

1. Apostolic Traditions of Church Practice

(New Testament Patterns)

INTRODUCTION: Suppose a newly planted, first century church in Alexandria, Egypt wrote a letter to the apostles over in Jerusalem. In this letter was a series of questions about church life:

What should we **do** when we meet as a church?

Why do we meet?

How often should we meet?

Does it matter **where** we meet?

What type of church **government** should we have?

What should we look for in a church **leader**?

Do we even **need** leaders?

Does it matter how often we eat the **Lord's Supper**?

How should we eat the Lord's Supper (what **form** should it take)?"

THE PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION: *How would the apostles have answered their letter?*

1.) Would they have written that each church was free to do whatever it wanted to do? That each church should just pray and follow the Holy Spirit's leading? That each congregation should be unique and different? That they should be free of outside influence?

2.) Or, might the apostles have answered with very specific instructions? With a particular way of doing things? With a definite agenda? With very particular guidelines?

THE PROBLEM: A problem faced by all believers for the past 2,000 years concerns exactly what we should do about New Testament patterns for church life.

•Should we follow these patterns?

•Are New Testament patterns optional or imperative?

•Are they merely interesting history or should they constitute some kind of normative church practice?

This problem is compounded because the New Testament has almost nothing to say by way of direct command concerning ecclesiology. Currently, it is popular to dismiss New Testament patterns as optional.

SLIDE: Fee & Stuart quote.

Fee and Stuart, in *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, correctly state: "Our assumption, along with many others, is that *unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is merely narrated or described can never function in a normative way*" (p. 97, first edition). We are not to be monkey-see, monkey-do readers of the Bible. No one, for instance, would advocate following Jephthah's example in Judges 11:29ff. The question for us is whether or not Scripture "explicitly tells us" that we "must" copy the patterns for church described in the New Testament.

Suppose we “bought into” the notion that New Testament patterns are not to be normative. Into what might this lead us?

1. We could construct a massive, opulent **cathedral** and post on its walls our motto, “Nothing But Positive Command Shall Bind Us” (that should really pack the pews!).
2. We could meet on **Tuesdays** rather than on Sunday, the Lord’s Day (this way we will have less competition from the mainline churches; we will be the un-church).
3. We could meet **monthly**, rather than weekly (this will be more to the liking of the modern generation, which dislikes commitment).
4. We might also opt to have **no leaders** of any kind (no pastors, no elders, no deacons) since nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to have any. This will be popular in America, the land of rugged individualism.
5. We could have absolutely no form of church government whatsoever; ours will be rule by **anarchy** (every man can just do what is right in his own eyes and we can fulfill Jdg 21:25).
6. The Lord’s Supper can be celebrated every **ten years** or so (we wouldn’t want it to become too common and lose its significance).
7. Since the New Testament does not specifically prohibit it, we can swell our membership ranks by **baptizing infants** or the deceased (1Co 15:29!).
8. Finally, new believers will be organized into loose confederations of **Bible studies**, not official churches (the New Testament never states we must form churches).

Obviously, this hypothetical “church” would be quite absurd. Yet, it would violate no positive command of Scripture. What would be missing is at least a partial adherence to New Testament patterns of ecclesiology.

Most churches do follow *some* of the patterns of the New Testament, but not all. The question is, *why not?* That which is argued for in this study is consistency. We propose that the apostles had a definite, very particular way they organized churches, and they intended for all churches to follow these same apostolic patterns, even today. The following study is evidence for our proposal. The paramount reason to adopt apostolic traditions is to honor Christ as the Head, the Leader, the King, the Bridegroom, besides being Lamb and Redeemer. If Jesus is not the One we are revolving around, all scriptural practice is only a false display without real spiritual life. We are called to be His hands, feet and mouth in this world, doing what He initiates. Without Christ as the center, anything we do would be just legalism and lifeless form.

— I. Holding to New Testament patterns is **LOGICAL** —

SLIDE: Logical

******In 1 Corinthians 4:14-17, why did Paul send Timothy to Corinth? 4:17.**

Paul wanted Timothy to model, and thus remind, the Corinthians of Paul’s life-style of humility and faithfulness as a servant of Christ.

What is the basic command in 1 Corinthians 4:16?

