

New Testament Church Principles - Part 1

by Mike Attwood

The church is the house of God, and it is essential to understand and follow the universal pattern of behavior and worship that is taught in the New Testament.

Duration: 1:03:29

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:14

Topics: "Church Order", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of following God's pattern and order for the church, highlighting the need for zeal and spiritual fervor in carrying out God's instructions. It discusses the significance of the New Testament church pattern, the dangers of deviating from it, and the importance of holding fast to God's revealed truths despite cultural influences or personal preferences. The sermon also stresses the need for a genuine fear of God and a commitment to spiritual preparation and participation in the assembly.

Transcript

Well, good evening everyone. It is indeed a great pleasure to be here and to share with you from the Word of God, talking with the brethren here. They've asked if I would speak particularly on a subject which is very dear to my heart and I believe even more dear to the heart of God, and that is the subject of the church.

And I want to begin by reading from 1 Timothy chapter 3. 1 Timothy chapter 3, if you'd like to turn there with me, I want to read from verse 14 through 16 in 1 Timothy chapter 3. 1 Timothy 3 verse 14 says this, These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly. But if I tarry long, 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. And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness.

God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. Again, we believe God will bless the reading of this precious word to us this evening. Just that casual reading of that passage will tell you two things that stand out immediately, and tell you a lot more than two things, but two things concerning the church.

One is, it clearly tells us that the church is the house of God. Remember it says here that how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God. And so what we can say is in

the New Testament, very specifically, because that's the era we live in, thank God we live in the New Testament era, not in the Old Testament.

I'm glad that I live in this day and age. I don't know about you, but I'm really thankful for that. But the house of God today is the church of the living God, right? And it's the New Testament church.

And then the second thing that stands out concerning the church is this. He says that you may know how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God. I think it really is helpful if we can get it straight in our minds right at the beginning, that the church is His house, not ours.

That makes a big difference, doesn't it? See, sometimes I think what we do is we kind of look at church and it's all about me, right? It's what I want. You know, I want my needs met. I want to have the right programs for my kids.

And we look at it from a very ego, because we're very egocentric by nature, we tend to look at it from an egocentric perspective. But I want to change that around a little bit because the Bible doesn't put it that way. He said it's God's house.

Now, when you start thinking of the church as the house of God, it changes everything. You see, if I really believe this is the house of God, one is I will behave myself because it's the house of God, and that means that God is here in this house, and I better behave myself in it. But secondly, because it's His house, He has the right to set the rules in His house, doesn't He? See, I'm already enjoying the fine hospitality of Brother Bob and Jane, and they basically have said, make yourself at home.

But I know that they're saying that somewhat tongue-in-cheek. If I said, well, look, I'd like to make some major changes in this house. Where's the sledgehammer? I think they would say to me, hey, hold on a second, we didn't really mean that.

You're welcome here, and we want you to feel comfortable here, but you don't mess with this house. It's our house. And they'd be perfectly right, wouldn't they? Well, the church is God's house, and there is a right behavior that is suitable for the house of God.

Before we look into that subject of how to behave, and that's basically what we're going to be dealing with a lot this weekend, is the order of the house of God, and how to behave correctly in His house. And people say, well, order's not really that important. Is that right? But you try calling my phone number and get all the right numbers, but the wrong order, and see how you get on.

You get what I'm saying? I mean, the order is important, isn't it? Not only the numbers are important, but the order is important too, if you want to get through. And so order is important. And so we want to talk about the order of the house of God.

Before we do that, I want to talk about the importance of the house of God to begin with, because it's just really critical that we understand this. Why would we bother spending a whole weekend, when we could, lots of other things we could legitimately be doing, here studying the subject of the church? Why bother? I'll tell you why. Because it's something that the Bible tells us, Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.

So for one thing, if you love the Lord Jesus, you love what He loves. And He loved the church and He gave Himself for it. So that's important to study something.

You say, I love the Lord Jesus. And so things that He loves, I want to know about. I want to understand what He loves and try and understand the heart of my Savior a little bit more.

And I cannot fully understand the heart of my Savior and be indifferent about the church, because He loves it and He gave Himself for it. Matthew 16, 18, the Lord Jesus says this, I will build my church. That's what He's doing right now.

That's what He's doing in the world today. He's building His church. It's the most important building project going on in this present age is the church.

So obviously it's important to Him. And then thirdly, let me tell you how important it is to Him. Acts 20, verse 28 says this.

It speaks of the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. Such is His love for the church that He made the ultimate investment in it. The church of God, which He purchased with His own blood.

So we're talking about something very important to the heart of our Savior, aren't we? And so that's why we need to study it. And not only that, when I think about my Savior, you know what it was said of Him? When He cleansed the temple in John's Gospel, chapter 2, and He drove the money changers out, His disciples watched Him do this, and this is what came to their mind. They remembered that it was written, zeal for thy house hath eaten me up.

That's John's Gospel, chapter 2, verse 17. And so one thing that characterized my Savior was a zeal for the house of God. Now I don't know about you, but as I read my Bible, I know one thing, and that is this, that God's plan for my life is that I'd be like the Lord Jesus, right? He has predestinated that I would be conformed to the image of His Son.

