

Reformat – Apostolic Pattern (Part 2)

Malachi 3:7 Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept *them*. **Return unto me, and I will return unto you**, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?

Illustration: Computer Reformat

The ministry of the church stands on three pillars – Apostolic preaching, Apostolic pattern, and Apostolic power. Remove any one of them, and the church is ineffective in fulfilling its mandate.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a **threefold cord** is not quickly broken.

Illustration: Three Legged Table

Today we will look at Apostolic PATTERN ...

Matthew 16:18-19 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

The words “bind” and “loose” are perfect passive participles in the Greek language, indicating things that have already been forbidden or permitted. We can’t just do whatever we want and expect God to bless it; we must do what He wants, and the blessing will come automatically.

If a contractor builds a house for someone, he sticks to the blueprint, which is the will of the purchaser. **If we want to build a church, we need to stick to the blueprint (Bible), which is the will of the purchaser (God).** Otherwise, we are not really building a church!

ONE ACCORD (HOMOTHUMADON) – This unique Greek word, used six times to refer to the church in the Book of Acts, helps us understand the uniqueness of the Christian community. It is a compound of two words meaning to “rush along” and “in unison”. The image is a musical one – a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. Like the instruments of a great concert under the direction of a concertmaster, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ’s church to accomplish His purpose. **UNITY IS A CRITICAL PART OF GOD’S PATTERN FOR HIS CHURCH!**

UNITY MEANS THAT WE WORK AS A TEAM!

Acts 6:1-4 (KJV) ¹And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. ²Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. ³Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. ⁴But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

“murmur” – “to mutter, or grumble, in a low undertone”

Paul says to the saints, “Neither murmur ye!” (1 Corinthians 10:10) and “Do all things without murmuring!” (Philippians 2:14)

The problem was not that the pastors weren’t doing their job; it was that there was too much work for the pastors to do alone!

God’s solution was to appoint **DEACONS** (“diakonas” = “a servant, one called to serve, to wait on, or an attendant”). These men were to be of honest report (having a good testimony inside and outside the church), to be full of the Holy Ghost (having a real relationship with God), and to be full of wisdom (having the necessary skills for the job). The word “deacon” does not refer to a POSITION, but to a MINISTRY ROLE.

Ephesians 4:11-13 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For (**“so that”**) the perfecting of the saints, for (**“so that”**) the work of the ministry, for (**“so that”**) the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

This is not a three-fold job description of the five-fold ministry, but rather God’s plan for **TEAM MINISTRY!**

During the Dark Ages, a distinction was made between clergy and laity, a trick of Satan to reduce and confine ministry. This was first taught by **Nicolas**, who was one of the original deacons in Act 6:5! He was not content with having a ministry, but wanted to have a role of “pastoral authority.” But his teaching that exalted “pastors” above measure actually reduced the overall effectiveness of the church drastically.

Revelation 2:15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. (PERGAMOS)

WE MUST BE UNIFIED – AROUND THE PURPOSE OF EVANGELISM

Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

The narrative between Acts 1:8 and Acts 6:7 covers a period of about ten years. It contains an important lesson to the church that most people miss: **BLESSING IS NOT A SURE SIGN OF GOD'S FAVOR.**

During these years, the Jerusalem church was blessed with divine visitation, miracles of healing, holy boldness, and numerical growth. The church grew in spite of persecution, opposition, and internal disputes. There were 3000 people in Acts 2:41, 5000 men in Acts 4:4, multitudes of men and women in Acts 5:14, and even a great company of Jewish priests in Acts 6:7. **BUT IT ALL HAPPENED INSIDE JERUSALEM!**

Jerusalem might have been enjoying the blessing of the Lord, and many souls within her walls may have even come to salvation during that ten year span ... but what about the 99.99% of people alive in the world at that time who did not live in that city? What about the other cultures that God specifically told them to reach?

How much blessing does the church have to receive before she is willing and ready to fulfill the Great Commission left to her by Jesus Christ? One of the great dangers when we go from a struggling small congregation to a successful larger congregation is that we lose our dependence on God's power. **We become self-centered instead of God centered, more focused on ease than on evangelism.**

In many of our meetings, the focus is mainly on "our Jerusalem," that it may grow and prosper so that it may continue to minister to US! We have "received power" (the first promise of Acts 1:8) but we have not "become witnesses" (the second promise of Acts 1:8). And the second promise is much more significant than the first!

Thousands of Christians use the baptism of the Holy Spirit for purposes other than the purpose it was given! For that, we will someday give answer to God. We are STEWARDS, not BOSSES, of His blessings! The baptism of the Holy Spirit is so exciting that we think the experience is all there is to it. Not so! This was the battle in the early church.

They did start out in obedience to Acts 1:8, but they stopped too soon. They wanted to reach out in Jerusalem, among their own kind, but they did not want to go to the ends of the earth – or even Samaria!