In 1 Corinthians 4:17b, what was Paul's way of life in Christ consistent with? It was consistent with ("agrees with") what Paul taught. There was integrity.

SLIDE: Form Follows Function

TRUTH: It is an engineering axiom that "form follows function." What does this mean?

SLIDE: Fertilizer

If my function is to sell fertilizer (*and I get accused of spreading around a lot of fertilizer!*)

SLIDE: Farmers

Then my form will be to call on farmers

SLIDE: Ballet

Not to call on ballet studios!

How can "form follows function" be seen at work in Paul's ministry as described in 1 Corinthians 4:16-17? Paul's way of life (form) was in agreement with what he taught (function) everywhere in every church. There was a uniformity of practice that grew out of Paul's teachings. His belief determined his behavior. His doctrine determined his duty.

PARALLEL APPLICATION: Similarly, the apostles' beliefs about the **function** of the church would naturally have affected the way they organized churches (the **form** of the church). Thus, we argue that: (see slide)

SLIDE: The function of a New Testament church is best carried out by the New Testament form of the church.

1. What uniformity of church practice could be deduced from 1 Corinthians 4:16-17? The immediate context concerns Paul's faithfulness in service and his humility as an apostle. Though the direct import of 1 Corinthians 4 is far afield from church practice, to also imitate the apostles' ways regarding church life would be a wise choice for any fellowship.

******Why, according to Titus 1:5, did Paul leave Titus in Crete?**

SLIDE: Titus 1:5

"The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished" (NIV)

Teacher's Note: Jump ahead and deal with question 12 at this point:

12. What does Titus 1:5 imply about uniformity of practice in the early church?

Titus 1 is a passage that does deal directly with church practice. It concerns the appointment of qualified elders in every city.

THE POINT: It is evident from Titus 1:5 that the apostles did indeed have a definite way they wanted things done. It was not left up to each individual church to find its own way of doing things!

SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 11:34

“The rest I will *set in order* when I come” (KJV, italics mine).

1 Corinthians 11:34 is a passage about the practice of the Lord’s Supper, another church life topic. There was obviously some kind of order, pattern, or tradition that was followed in organizing the churches.

SLIDE: J.L. Dagg Quote

J. L. Dagg, the first Southern Baptist theologian who ever really wrote anything, a founding member of First Baptist Church of Atlanta and professor of theology at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, wrote in 1858 that: “they (the Apostles) have taught us by example how to organize and govern churches. We have no right to reject their instruction and captiously insist that nothing but positive command shall bind us. Instead of choosing to walk in a way of our own devising, we should take pleasure to walk in the footsteps of those holy men from whom we have received the word of life . . . respect for the Spirit by which they were led should induce us to prefer their modes of organization and government to such as our inferior wisdom might suggest” (Manual of Church Order, p. 84-86).

— II. Holding to apostolic traditions is **PRAISEWORTHY** —

SLIDE: PRAISEWORTHY

******Whose example did Paul want the Corinthians to follow (1Co 10:31-11:1)?**
11:1.

2. In 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, why did Paul want the Corinthians to follow his example?

The immediate context concerned doing everything to God’s glory, and not causing anyone to stumble. The word “follow” (11:1) is from *mimatai*, basis for our word “mimic.”

The Issue: Is this the only area that in which we should follow Paul’s example?

TRANSITION: This command for them to mimic Paul in glorifying God evidently brought to mind a situation the Corinthians were dealing with in another area, and so he began a **new** topic of discussion in 11:2ff (Christian order; head coverings; see the next question below).

******In 1 Corinthians 11:2, why did Paul praise the Corinthians?**

What does the word “everything” (1Co 11:2) mean? The word “everything” means “all that exists” or at least “all that pertains to the subject” (Webster).

Does this mean we all need to be tent makers? No, of course not.

When Paul wrote “everything” (1Co 11:2), what did he have in mind?

How might “everything” (11:2) apply to church order? It suggests that Paul’s intended application was larger than just the exhortation found in 10:31-11:1 (bringing glory to God). He is now about to move on to a new topic: Divine Order or Head Coverings. This is very much a church practice issue.

3. In 1 Corinthians 11:2, what is the general difference between “teachings” (NIV) and “traditions” (NASV)? Do a word study.

SLIDE: TEACHING VS TRADITION?