That's God's plan for my life, is for me to be more like the Lord Jesus and less like Mike Atwood. It's God's plan for you too, to be more like the Lord Jesus, right? And can I just say this lovingly, but honestly, you cannot be like the Lord Jesus and be indifferent about the church. Can you? If God's plans for me to be like Christ, and it was said of Him, zeal, and that the word zeal means hot.

It was something that He was hot about, passionate. Zeal for the house of God consumed Him, it said. And so what I'm saying is that if I would be like the Lord Jesus, my life should be characterized with a zeal for the house of God.

So we're saying this subject is important to God. It really is. It's important to my Savior, but it's also important for you to be part of the church, to be involved in the local church.

I just this summer had the privilege of visiting Norway for the first time. I had a good reason. My oldest boy married a Norwegian girl, and we had the privilege of meeting her family.

We'd met her. She came over and visited, and I'd met her in England, but we met with her family. And her family, we learned some interesting things about them.

She's got six of them, six children, and the parents, and they, in Norway, the churches like this are rare. I know of one assembly right now in the whole of Norway, in a place called Skien, just south of Oslo. And the state church dominates the country and controls the Christian world very strongly.

They have these prayer houses where the evangelicals meet, but they're still connected with the state church and very involved, particularly in baptismal regeneration. In other words, when you're a baby and you get dipped in the font or whatever, you become saved, which has really messed up Norwegian Christianity big time, because you know that's not true. And so it's very much Lutheranism, the whole thing.

But basically, how that plays out is things like this. For instance, when I was there, I got to speak in these prayer houses, but there's a rule in the book that if you're not a Lutheran, you can only speak there twice. Because they don't want to let us guys loose in a place like that, because we might cause a problem, because we'll teach the Bible and that might wake people up.

So there's limits, you see, on what you can do. But the interesting thing is that their family packed up and left Norway and went to England for one year, just so they could have the privilege of being involved in a functioning church. Can you imagine packing up six kids and going to another country for a year, and all the implications of that, just so you could experience the privilege of being in a functioning New Testament church? I think to myself, we have it here, so available, and yet often we're so bone idle, it's too much trouble to be involved.

Shame on us. Isn't that a shame? It's important to us. Important to us.

Why? Because the church is a place where, one, we use our spiritual gifts, a place where we get fed and edified and cared for, a place where we learn to deal with awkward people. If you haven't experienced that yet, you will, right? And that's good. That's part of maturity, isn't it? Learning to deal with difficulty and overcome it with the love of Christ.

I mean, church is a great place for all these things, and it's God's plan, and so we need to see this is a very important subject. Now, I want to get on to the subject of the order of the church, and I want to just show something this evening, just to kind of lay a foundation before we get into specifics. And my outline is very simple this evening.

What I want to do is really three points, because that's got to have a simple three-point outline, or else it doesn't work, right? It's fairly simple. One, to first of all demonstrate from scripture that there actually was a universal pattern in the New Testament of how believers are supposed to meet. I think that's important to do that, because, you know, if you were to... I often think, what would it be like if some New Testament Christian, you know, I'm talking about somebody from the early days of Christianity, when it was in its very primitive, simplest form, as we see it in the New Testament, was certainly, as it were, put in a time warp, and ended up coming to Missouri in 2011.

Okay? And they started visiting around, quote, the churches, even in this area. I wonder what they would think. You know, coming from the simplicity of how it was in the beginning, and then going and visiting some... I'm sure they'd say, how did we ever get from here to here? What happened down these centuries? Where did they get that from? I'm sure they'd be shocked, wouldn't they? And what I'm saying is that the Bible, in its essence, is given as a simple, clear pattern of how we're to meet as believers.

And it's there in the Word of God. It's not hard to find. I wasn't raised in a church like this.

I was raised Roman Catholic. When I got saved, I was not involved in churches like this. But what I did is I began to study the Bible in earnest, and I began to see certain things that weren't being practiced in the

church we were going, and I began to wonder, is anybody out there really doing this stuff that I see in the New Testament? And I finally found a place, and I thought, wow, this is exciting.

Somebody's finally seen it, because it's there to be seen. There is a pattern, and I want to show you that there was a universal pattern, that they all met the same way in the New Testament church, and show, secondly, that the apostles sought to maintain that pattern. They were concerned about the order.

They wanted to keep it that way, and thirdly, I want to use an illustration from the Old Testament to show how serious it is to depart from God's order. Just as it's serious to get the numbers wrong, you know, Eric called me, I think, was it last night? Wednesday night. Yeah, that's right, on the way home from the meeting.

He called me Wednesday night, and he had my number, and he got all the numbers in the right sequence, and we were able to speak. But if he had used the same numbers, but in a different order, we would not have had that conversation. So, it really is important to get the order right.

So, let's just look, first of all, to the existence of a universal pattern in Scripture. Look at 1 Corinthians with me, and just to look through 1 Corinthians, and just see simply that there really was a universal order in the New Testament church. 1 Corinthians, and chapter 1, just to begin with, and verse 2. 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 2, tells us who this epistle is written to.

