

new things amongst those already fixed and established; and where there is no law there can be no transgression, for a transgression is a leaping over or a violating of legal restraints. Those, then, who contend that there is no divinely authorized order for Christian worship in Christian- assemblies, do at the same time, and must inevitably maintain, that there is no disorder, no error, no innovation, no transgression in the worship of the Christian Church – no, nor ever can be. This is reducing one side of the dilemma to what may be called a perfect absurdity” (*Christian Baptist*, Vol. 2, pp. 239-243).

If there is no pattern, Campbell pointed out that various assemblies of worship could be devoted to nothing but dancing, singing, shouting, running, lying prostrate on the ground, reading, listening to a speaker, sitting silently, waving palm branches, crying, or playing an organ. To exclude any act from worship, a person must refer to some fixed standard.

Ephraim’s idols originated in a spirit that refused to be restrained by a set pattern of teaching. The same spirit is producing the same results today. Ultimately, nothing revealed in the New Testament can escape the destructive hand directed by the spirit of no-pattern-ism. The only way to avoid the total destruction of New Testament faith and practice is to hold fast the pattern of sound words.

Truth Magazine, 8 Mar. 1979, pp. 165-166).
Guardian of Truth XXXIV:13 (July 5, 1990), pp. 404-405

News & Notes

Please pray for our gospel meeting; April 15-20. John Isaac Edwards will be doing the preaching. Make plans to attend every session!

Please consider donating funds to Zach & Taya Martin. Zach is a medical student and he and his wife Taya are planning to assist Ron Halbrook on one of his preaching trips to the Philippines. The Martins are worthy of our support. You can contact Zach at: zcmartin30@gmail.com.

Please pray for one another! “comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Please pray for Ryan & Jennifer and the brethren of the Northern Michigan church of Christ. They are now meeting in their newly purchased building in Roscommon, Michigan.

Please keep sisters Virginia Brown and Wilma Cardwell in your prayers. Their faithfulness sets such a good example and gives encouragement to all! Ditto for Al (our Barnabas!).

Pray for all the lost souls, especially those in the greater Bloomington area. Pray that Westside might be an influence for good in this community.

Pray for the all of our students: elementary, secondary and college. Our young people face many trials and temptations at school.

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“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

John 6:68

Can You Hear Me Now?

Ryan J. Thomas

One of the greatest books in the entire Bible is the book of Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah and the book that bears his name make for a unique and fascinating study. The time of Isaiah’s work spanned an era that lasted approximately 50 years from roughly 745 to 695 B.C. Isaiah was specifically chosen by God to testify against His people (both Israel and Judah) at a time when they had departed from following Him. Due to the fact that both nations were guilty of disobedience and had corrupted themselves in the abominable practices of their heathen neighbors, the time had finally come for God to pass sentence and execute divine judgment upon His erring, rebellious children. Ironically, they would be judged by the very same law which they had cast behind their backs in their relentless pursuit of idolatry and false religion. Just like their godless, heathen neighbors, the nation of Israel had chosen to honor and serve the works of their own hands rather than the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. In their arrogance, they chose instead to bow down to their useless, lifeless statues. It was because of this that the prophet Isaiah was commissioned by God to testify against the sin and wickedness of his own countrymen and urge them to repent. At the same time, he warned them of their rapidly approaching destruction at the hands of the cruel Assyrian army who was the emerging world power of the time.

In Isaiah 28 we’re faced with the situation that’s described in verses 7 and 8. The rulers of the people had failed miserably in their responsibility to lead the people through precept and example and are described and denounced in the following language: “*But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean.*” The text says one reason why they had failed to faithfully discharge their God-given duty as shepherds was because of the intoxicating effects of alcohol. This had seriously impaired their thinking. No wonder the wise man Solomon said what he did in Proverbs 31:4-6: “*It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.*” (For a lengthier description of the effects of liquor read Proverbs 23:29-35)

It was in this sorry and sloppy condition that they criticized the preaching of the prophet. Essentially, their chief complaint was that his message was far too simple and

monotonous. You might even call it boring. To them, it was a message fit only for the minds of small children as it merely consisted of “precept upon precept,” “line upon line,” and “here a little, there a little.” In other words, they believed his teaching was far too primitive to be of any practical use to them. They felt its elementary precepts were more suitable for a kindergarten classroom than the prestigious universities of their religious elite of which they routinely and confidently boasted. In their defiance, they openly mocked and ridiculed God’s holy prophet. Because of their brazen attitude, the Lord had devised a much more effective means of communication - the language of their Assyrian captors! Misery, death, and destruction are a powerful language that people of any nation can easily comprehend and one for which no translation is necessary! As they were led into captivity marching single file with literal fishhooks in their lips (Amos 4:2), God would be teaching them a lesson they would not soon forget effectively saying to them, “Can you hear me now?” This would indeed be a “*strange act*” (Isa. 28:21)!