SLIDE: TEACHING/*didaké*

The regular Greek word for “teaching” is *didaké* (basis for “didactic”), but that is not the word used here.

SLIDE: Acts 2:42

SLIDE: Tradition/*paradosis*

Instead, *paradosis* (“tradition”) is used. Thus, the NASV has “traditions” here instead of “teachings” (NIV).

SLIDE: Tradition defined.

In English, a tradition is usually thought of as a custom or way of doing things that is handed down. Webster’s says it is an inherited pattern of thought or action.

SLIDE: Fiddler On The Roof

SLIDE: *paradosis* defined

A tradition is “that which is handed down” (information, custom), according to BAGD, p. 615. While we think of tradition as involving a practice, it can also be a teaching that is handed down.

SLIDE: 1. Practice 2. Teaching

SLIDE: 1. Practice

This same Greek word (in verb form) is used in **1 Corinthians 11:23** in regard to the Lord's Supper (that it was "passed on") .

SLIDE: 2. Teaching

Paradosis was a technical term in Judaism for oral transmission of religious instruction

SLIDE: SUMMARY

That which is handed over could be:

- 1.) The tradition of a certain custom or way of doing things (such as Lord's Supper).
- 2.) The tradition of a certain teaching (as in Judaism)

SLIDE: Fee Quote

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Gordon Fee pointed out that although the Greek word for tradition, *paradosis*, was a technical term in Judaism for oral transmission of religious instruction, in this context it almost certainly does not refer to teaching, but rather to religious traditions regarding worship (*New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 499).

SLIDE: DISCLAIMER

DISCLAIMER: We are *not* herein advocating the supposed apostolic tradition found in church history as claimed by Greek Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. Instead, we promote *only* those apostolic traditions that can be found in the pages of the New Testament. It is our privilege to leave the muddied water of church history and drink at the pure spring water of inspired New Testament writings.

What do the words "just as" (11:2) indicate about the degree of their compliance with Paul's traditions? They adhered to every iota; it was sort of a photocopy effect! Paul praised them for holding to his traditions "just as" (*kathos*) he passed them on to them. The apostles evidently designed for the churches to mimic the traditions (inherited patterns) they established. The particular issue dealt with in 1Co 11 is a woman's head covering.

SLIDE: What application could be drawn from the fact that the word "traditions" (11:2) is in the plural?

SLIDE: Paul had in mind more than the one tradition of head coverings. He was pleased that the church held to all of his traditions for church practice.

4. Comparing 1 Corinthians 11:2 to Matthew 15:1-3, what interesting paradox can be observed about religious tradition? The same word (*paradosis*) used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:2 is used by Jesus in **Matthew 15:1-3** when He said to the Pharisees:

SLIDE: "why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?"

SLIDE: Jesus blasted the tradition of the Pharisees, Paul blessed the Corinthians for following the tradition of an apostle.

SLIDE: Some Jewish traditions broke the command of God. All apostolic traditions are consistent with the commands of Jesus.

5. KEY IDEA: Based on 1 Corinthians 11:2, what attitude did the apostles have regarding churches following their way of doing things?

SLIDE: The Paradigm Principle.

The Paradigm Principle. Mosaic legislation was **paradigmatic** in nature. It was **case law, law by example**. Only a few, sample, legal examples were recorded by Moses. The believer was expected to apply those case studies to other areas of life not specifically mentioned. For instance, the corners of fields were to be left unharvested for the poor to gather and eat. Nothing was said about olive groves. Does this mean that a wheat farmer alone was burdened with feeding the poor, but that the man with an olive grove could harvest every last olive? Certainly not. Every farmer, regardless of the crop, was to leave a similar portion of his harvest to meet the needs of the poor. Similarly:

SLIDE: We argue that adherence to apostolic tradition is paradigmatic in nature. If we observe that the apostles were pleased when churches followed specific traditions, then we are expected to apply that example to other patterns we see modeled by the apostles in their establishment of churches.

— III. Holding to apostolic traditions was UNIVERSAL —

SLIDE: Universal

******In 1 Corinthians 11:16, how did Paul quiet those inclined to be contentious?**

6. What does 1 Corinthians 11:16 indicate in principle about uniformity of practice in New Testament churches?

NOTE: The point is that Paul expected all churches to be doing the same thing. Just to realize that one was “different” was argument enough to silence opposition. (It is beyond the scope of this study to deal with the particulars of head coverings.)