It says, unto the church of God which is at Corinth. Now, we'll just stop there. We'll come back to this verse in a moment.

Now, so this letter is dealing with a church, the church of God that exists in the city of Corinth back in the first century, and everybody that has ever studied Corinthians will tell you that it's a church that was full of problems, and that actually in every chapter, Paul is correcting errors that were taking place in this assembly. Now, the question is, how did he come to understand about these problems? How did he know about them? I know that he was there, and he established the work, and he started it, and he spent 18 months in Corinth, but then he left, and then after his leaving, these problems began to develop, and he heard about those problems, and now he's writing to bring correction to these problems, but how did he hear? Well, first of all, verse 11 tells us that some of the problems were actually told to him by a family in the church. So it says in verse 11, it has been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you, and so part of the reason Paul knew there were problems there is that somebody tattletaled.

The house of Chloe told Paul about the problems, and I say, were they gossips? No, they weren't, and the reason they weren't gossiping is that they were willing to have their name attached to it. Now, if I was to tell you about Springfield and say, now listen, let me tell you about some of the problems in Springfield, Southeast Bible Chapel, but whatever you do, don't tell them that my cat would told you, right? Don't listen to me, because it's just pure gossip, but if I say, let me tell you something about the assembly in Springfield, and you can tell them my cat would told you, I'm willing to be, to own the problem, right? To be, to be owned, owned that this is, this is not gossip. I'm willing to go on record and say, this is the problem.

Now, by the way, I love the assembly in Springfield, and I'm not going to say anything negative about it, and we just thank God that we're there. It's just a delightful assembly, and if you've never been to a good assembly before, come and visit. You'll enjoy it.

It's really a great meeting, and lovely saints. So the house of Chloe, first of all, explains some of the difficulties. Now look at chapter seven, and so part of his correction comes from things he heard from the household of Chloe, but not only that, he also heard about the problems there as a result of correspondence from the Corinthians themselves.

Verse one of chapter seven, he says, now concerning the things whereof you wrote unto me, and so there were some things that they even wrote to him and said, look, they're, they're, we don't know what to do with these issues. This is what's going on in the assembly, and they themselves wrote about it. So, so there's a two-fold source of the information that he's dealing with, and so he begins to deal with these local problems, and he begins to give answers to them, but let me just say this, that you might say, well, well, what's that got to do with us? Well, again, look at chapter one and verse two with me.

First Corinthians chapter one, verse two, it says, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours, and so not only is this letter being addressed to those that are in Corinth called saints, but it's also addressed to all that in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus. Did you ever do that here? You ever call on the name of the Lord Jesus? I hope you did. How did you ever get saved, right? In other words, it's, it's relevant not only to Corinth, but to Jackson, Missouri.

It's relevant wherever people call on the name of the Lord Jesus. So, it has a universal application, and as he was there, the instructions that he gave, the corrections that he gave, were not just for Corinth, they were, they were universally practiced and held. Let's look again at chapter four now, please.

Chapter four, just to show that there was a universal pattern that was taught by the, the apostles, and that they expected this pattern to be followed. Chapter four, verse 17, he says, for this cause have I sent to you Timotheus, who is my beloved son and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, and then notice this last bit, as I teach everywhere in every church. Do you get that? There was the instructions that he's given to the Corinthians are exactly the same instructions that he teaches everywhere in every church.

So, there's obviously a universal pattern here, isn't there? It's something that goes on everywhere in every church. Look at chapter seven and verse 17. Sometimes we miss some of these things, but when you link them together, you see that there's clearly a pattern here.

He says, but as God has distributed to every man, it says, chapter seven, verse 17, as the Lord has called everyone, so let him walk, and so ordain I in all churches. You get that? There was this pronouncement that is being made, not just for Corinth, I ordain this in all the churches. It's for everywhere.

Chapter 11 and verse 16. We're going to look at this in more detail tomorrow, but he's dealing with a subject that was certainly an issue in Corinth, and it was to do with the issue of the veiling of women and men appearing in the presence of God without a covering on their heads, and what was happening in Corinth is that they were doing their own thing. In fact, he has to say to them that it was a shame what was going on there, and they were out of step, and in verse 16 he says, if anyone seems to be contentious, he says, we, that's the apostolic we, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

What he's saying is the Corinthians and what they're doing is out of step with what we the apostles teach, and also all the churches of God, in other words, they're doing their own thing. It's like this. Have you ever seen a military march passed, and you know what, one of the things about these military marches is

precision, isn't it, and everybody is marching to the same tune and in the same step, and here's one guy who's got two left feet, right? What would you see as you watch that group? You know what stand out immediately? The one guy that's out of step, right? And what Paul is doing is saying, here, look, all the churches practice this, but you're out of step.

You're doing your own thing. You're marching to your own tune. Get in line, and that's his message, really, is he's trying to bring the Corinthian assembly back in line with the universal practice of all the churches, and again and again he keeps appealing to this practice.