Acts 1:6 (KJV) When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

The early church needed a reversal in their thinking! They wanted to sit in a state of spiritual blessing in Jerusalem and have the nations flow to them. Jesus wanted them to be servants of the Kingdom who would leave their comfort zone and go to others, just as He had left heaven to come to us! Their responsibility was not just to care for the lost who came to find them, but to seek them out!

The question might now be asked, "SO WHAT?" So what if the church holds these concepts? So what if we are not as evangelistic as we should be? Can't we still just have church for ourselves? BUT LOOK AT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE JERUSALEM CHURCH!

At first, the Jerusalem church grew strong spiritually and numerically, and even the attacks and setbacks they experienced turned to gain and expansion. But the honeymoon was shattered with the martyrdom of Stephen and the intense persecution of Saul of Tarsus. Suddenly, disciples are being scattered everywhere, and while things grow worse in Jerusalem, great things are happening in Judea and even Samaria! **When the church wouldn't go on their own, God gave them a shove!**

IF WE WILL NOT GO, God only has two alternatives when we continue to rest in our "Jerusalem comfort zone" ...

- **PERSECUTION, to drive us out**
- **SUBSTITUTION, to find someone else who will go willingly**

Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

God loves lost people so much that He will allow ANYTHING to happen in order to fulfill His purpose of reaching them! God is not primarily committed to individuals, ministries or even great churches – He is primarily committed to the Great Commission. Nothing is secure, nothing is permanent, nothing is guaranteed to have God's favor forever, even if it seems to have been built by Him and to have His anointing.

ONLY THE CHURCH THAT OBEYS HIS COMMANDS CAN BE ASSURED OF HIS CONTINUING FAVOR!

The Jerusalem church could not seem to manage the kind of vision and commitment that was required in this period of church history. So, God used persecution first (with some results) and then substitution when they continued to resist.

Acts 11:19-21 (KJV) Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

Antioch was a mostly Gentile city, and it is inconceivable that they should ignore all but a small minority of Jews, assuming they were the only ones God wanted to save! But that's what the first group did! However, thank God there was a second group not from Jerusalem that preached to the Greeks – **AND THE HAND OF THE LORD WAS WITH THEM!**

This is a moment of destiny, when the church at Antioch was born! Not just a few transplants from the Jerusalem Jewish subculture, but some sinfully irreverent, Biblically illiterate Gentiles came to God!

Jerusalem never did know how to deal with revolutionary revivalists like the Apostle Paul, who continually jumped fences, ignored boundaries, and broke rules to win the lost. That's why Jerusalem never sent out history's greatest missionary – Antioch sent him out!

The Jerusalem church was originally chosen, richly anointed, full of New Testament teaching, experiencing amazing miracles and basking in rich worship. But God still turned His attention to Antioch because Jerusalem would not embrace God's command to witness! If our church building and program becomes the sum total of our vision, our church will not last beyond a second or third generation!

But a Great Commission church is different! Generation after generation they run with vision. No matter what they achieve, they have never arrived, because there is always one more soul just beyond their borders that needs to hear about Jesus! Jerusalem held on to their resources, but Antioch accepted that Jesus had the right to demand of them any resource He wanted to use – people, prayer, finance, whatever!

The Jerusalem church was unwilling to CHANGE to reach the culture of the world around it. THE SAME THING HAPPENS TODAY, and because change is hard, most churches simply don't want to be uncomfortable. They just want to touch their Jerusalem and leave it at that.

There are only two New Testament church models in the Bible, the Jerusalem Church and the Antioch Church. We have to be one or the other, and the choice is ours. The Antioch church was full of risk-takers.

Acts 11:25-26 (KJV) Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

But what will the other Christians think? That's not the question that begs to be answered. WHAT WILL JESUS THINK?

C.T. Studd: "Some wish to live within the sound of church or chapel bell, I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

The greatest danger is always at the edge (where the church meets the culture). But so is the greatest opportunity for rescue and redemption. The New Testament church lived "on the edge" – never safe, always one step from disaster if God didn't intervene! Jude felt the tension:

Jude 1:22-24 [22] And of some have compassion, making a difference: [23] **And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire;** hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. [24] **Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling,** and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

Many Apostolic people have gotten too comfortable with the status quo. Church has become a comfortable place, a place that is always the same ... same friends, same events, same songs, same sermons, same faces, same size, same methods, and same results! That mentality is an affront to God, who called us to impact our culture with the gospel.

People say, "I want to have an Acts 2 church, where we preach the message of the Apostles!" That's great, but Acts 2 is not the whole pattern for the early church. We also need to have ...

An Acts 3 church where miracles happen at prayer meeting

An Acts 4 church where our services are literally shaken by God's power

An Acts 5 church where we have church from house to house

An Acts 6 church where saints take on ministry so pastors can seek God

An Acts 7 church where ordinary Christians are used powerfully by God

An Acts 8 church where we reach people of influence for God's kingdom

An Acts 9 church where we see religious people powerfully converted

An Acts 10 church where we are willing to reach people who not like us

An Acts 11 church where even persecution spreads the gospel

An Acts 12 church where God gives miraculous answers to prayer

An Acts 13 church where we send out people to do missionary work