******Based on 1 Corinthians 14:33b-34, what was true in all congregations?**

Without dealing here with this passage’s specific meaning, notice how Paul again appealed to a universal pattern that existed in all the churches as a basis for conformity.

Note: As with 1 Corinthians 11, this passage deals also directly with church practice issues.

7. What does 1 Corinthians 14:33b-34 reveal about uniformity of practice in New Testament churches?

******What is the answer to the two questions in 1 Corinthians 14:36?**

How does 14:36 constitute a chide?

8. How does Paul's chide in 1 Corinthians 14:36 reveal that a uniformity of practice was the norm among New Testament churches? The chide was for doing something different than what the other churches were doing. Evidently all the churches were expected to follow the same patterns in their ecclesiology.

SLIDE: Jim Elliot Quote

Jim Elliot, missionary martyr, wrote, "The pivot point hangs on whether or not God has revealed a universal pattern for the church in the New Testament. If He has not, then anything will do so long as it works. But I am convinced that nothing so dear to the heart of Christ as His Bride should be left without explicit instructions as to her corporate conduct. I am further convinced that the 20th century has in no way simulated this pattern in its method of 'churching' a community . . . it is incumbent upon me, if God has a pattern for the church, to find and establish that pattern, at all costs" (*Shadow of The Almighty: Life and Testimony of Jim Elliot*).

IV. Holding to apostolic traditions brings God's PEACEFUL PRESENCE

SLIDE: PEACEFUL PRESENCE

******According to Philippians 4:8-9, how can a church get into a position for God to be with them?** The Philippians were to put into practice "whatever" they learned, received, heard or saw from Paul.

SLIDE: "Whatever"

What is the general context of Philippians 4:8-9? Life-style issues: putting others first, holding forth the light of the gospel, rejoicing despite our circumstances, boasting in Christ rather than our self righteousness, etc.

9. How might Philippians 4:9 apply to us today with respect to the way we see that Paul organized churches? The primary application in context concerned imitating Christ's humility, putting others first, and rejoicing in the Lord. But by extension could this *whatever* not also include the way we see in the New Testament that Paul organized churches?

SLIDE: Watchman Nee Quote

Watchman Nee in *The Church And The Work: Rethinking The Work*, wrote, “Acts is the ‘genesis’ of the church’s history, and the Church in the time of Paul is the ‘genesis’ of the Spirit’s work . . . we must return to ‘the beginning.’ Only what God has set forth as our example in the beginning is the eternal Will of God. It is the Divine standard and our pattern for all time . . . God has revealed His Will, not only by giving orders, but by having certain things done in His church, so that in the ages to come others might simply look at the pattern and know His will” (p. 8-9).

— **V. Holding to apostolic tradition is COMMANDED** —

SLIDE: Commanded

******Examine 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15. Since God had chosen the Thessalonians to be saved, what were they commanded to do? 2:15.**

10. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15, what does the word “teachings” (NIV) or “traditions” (NASV) mean? Do a word study. This is the same Greek word, *paradosis*, used in 1 Corinthians 11:2. The Thessalonians were specifically commanded to follow, to hold to, the “traditions” of the apostles, whether received by mouth or by letter (whether oral or written).

The overall context of 2 Thessalonians 2 refers to their traditions about end-time events, and not specifically to church practice. **Yet would it not also apply in principle to their traditions regarding church order, as patterned in the New Testament?**

The word “traditions” is again in the plural; the author clearly had more in view than merely the one tradition about the Second Coming. Later, in 3:6-10, it was used with reference to life-style issues. The command applies to all their traditions.

APPLICATION: Today we do not have any apostolic information received by mouth, but we do have their letters. We are to hold to the traditions found in those letters. This would include both their theology and their practice.

11. Many believers feel that while apostolic traditions are interesting, following them is never commanded. What does 2 Thessalonians 2:15 indicate about this issue? Is adherence to the traditions commanded or suggested? See 1Th 2:13-14, 2Th 3:6-7. Significantly, it is clearly commanded!

******What “traditions” (NASV) did the apostles pass on in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13?**

The specific context here refers to gainfully working versus being idle and lazy, but the principle still holds true: the apostles generally wanted the churches to follow, to hold to, to mimic, their traditions (in work ethics, end time events, and church practice).