We, the apostles have no such Christian, neither the churches of God, so how come, where do you get this stuff from? How come you're acting differently? We'll go into that verse in a lot more detail tomorrow, but look at chapter 14 now and verse 33. For God is not the author of confusion. I hope that one thing that happens this weekend is that you will not be confused, because if you are, it's not of God.

Now, sometimes you might initially think, where's this all going, but hear me out. At the end of it, I'm certain that you won't be confused, because God is not the author of confusion, and then he says this, but of peace, and then he says, as in all the churches of the saints, let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law, and if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home, for it's a shame for women to speak in the church, and again, I want you just to notice that, as in all the churches of the saints, let your women keep silence in the churches. What is he doing? All the way through this epistle, he's doing the same thing, isn't he? He's saying, get in line, do what all the other churches are teaching, the things that I teach everywhere, in every place, and so there's clearly a universal pattern.

He's clearly expecting that the Corinthians will get in line, and be obedient to this, and the question is, well, okay, let's accept that that's true, that there is this universal pattern that Paul expects, but what right does Paul have to tell us how we're supposed to do church, right? I mean, what business is it of his to tell us how to do church? Well, let me tell you what business it is of his. Look at chapter 11 now, please. First Corinthians 11, and verse 23.

Very familiar verses to you, but sometimes I don't think we think through them quite as much as we should. Paul says this, for I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night which he was betrayed, took bread, when he had given thanks, he break it, and said, take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you, just do in remembrance of me. Now, what you're going to notice is what he says.

What is Paul telling them? He's telling them to remember the Lord Jesus in the way he's appointed, but where did he get it from? He says, I have received it from the Lord. In other words, the reason that he's so insistent about them keeping this teaching and adhering to this universal pattern is because he got it from the Lord. That's why.

Because he received it from the risen, glorified head of the church. That's why it's important that we keep it, because that's where he got it from. Now, think through this.

Was Paul there when the Lord's Supper was instituted? He wasn't even saved then, and if he had been there, he would have probably tried to stop it, wouldn't he? And so he got it from the risen, glorified head. And actually, many think that the first description of the remembrance meeting that would have been in circulation, because remember, they didn't get their Bible all at one chunk like we got it. These letters

came out, and perhaps the first recorded words they had of the Lord saying, do this in remembrance of me, would have come from Paul and 1 Corinthians.

Isn't that amazing? And he got it, and he tells us in Galatians, he didn't get his message from the other apostles, he got it directly from the Lord himself. And so, the source of it, why it's so important, is where it comes from. Now look at chapter 14 again, and I know we're going back and forth in Corinthians, but I want you to see things that perhaps a casual reading we might miss.

Chapter 14, verse 37 now, it says this, if any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, who do you think in Corinth would have, how do you think the Corinthians would have responded to this? Anybody here think that you're a prophet? You think anybody in Corinth would have said that? They all kind of felt like they were prophets, didn't they? And they said, yeah, that's us. Anybody here spiritual? Oh yeah, we're spiritual. We speak in tongues, we do all this stuff.

I mean, we're really spiritual. And so he says, okay, you guys think you're spiritual. Let me give you an acid test of true spirituality.

He says, if anyone think himself to be prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. That's interesting, isn't it? In other words, a true test of spirituality is that you receive the teaching that Paul gave on church order as if they were the very commandments of the Lord himself, because they were. Because he says, I received in the Lord that which I have delivered to you.

And so what should we do with this? People say, well, you're being legalistic. No, I don't think so at all. Let me tell you why.

Because it says, the things I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. What did the Lord Jesus say about his commandments? John 14 verse 15 says this, if you love me, keep my commandments. So what you say is, listen, I'm not a legalist.

The reason I meet this way is because I love the Lord Jesus and I want to keep his commandments. And these commandments, well, they've been delivered from the Lord Jesus through the apostle Paul to us. And out of love for him, we want to keep them.

So it's not called legalism. It's love, isn't it? It's, I love you, Lord. And because I love you, I want to be obedient to you.

I want to do what you say, because I love you. So the true test of spirituality has been submissive to what the Lord has revealed. The apostles clearly taught a universal practice of how the churches were to meet.

It was a pattern that had been delivered to them from the risen head himself, and they passed it on and they sought to maintain it. Second point now that they sought to maintain it, look at chapter 11 again and verse 34. First Corinthians 11 verse 34, it says, if any man hunger, let him eat at home that you come not together unto condemnation and the rest will I set in order when I come.

The word set in order here, it's a word in the original language, which is used to speak of mending broken bones that are out of joint. And what he's saying is when I come, all that stuff that's out of order or out of joint, I'm going to mend it. You got to put it back in order.

And you know, when your bones are out of joint, you're crippled, right? Could it be that the church of the Lord Jesus is crippled because it's out of order? It's not following the pattern and design of the head himself. Now, that's true of many churches today, isn't it? Many churches, you talk about some of the things that we're going to talk about this weekend, and they would, well, they probably never heard it before, or they just laugh at the very idea that you would even think about practicing these things in the 21st century. But you see, when something's out of order, it's not a healthy thing.

