name of the Lord Jesus. We are supposed to do everything.

There are many points that we could draw from this, but the point that I want to make is that if we do some things in the name of Jesus and not others, we are not being consistent. Why is what the Bible says so important in this one area over here but not in this other area over here?

I think that nearly everybody here this evening would agree that following the New-Testament pattern is important when it comes to conversion. We go to various passages and see that we're supposed to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. That's how you know you've been saved, not because you hear a still small voice in your head, but because you have done what the Bible tells you to do.

We are very suspicious, and rightfully so, of additions to that pattern. For instance, let's say we run into somebody who insists that we can be saved from our sins by praying the sinner's prayer. What do we tell somebody like that? I'll tell you what I'd do. If this were somebody with any Scriptural sophistication at all, I'd hand them a Bible and ask them to prove it

Of course, nobody is going to be able to do that. At that point, though, they're likely to start saying that the Bible never says you can't, either. That's true. I cannot point to a verse that says, "Thou shalt not pray the sinner's prayer in order to be saved." The Scriptures are silent concerning the sinner's prayer, but I don't think any of us would say that such silence makes the sinner's prayer acceptable.

You know what, brethren? If silence doesn't authorize adding to God's plan for salvation, it doesn't authorize adding to God's plan for worship or for the work of the church either. If we honor God's silence in teaching others the truth, to be logically consistent, we must honor it everywhere.

Second, caring about the pattern matters because IT CALLS US TO THE WORD. Consider, for instance, the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:10-11. Paul came to town proclaiming that Jesus was the Christ. The Bereans didn't dismiss his teaching out of hand because they'd never heard it before, nor did they uncritically accept it. Instead, they turned to the word. They examined the Scriptures to determine whether what Paul said was true.

We can just as easily apply the same method to weighing any teaching that we hear. Preacher gets up, says something we've heard all our lives. The fact that we've heard it all our lives is irrelevant. The only thing that matters is whether his sermon stands up to the word.

What if he says something we've never heard before? Doesn't matter. Compare it to the Scriptures, and that will reveal whether we ought to listen.

This word-centric method of discovering truth has two main virtues. First, it means that we can apply an impartial standard to our lives. Now, obviously, not every Scriptural question we have can be answered with certainty. If you think you know for certain what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, I think you're wrong! However, the things that we need to do have been revealed for certain, and if we will agree on following the standard, we can use it to serve God together.

Second, turning to the word is important because it changes us in ways we don't expect. The longer I spend with the Bible, the less I think that it's just a book and the more I think that it's more like a computer program. It's more than a source of information. As we take it into ourselves, it changes us, and the more we turn to it for answers, the greater that change will be.

Finally, we should care about following the pattern because IT HONORS JESUS, NOT OURSELVES. Let's begin our investigation here with Ephesians 5:22-24. In context, Paul is making the point that women are to submit to their husbands as the heads of their families. It's important to note, though, that the example he uses for this submission in everything is the submission of the church to Christ. Clearly, Paul believed that the church too was supposed to submit in everything to Christ.

That's a big deal, brethren, not only for the church but for its members. Everything is everything. This begins with our personal lives. Every decision we make, every hour of the day, is supposed to honor Jesus as Lord. There's a lot of noise on the news these days about how people have the right to control their own bodies. Christians don't. The most intimate decisions we make, those belong to Jesus too.

So too in our churches. We've got a sign out front that says "Church of Christ". Brethren, we can't just say that we belong to Christ. We have to prove it. If everything this church does does not show our submission to Jesus as Lord, that sign out front is nothing more than an empty boast.

OK, but how do we know? How do we know whether in our personal lives and in our church we are submitting to Christ? Simple. We know we are honoring Him as Lord when we do what He says. There's no other way.

If I've got this great idea for how I should live my personal life, and I can't point to anything in Scripture that says it's a great idea, that's a problem. If I put it into practice, I'm not honoring Jesus. I'm honoring me.

Same goes for our conduct in the church. There are all kinds of things that we might do in our assemblies. There are all kinds of things that we might do with the Lord's money. However, unless we are taking our marching orders from Jesus in those things, we are not honoring Him. Honoring Jesus means following the pattern. Anything else is about exalting ourselves.

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