QUOTES: Roger Williams, founder not only of Rhode Island but also of the very first Baptist church in North America (1600s), believed that churches should strive for as

near approximate as possible to New Testament forms and ordinances (*Liberty of Conscience*, p. 106). This belief led Williams to resign as an Anglican clergyman and also to found Rhode Island on the New Testament pattern of a separation between church and state.

12. Teacher's note: this question was moved up after the first question.

13. **What gave the twelve apostles authority to establish patterns that all churches are obliged to follow? See Jn 13:20, 15:20, Ac 1:1-3, 2:42.**

NOTE: More will be studied about the Twelve in a later lesson.

SLIDE: What conclusion can be draw about God's desire for the modern church to follow New Testament patterns for church practice?

14. **PERSPECTIVE: Based on the above study, what can be concluded about God's interest in the modern church adhering to New Testament patterns for church practice?** It seems evident that whatever was normative church practice for all the churches in the New Testament should be normative practice for churches today. It was precisely these patterns of ecclesiology that gave the New Testament church the dynamic that today's church has been missing for so long!

SUMMARY: If the Bible directly commands something, then we obviously ought to follow that command. *Significantly, the Bible commands adherence to the traditions of the apostles.* If, however, the Bible is silent about something (i.e., there is neither command nor pattern to follow), then we have the freedom to do whatever suits us (following the wisdom of the Holy Spirit). The real question thus is not, "Do we *have* to do things the way they were done in the New Testament?" The question is: "Why would we want to do things any other way?!" The burden of explanation and concerned questions ought to fall upon those who deviate from New Testament patterns, not upon those who seek to keep them.

SLIDE: Fee & Stuart Revised Quote

Remember Fee & Stuart's statement about New Testament patterns? Their latest edition adds a significant phrase, not found in the first edition. It now reads, "*unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative way — unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way*" (p. 106, second edition). Their modified position allows for the importance of holding to apostolic tradition.

CAUTION #1: Beware of making patterns out of things that are **one time events**. For instance, the Christian communalism of Ac 6 was a one time event for a single

church. It is an option for any believers of any age, but it is neither a command nor a New Testament pattern. The same could be said of Paul's vow in Acts not to cut his hair.

CAUTION #2: Beware of making patterns out of **silence**. Some feel that not only must we follow New Testament patterns, but we that we also do not have the freedom to do anything that was not done by the early church. They believe that if a practice is not found in the New Testament, then we can't do it; it is forbidden. For instance, if the New Testament is silent about using musical instruments, then we must not use them. We disagree with this approach. The lack of mention of a practice is not proof that the early church did not practice it! This negative approach is essentially a form of legalism and leads easily to a critical and judgmental spirit toward others. Instead of seeking to positively follow what clearly are New Testament patterns, advocates of this negative hermeneutic are known for all the things that they are against (anti-this, anti-that).

CAUTION #3. Beware of developing an attitude of **pride or legalism**. Darryl Erkel has pointed out the “danger of making distinctive New Testament patterns a form of legalism wherein we begin to look down or distance ourselves from our fellow brothers because they don't quite do it the way that we think it should be done. We should always be careful to not give the impression to others that their church is false or that God can't use their church because they're not following Apostolic patterns as closely as we are. That is nothing but sheer pride! On the other hand, we ought to look for opportunities to respectfully and tactfully demonstrate that there is a better way — one which is more conducive to the spiritual growth of God's people — for the **function** of the New Testament church is best carried out by the New Testament **form** of the church!”

15. The Roman world is gone forever; what is the difference between holding to apostolic tradition and mindlessly copying everything seen in the New Testament (wearing sandals, writing on parchment, studying by oil lamps, wearing togas, etc.)? The key is to focus in on New Testament religious practices, especially (but not only) those that went against the culture of their day. For instance, if the Romans had electric lighting and if instead of using electric lights the Christians lit their meetings by oil lamps, then that should get our attention! By way of contrast, there was nothing religious nor out of the ordinary in wearing togas, so there is no need for us to do so today. Another example would be the use of guitars in modern meetings; since they did not use them in New Testament times, does this mean that we should not either? Since guitars were not yet invented, the real question is whether they used instruments at all. The word for “psalm” is *psalmos* and means “song of praise”; the original meaning of *psallo* was “pluck, play” (a stringed instrument), a meaning that persisted into the second century A.D. (BAGD, p. 891). If instruments were not used in New Testament church meetings, then arguably they went against their culture in not using them and thus neither should we. If, however, instruments were used, then a guitar would be perfectly acceptable today.