Look at Titus. Titus chapter 1. Again, the same thought. Titus chapter 1 verse 5, for this cause left I thee in Crete, Paul speaking to this man Titus, this is the reason that I left you in Crete, that thou should have set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee.

And so what we're saying is that there really was a pattern, and that this order was so important that a lot of ministry in the New Testament was concerned with putting things in order, setting things in the right order. And that's most of the ministry this weekend is going to be about, setting things in order, putting them in God's order, in the right order, because it's very important. And of course, we say this, when it comes to the house of God, God knows what he wants in his house, right? He knows exactly what he wants.

The tabernacle is a perfect illustration that when it came to a dwelling place for God, he gave the pattern to Moses in the holy mount, didn't he? How much of it was left to man's imagination? None of it, right? Even down to the joints that held the thing together, every detail was given by God. In other words, I want to meet with man, and I want to dwell amongst you, and this is what my house is going to be like. And what does God commend Moses for? He built the tabernacle according to the pattern in the holy mount.

Now, why was it so important? I mean, is God just being persnickety, and, you know, kind of detail-orientated, and it kind of, I don't know, maybe it's just over the top here. You know why? Because every detail of the tabernacle speaks about his son. That's why it's so important.

And if you miss something, you miss something of the Lord Jesus. Can I say this? The reason the New Testament church pattern is so important, and we'll try and point this out this weekend, is that every aspect of the New Testament pattern is designed specifically so that it keeps our focus and our eyes on the Lord Jesus, and not on anything else. That's the reason why.

That's why the pattern is the way it is, because it all is going to speak of Christ. Why is it that we do not have a senior pastor speaking at this church? Because we have one, right? The Lord Jesus is the chief shepherd, and we don't want anybody claiming to be him, because there's nobody can be a substitute for him. He's perfect.

So we have a chief shepherd. Why do we have plurality of elders? Well, because it's the position that least obscures the idea of the preeminence of Christ. Sometimes I get to speak in other types of churches, and I always laugh because sometimes they'll have a parking lot, and it's for the senior pastor.

And I'm thinking, well, you know, the Lord didn't get here by vehicle. But you know what I'm saying? In other words, so many places out here, they've lost that. It's not there.

And the thing that we've lost is seeing Christ, and Christ is in all the details, and that's why the details are so important. Now, I want to just kind of spend a little bit of time thinking about tradition, because that's kind of a dirty word, I know, in many people's minds, although I think if we're really honest, it's really not

that much of a dirty word. In fact, it's kind of an interesting thing.

Look at 1 Corinthians 11 again, in verse 2. Now, depending on which Bible version you're reading, the King James has ordinances, but I think the New King James has traditions. It says, I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the traditions, New King James, ordinances, King James, as I delivered them to you. And so there are places in Scripture where there's clear commendation because they've kept the traditions.

He's praising them that they've kept the traditions. 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 15, he tells them to hold fast to the traditions which you have heard of me. You know, hold them tightly.

And yet, on the other hand, we've got this kind of tension here, because remember much of the Lord Jesus' controversy with religious leadership was over what? You have made the commandments of God of non-effect by your traditions. So on the one hand, there's praise and commendation, you keeping the traditions. On the other hand, there's this conflict between the Lord Jesus and the Pharisees over the very issue of tradition.

And so that has caused some difficulties. And so some people would say, even to say the way we would meet, they say, oh, well, that's your tradition. That's how they'd answer it.

That's your tradition. So how do we deal with that issue of tradition? Well, let me just say this. First of all, tradition is not always bad, is it? When we were in Norway at the wedding, they had lots of Norwegian wedding traditions, which meant that the wedding went from one o'clock in the afternoon till one o'clock in the morning, because they had to have all their traditions in it.

And it wasn't all bad. In fact, a lot of it was very pleasant. And I can tell you about some of it later, but it was very interesting.

But that is that some traditions are just not necessarily evil, are they? Do you have family traditions? One assembly I used to be in, they had their own little tradition. If it was your birthday, you got to come to the front, and they would sing happy birthday to you, and they'd give you a cake. Problem with the cake is it was plastic, and it had a hole in it, and you were supposed to put money in it for missions.

I have no idea whoever started that tradition. I have no idea. But I want to tell you, if you forget the cake, I'll tell you that they're very upset about it.

It's a big thing to them. Now, let me just say, I mean, it's not an evil thing, is it? I mean, there's some things that we have as traditions. They're not necessarily evil things.

The conflict comes where the traditions of men clash with the word of God. That's where the difficulty comes, isn't it? So if your tradition contradicts scripture, then you've got a problem. And that was the difficulty with the Pharisees.

They made the traditions of the elders. They took them and held them on higher authority than the word of God itself. And they got out of obeying God by saying, well, this is the tradition.

And so that's where the conflict comes in. And so, you know, the important thing is, when we the word tradition, it just kind of makes it simple for us. It just simply means something that's been handed down.

It's something passed from one to another. And when Paul commends them for holding fast the traditions, what he is saying is there are things that have been handed down to you. But what was the source? That's the important question to answer.