Even today, men continue to rail against the gospel message because of its childlike simplicity. They mock our five-step salvation and simple New Testament worship. They ridicule the way we establish Bible authority using direct commands, approved examples, and necessary inference. They scoff at the notion that many honest and sincere people will be lost come Judgment Day (Matt. 7:21-23). They reject the simple pattern and organization of the New Testament church with saints, bishops, and deacons in every congregation (Phil. 1:1), choosing instead to mold it according to their own carnal desires. Nor will they accept the limitations and restrictions imposed upon this Holy Institution by God’s word, instead opting to expand its work into areas Christ never intended (Eph. 4:11-12). And, just like Israel, they refuse to make any correction. Even though they may not listen now, we can rest assured there is Someone they will listen to!

Let us not be of the class of individuals of whom Isaiah wrote when he said, “*For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.*” It’s absolutely vital that we learn to listen and obey now while we have opportunity before it is everlasting too late (2 Cor. 6:2)!

Either There Is a Pattern, or There Is Not

Ron Halbrook

The only sure and safe way to avoid all forms of religious idolatry is to follow the New Testament pattern of faith and practice. Unity blesses those who adhere to that standard. Naturally, they will be separated from all who act upon some other principle. The Holy Spirit admonished first-century Christians to hold fast the form or “*pattern of sound words*” (2 Tim. 1:13). The pattern was binding and exclusive, not optional. Timothy was to charge hearers to “*teach no other doctrine*” (1 Tim. 1:3).

The message inspired by the Holy Spirit was first proclaimed through apostolic men, then presented in writing. This inspired Word constituted the pattern. “*These things write I unto thee . . . that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:14-15). The things proclaimed by apostolic men and presented in writing by them were all-sufficient, and binding for all ages (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:12-15). The pattern of sound words revealed the will of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the life and work of Jesus Christ; the scheme of redemption; the conditions of pardon; the graces of godliness to be

developed in our lives; the origin, work, worship, organization, doctrine, and discipline of the church; and the hope of eternal life.

Many churches of Christ are slipping away from the New Testament pattern and separating themselves from the Lord (Rev. 2:5). An excellent tract by Cecil Willis identifies “The Taproot of Digression: No-Pattern-ism.”

“The history of man is the history of his digressions from God’s divine will. Man has, at one time or another, perverted and polluted every divine provision of God. He has corrupted the sacred worship, distorted the organization of the church, and perverted the divine mission of the church. Again and again, man has changed the unchangeable. Herein has been the source of a multitude of digressions.”

Brother Willis then explained, “The basic assumption of the digressive is that there is no New Testament binding pattern.” The question of “freedom” and “unity” are always raised by the digressive. He wants “freedom” to change the New Testament pattern, and considers those who deny this freedom as disturbers of the peace. Faithful men recognize that in adhering to the pattern there is freedom from the chaos of idolatry. Either there is a pattern or there is not; here are two irreconcilable concepts of what it means to serve God.

Leroy Garrett argues, “Those who look for a ‘fixed pattern’ might well give up their search. There is no pattern of Christian worship in the Scriptures.” There being no pattern of what must be done, none of the following can be excluded: “coffee and doughnut session” as part of “social or corporate worship,” “children’s church,” “a symbolic candle-lighting to enhance the Supper,” “choirs,” “counseling and group therapy,” and, of course, instrumental music (*Restoration Review*, October, 1978, pp. 142-146). Garrett thrilled to report, “A church of Christ in the Dallas area recently had a candle lighting as part of its worship and edification” (p. 160). It is not deviation from the pattern which causes division, he says; rather, the “fatal error” is “restorationism,” the idea that “the New Testament constitutes a fixed pattern,” also called “legalism” (p. 148). Carl Ketcherside reports that he had a private, true conversion experience 27 March 1951, escaping “legalism and tradition,” while Robert Meyers explained that he only gradually reached “the wisdom of uncertainty,” “Christian” agnosticism, the concept that “one can never know very much for sure” (pp. 152-158). These men have tested the heady wine of no-pattern-ism and gotten gloriously drunk on it.

In discussing “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things,” a young preacher named Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) wrote in 1825 that before inquiring “what was the ancient order of worship . . . it may be expedient to consider whether there be any divinely authorized worship in the assembly of the saints.” He saw two irreconcilable answers: ‘Either there is a divinely authorized order of Christian worship in Christian assemblies, or there is not. “ Campbell then reduced no-pattern-ism to its logical absurdity, as follows:

“On the supposition that there is not, then the following absurdities are inevitable. There can be no disorder in the Christian assembly, there can be no error in the acts of social worship; there can be no innovation in the department of observances; there can be no transgression of the laws of the King. For these reasons, viz. Where there is no order established there can be no disorder, for disorder is acting contrary to established order; where there is no standard there can be no error, for error is a departure or a wandering from a standard; where there is nothing fixed there can be no innovation, for to innovate is to introduce