16. Read the chapter entitled, “Apostolic Traditions: Obsolete?” in *House Church: Simple, Strategic, Scriptural*. What are some possible apostolic traditions that should still be binding on the church today?

17. How can we determine what is and is not an intended tradition? The tradition of the Twelve will: **1.)** Originate from the original twelve apostles, **2.)** Apply to all New Testament churches, **3.)** Cross cultural boundaries & transcend language differences, **4.)** Pass from spiritual generation to spiritual generation, **5.)** Have a reasonable, obvious purpose (it is not mindless aping).

SLIDE: What are some apostolic traditions that should still be followed today?

SLIDE: 1. The Lord’s Supper

- a. An actual meal ~ rehearsal dinner for the marriage banquet of the Lamb. It is a sacred, covenant feast, a holy meal
- b. A time of fellowship and encouragement
- c. Celebrated weekly
- d. The main reason for gathering each week

SLIDE: 2. “Worship Services”

- a. Style: *Participatory* ~ not a service at all
- b. Goal: *Mutual edification* ~ not worship
- c. Emphasis: *One Another* ~ not one man

SLIDE: 3. Church Government

- Elder-led congregational consensus
- Not elder rule
 - Not majority rule

SLIDE: 4. House Churches vs. Church Houses

micro vs mega

SLIDE: 5. Gathering Weekly On The Lord’s Day

As opposed to monthly or on some other day of the week.

SLIDE: 6. Community Church

A community based church (daily fellowship) vs. one that is geographically dispersed (Sunday only fellowship). A community church vs a commuter church.

SLIDE: 7. Itinerant Workers

Church reproduction and strengthening through the ministry of itinerant church workers (apostles, pastor-teachers, evangelists, etc.).

SLIDE: 8. Believer’s baptism.

The baptism of believers only vs. infant baptism.

SLIDE: 9. Separation of Church & State

The separation of church and state vs. state controlled or funded churches.

SLIDE: 10. Regenerate Church Body

A regenerate church body vs. a failure to exercise church discipline.

SLIDE: 11. Uniting of Church & Family

Children present in the church meeting vs. being shunted into Sunday school or children's church.

SLIDE: 12. Distinguishing Church Meetings from Ministry Meetings

A distinction between church meetings and ministry meetings. Special times devoted to the ministry of Bible teaching that are distinct from the regular church meeting.

SLIDE: APPLICATION

APPLICATION: What we have argued for here is consistency. Most churches already follow some of these patterns, but not all. The question is, why not? This consistency is especially important since the apostles expected for all churches to follow their traditions "just as" they were handed down. Of course, Jesus must be the center of a church or none of this will work anyway. It would blow apart! As He said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing."

SLIDE: TIRE

ALIGNMENT EXAMPLE: A car with its front end out of alignment will still take its driver where he wants to go, but at a price: prematurely worn and damaged tires. Similarly a church that neglects apostolic patterns is still a church, much good can come from and through that church, but at a price. Damage is being done. At the least blessings are being missed. More significantly, people are being hurt, damaged, worn out.

— Conclusions —

SLIDES: CONCLUSIONS (5 points)

1. **God directs by patterns** (traditions) as well as by precept (teaching).
2. The church life patterns in the New Testament are **generally applicable** for the church in all ages and places.
3. Apostolic traditions are **consistent** with apostolic teachings.
4. The **most important** New Testament patterns are: the celebration of the Lord's Supper weekly as an actual meal (rehearsal dinner for the marriage banquet of the Lamb!), participatory church meetings, elder-led congregational consensus and home-based, home-sized churches (micro churches rather than mega churches).
5. Without **Christ at the center** of things, the patterns become legalism and death, a hollow form, an empty shell. We need the proper wine skin, but more importantly we need the wine. Both have their place. Either one without the other is problematic.

Other considerations:

Following New Testament patterns does not mean blindly **attempting to recreate Roman culture** (like wearing togas, writing on parchment, lighting by oil lamps, etc.). The issue here is church practice. There should be obvious reasons behind the practices being followed.