See, for Paul, he says, I've received it of the Lord, and now I've handed it to you. You keep it. Why? Because the source was from the risen glorified head.

You better keep that. I'm going to commend you when you keep that, right? Because the source of the thing that was passed down came from glory itself. It came from God.

And then was passed to Paul and passed to us. And you better, it's something to die for, right? You don't give this up. The problem with what the Pharisees did, it was the tradition of the elders, right? That's where, that's the source of it.

They've made the commandments of God of no effect because of their tradition. And it was really the traditions of men. And so what we're saying is, okay, some traditions are harmless.

When it conflicts with the word of God, it must go. And we want to make sure that we're following clearly the pattern. What things can we clearly say were handed down from heaven to Paul and have now been given to us? He said, those things you hold on to them.

And those are the things we're going to deal with this weekend. The things that clearly came down from the Lord of glory through the apostle Paul to us. Now there are things like, for instance, you may decide, like in England, when I go there, they break bread at 11 o'clock on Sunday morning.

I actually like that. And that's great because you got lots of time to prepare yourself and they don't have any preaching, but they will go maybe for an hour and a half of remembering the Lord. And that's, they determined that.

Now, most places in North America, it's nine o'clock or 915 or 930 or 945. But that's just, it's not a big issue, is it? The thing is that they remember the Lord. That's the important thing.

And so we don't want to fall out over some of the things that people have made up for, decided on for convenience sake. But the important thing is we hold fast to the things that have been passed to us from God himself. Look at 2 Thessalonians.

Let's look at that verse. 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 15. Therefore, brethren, stand fast.

In other words, hold your ground. Don't move away from your position. Stand fast and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, that is orally.

In other words, when they were, apostles were with them. And before, remember, they didn't have a complete Bible at that point. So a lot of their teaching was given orally.

So he says, hold fast that which you, that's been the traditions that have been given to you. Don't, don't give an inch. Don't, don't give in to them, to temptations, to give them, stand fast, hold the traditions which have been taught, whether by word, that's orally, or our epistle.

And so the idea is this. In these days, just like the Thessalonians, the pressure is on to give up truth. You know, sad thing in Norway, my daughter-in-law's father told me that on the West Coast in Norway, there

were assemblies all the way up the West Coast at one time.

And they said a lot of their early teaching came from brethren evangelists from the United Kingdom. And he said, sadly, most of them went charismatic. What happened? They didn't hold fast to the teaching that had been given to them either orally or by the scriptures.

They didn't hold fast. They let it go. And there are lots of assemblies in this country that once were following clearly the pattern revealed by God, and it's gone now.

Why? They didn't hold it fast. So our purpose this weekend is to examine what God has revealed through the Lord Jesus, through the Apostle Paul to us, and to challenge us to not give an inch on these truths, to hold fast, to stand firm in days where the pressure is on to give up. Now, why is it so important to hold fast? Well, let's look at an Old Testament illustration of the importance of following the pattern revealed in scripture.

Look at 1 Chronicles chapter 13. 1 Chronicles chapter 13. So often the Old Testament does a perfect job of illustrating principles that you see in the New Testament.

And so we're saying about the value of this standing fast, holding firm, not giving an inch on what God has revealed to us and the importance of divine order. And when we look at chapter 13, we're going to break in at verse 3. And it says this, 1 Chronicles 13 verse 3, it says, let us bring again the ark of our God to us for we inquired not of it in the days of Saul. So the plan is to bring the ark of God back.

The ark of God, if you remember Old Testament history, the ark had been lost to the Philistines. The Philistines had captured it. They'd put it in the temple of their God Dagon.

There was something fishy about him. Remember, he was half fish and half man. And Dagon kept falling over in the presence of the ark and kept breaking.

And so they kept having to take their God and put him back on the shelf again, and kind of getting the gorilla glue out and trying to stick him back together and all the rest of it. And he kept falling over. And then of course it gave them a lot of problems.

They had a lot of health issues directly related to the ark being there. So they sent the ark of God away and they put it on a cart. And it went on this cart and it had two cows that were milk cows and their young were close by.

And of course, when the young started kind of mooing for their milk, the natural tendency of the cows would be to go to their calves and satisfy that. But instead, because this was truly of God, these cows went straight back to the land of Israel. But it hadn't been returned back to the house of God yet.

And in the days of David, he determines that he wants to bring the ark of God back. And so he says this, verse four, and all the congregation said that they would do so for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people. I want to say this right at the outset.

This desire to bring the ark back, David suggests it and all the people say this is a great idea. Now let me just say this, that sometimes something can be right in the eyes of all the people and be wrong in the eyes of God. We need to, again, get this mentality, this is God's house.

And even if everybody wants to change and get rid of some of these things, what should we do? Be loyal to God, shouldn't we? It can be right in the eyes of all the people and be a dead wrong. You think of this country, the majority of people think that it's okay to murder babies in their mother's womb, don't they? Is it right or is it wrong? Even if everybody says it's okay to kill a baby in its mother's womb, it will never ever be right because God has said it's wrong. Homosexuality, okay, that big debate right now, isn't there? And the majority are saying it's okay, it's just, it's normal, we should be marrying these people and they're in love and all this kind of stuff.

And so what do we say? Okay, is it right because all the people are now saying it is okay or is it wrong? Thank you. Why is it wrong? Because God says it's wrong, right? That's the reason why. Okay, so when it comes to these issues, something can be right in the eyes of all the people and be dead wrong.

When it comes to the house of God and the order of the house of God, God is telling us what's right. We need to get in with him. Okay, that's what we need to do.

It doesn't matter whether you like it or not. God's not asking for your approval. He is saying this is it.

This is my house. I have the right to set the house rules and this is what I expect in my house. Okay, so all the people in agreement, verse 5, so David gathered all Israel together from Shehor of Egypt even to the entering of Hamath to bring the ark of God from Kirjath-Jerim.

And David went up and all Israel to Baala, that is Kirjath-Jerim, which belonged to Judah, to bring up thence the ark of God, the Lord that dwells between the cherubims, whose name is called upon it. And they carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab and Uzzah, and Ahio drove the cart. Now, straight away, they're doing something.

Their desire is right. It's good to bring the ark back, right? But what are they doing? Where did they get the idea of this new cart thing? Well, the Philistines, right? But you say, well, Mike, that's progress, right? I mean, this is progress. This is being progressive.

It's technology. You see, they're using a new cart, wheels and all the rest of it. This is a good idea.

Well, it's not a good idea because God has already said how the ark should be carried, right? How should the ark be carried? The priests were to lift up the ark. There were staves that went through the side of the ark of the covenant, and the priests were to lift it up on their shoulders, and they were to carry it. Why is that? Because the ark is a picture of Christ, and it's the work of priests to lift up Christ.

And that pattern still stands today, isn't it? When we come together on the Lord's Day morning, there will be believer priests here, and I'm hopeful that they're going to be lifting up the Lord Jesus because that's what priests are supposed to do. Amen. And you see, so the pattern is clear, and yet they're saying, well, let's use this new cart.

And it says, David and all Israel played before God with all their might, verse 8, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets. Notice the enthusiasm and the zeal. They're playing with all their might.

So they're sincere, right? I mean, you can't blame them for sincerity. They are really into this. And sometimes it can be right in the eyes of all the people.

It can be using all the most modern technology, and it can be done with great enthusiasm, but it brings no pleasure to the heart of God whatsoever because it's not what He has said in the Word. And it says, and when they came to the threshing floor, verse 9, of Chidon, Uzzah put forth his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and he smote him because he put his hand to the ark, and there he died before God. A lot of people think God has been awfully hard on Uzzah because, you see, what would you have done? You were driving the ark, and it hit a bump, and the ark was ready to fall off the cart.

What would your natural response would have been? What? Put out your hand, wouldn't it? But you see, what have Israel done? What have they done? They have lowered the God of Israel to the same level as Dagon. Remember how Dagon needed a hand up? Remember he kept falling over, and they kept trying to prop him up? God doesn't need us to hold him up, does He? He holds us up. He holds the universe up.

He holds everything together, doesn't He? And in their minds, they had lowered the God of the scriptures to the same level as Dagon. He needs a hand. You know, even in this assembly, sometimes we think the assembly is depending on us, and there are always key people in assemblies, you know, and we say, you know, there are pillars in the church, and what will happen if the pillars go? Well, the work goes on, you know.

It's amazing. It's not dependent on us. It's dependent on the Lord, isn't it? And none of us are, what is it, expendable.

God is the one that keeps His work going, and He'll raise up people from the most unlikely places to carry the work on. And so, certainly, we see there, there's great enthusiasm, all the rest of it. Verse 11, David was displeased because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah, wherefore the place is called Peres Uzzah to this day.

And David was afraid of God that day, saying, how shall I bring the ark of God home to me? David was afraid of God that day. You know, I hate to say it almost sounds controversial to say this today, but one of the things that is entirely lacking in many assemblies today is the fear of God. The fear of God.

People say to me, that's Old Testament. No, it isn't. No, it isn't.

It's found in the New Testament as well. A couple of years ago, I started going through the Bible twice a year, and I read through looking for a theme every time. And I went through and I underlined every time I saw the fear of God or fear of the Lord, and I was doing it almost every day, Old and New Testament alike.

It's amazing, the fear of the Lord. If we lose the fear of the Lord, and I believe that that's exactly what's happening, we become very egocentric, very man-centered. It's all about me.

And David was afraid of God that day. He should have been afraid of God right at the beginning of the day, and then he would never have put the ark of God on a cart. He would have done it the way God instructed him to do it.

Now look at chapter 15 in verse 11. It says, David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priest, and for the Levites, and for Uriel, Asaiah, and Joel, Shemaiah, and Eliel, and Amminadab, and said unto them, You are the chief of the fathers of the Levites. Sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it.

For because you did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the Jew order. There it's pretty clear, isn't it? The problem was you guys didn't do it in the first place. Now let's be honest, David, he's the king, you know, he's pretty powerful.

I mean, he can do what he wants to a certain degree, but yet the priests should have kept the king accountable, and they ought to have said, David, don't put that on a cart. That's our job. God has given us the responsibility of lifting up the ark.