Following New Testament patterns **does not mean every church will be exactly alike** (cookie cutter). Certainly there will be similarity in the basics (see summary # 4 above), but there is also freedom within the boundaries of the form (like in music, food, clothing styles, etc.).

A word of balance: The early church was not nearly so program and building oriented as many traditional churches are. Because of this, some have mistakenly concluded that NTRF is against organization. Faithfulness to our Lord and His Word necessarily results in a church that follows God's complete pattern for His people. We are not institutional, but we are to be organized. Following the traditions laid down by the apostles means that churches are to have definite leaders, regular and orderly meetings, active church discipline, and weekly Lord's Supper celebrations.

PRACTICAL CONCERNS: What do you do if you find yourself in a church that neglects New Testament patterns?

1. Do not get cynical, angry, nor bitter. Most believers are blissfully unaware of the importance of following New Testament patterns. Keeping the proper attitude and spirit is of paramount importance.
2. Keep quiet for a year or two until you get over the initial euphoria of having discovered a new truth. Take time to ground yourself in what the Bible teaches about the church. Calm down, and be sure you are clothed and in your right mind!
3. When you do finally speak to your church about this, talk privately, humbly, and respectfully to the leadership about your new understanding. Do not expect them to agree with you, especially at first, and maybe not at all. Nobody likes change, and the leaders will have a vested interest in the *status quo*. Further, pastors are by temperament conservative and like stability. Frankly, some seminary trained, full time pastors will look down on mere "laymen" (who lack professional training) and discount the truths that they discover in Scripture.
4. If the church leadership does listen and agrees to consider New Testament patterns, continue to be patient. Work with them, not against them! As long as there is hope for significant change, hang in there.
5. If, in the final analysis, the church will not consider adopting the patterns of the New Testament, then ask them to send you out to start a new work. Seek their blessing. Do not be factious nor divisive. They are your brothers in Christ, not your enemies.
6. If they will not bless you in your efforts to begin a Biblical church, it is still important to leave quietly, not causing a ruckus. Doubtless your disappointment will be great, but it is critical to maintain a good attitude (1Pe 3:8-22). Remember that God is sovereign over all men. It is His church anyhow and He is not worried about a thing! Remember also that you have planted many seeds that may grow and bear fruit in the future.

7. Realize that not everyone is equally gifted to start or lead a church. You may be better served (and able to serve) by seeking out an existing church that goes closer by New Testament patterns than the one you are currently involved with. Just do the best you can as you pray and fast!

FINESSE: Darryl Erkel has observed, "It's important to keep in mind that as believers under the New Covenant age, God does not always give us precise or exact commands of what and how we should always do things, but often chooses to give us general principles which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and some sanctified wisdom, we are to apply for the benefit of the church. Part of this may be due to the fact that God knew that His people would sometimes find themselves in unique situations which might possibly require a temporary shift in their practice. Thus, in His wisdom, God set forth general ecclesiological patterns and principles that the church would have to work out depending upon where they were and what threats confronted them."

**** = Ask this question before having someone read the text aloud; it introduces a new passage of Scripture.

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1. Apostolic Traditions (New Testament Patterns)

1. What uniformity of church practice is implied in 1 Corinthians 4:16-17?
2. In 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, why did Paul want the Corinthians to follow him?

11. Many believers feel that while apostolic traditions are interesting, following them is never commanded. What does 2 Thessalonians 2:15 indicate about this issue? Compare 1Th 2:13-14, 2Th 3:6-7.

12. What gave the twelve apostles authority to establish patterns that all churches are obliged to follow? See Jn 13:20, 15:20, Ac 1:1-3, 2:42.

13. Based on the above study, what can be concluded about God's interest in the modern church adhering to New Testament patterns for church practice?

14. The Roman world is gone forever; what is the difference between holding to apostolic traditions and mindlessly copying everything seen in the New Testament (wearing sandals, writing on parchment, studying by oil lamps, wearing togas, etc.)?

15. How can we determine what is and is not an intended tradition?

16. Read the chapter entitled, "Apostolic Tradition: Obsolete?" in *Ekklesia: To The Roots of Biblical House Church Life*. What are some possible apostolic traditions that should still be practiced by the church today?