That's our responsibility. And he says, because you didn't do it, you see, you got sloppy. You should have corrected me.

You should have stopped me. What are you doing? You should have confronted me. Because you did it not at the beginning, the Lord made a breach on us because we sought him not after the Jew order.

It's a very serious thing, isn't it, to follow God's order. Verse 14, so the priests and Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord, God of Israel. Verse 15, the children of the Levites bear the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon.

Notice this now, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord. Finally, they're getting it. God's work must be done in God's way.

That's what they're finally getting, because God knows best, doesn't he? I think it's arrogance, it's absolute arrogance to think that we can improve on God's order and God's pattern. Now you say, but look, I see all these assemblies and they're struggling. What are you saying? What are you saying to me? Obviously, God's order is not working, because look, I can take you to these mega churches and they're bursting at the seams.

You can say all those things. The failure of New Testament assemblies is not because of the pattern, it's because of the people. That's where the problem is.

It's not God's pattern, it's our weakness is the problem, isn't it? Like if an assembly is really functioning the way it should, and every believer is really serious about preparing their hearts for worship and remembrance on the Lord's day morning, there's no place on earth like that, is there, when that happens? It's just incredible. When every believer is developing their gift and using their gift, the pattern is perfect. The problem is not the pattern, the problem is the people.

So what we can say is this, okay, you see all these assemblies and they've got all kinds of problems. Well, you know what the answer is? The answer is, let us start functioning the way God intended us to. That's the answer.

Us rolling our sleeves up and getting serious about following what God would have us to do, and that would change everything. It really would. And when you meet a group of believers that are serious about the Lord, it's tremendous.

We had a Bible study this Wednesday night, and we have a conversational Bible study, because we'll have a couple of guys sit up front, and this week we had two younger brothers there at the front, and then they will moderate the conversation on the passage of scripture that's pre-announced. And so we were doing Judges chapter 16 this last Wednesday night, and the conversation was so edifying, because all the brothers had come and studied, and they came together, and we had visitors in, and they said they'd

heard about Bible readings all their life, but they'd never been in one, and they said it was amazing. It was amazing.

I mean, it just was incredible. Every assembly could be like that. If people just get serious, and be in the Word, and be the men and women of God that God would have them to be, our assemblies would be tremendous.

If we just simply follow the advice of scripture, like love one another with a pure heart fervently, how would that work? If everybody in the assembly loved one another with a pure heart fervently, would that make a change? Sure it would. See, it's just a case of doing it, really. That's the problem, isn't it? And sometimes, and we're going to emphasize the order and the pattern, but I want to say this right at the outset.

New Testament principles without New Testament power can be cold and lifeless. We're going to emphasize the pattern, because it's God's pattern, and it's given in the Word, and it's clear. But what we say is that to carry on this pattern requires a high degree of spirituality.

And if we're not the men and women God would have us to be, it's not going to work. You see, I've often used this illustration, but it's so true. You come to the breaking of bread on Sunday morning, and we don't have any professional staff to make it look good.

Right? So if we don't come in the right heart attitude, and we've been in the Word, and we're properly prepared so that the Spirit of God can fine-tune the orchestra of praise to the Lord Jesus, and He's good at doing that. If we're not in that right frame of mind, you know, you want to meet in 10 minutes, and you know it's got a problem. Right? Whereas if you have a professional staff, you know, with musicians and all the rest of it, you can make it look good, whether you're calm or spiritually, it doesn't make any difference.

The show goes on. We don't have that freedom. It's obvious for us whether we're in tune or not, isn't it, spiritually? My youngest boy, he said it to me on more than one occasion.

We've been in meetings, and it's obvious that the men, particularly, who audibly are to lead the company in remembering and worship, and there's just been this cold silence, and it's been a long cold silence, so that it's almost embarrassing, and my son has said to me, he said, Dad, what's wrong? And I said to him, there's death in the pot. Come coffee break, those same men that have nothing to say about the Lord Jesus are waxing eloquent about an American football game that they watched last night. Now, the pattern was perfect, wasn't it? Do this in remembrance of me, isn't that what he's told us to do? And just isn't there a preparation of heart not to come with our baskets empty, but to come with something to bring? And yet, obviously, people had nothing to bring.

And it was so painful. And so what I'm saying is God's order is perfect. The real issue is what about us? What about us? Are we willing to not only follow the pattern, but to be like the Lord Jesus in the zeal for the house of God eats us up? Now, again, let me just ask you, what would this assembly be like if every Christian in fellowship in this assembly, it was said of them, they have a zeal for the house of God.

And it was evident in their enthusiasm. They're hot about it. I mean, they're just passionate.

And so when it comes to the meetings, they're there. When it comes to the opportunities of service and witness, they're doing it. When it comes to audibly participating for the men, they're like popcorn on their feet.

One after another, they've got so much to say about their savior. Zeal consumes them. Would it make a difference? Sometimes what really people see is coldness and apathy and lethargy, don't they? That's what they see.

And they say, oh, this assembly business is for the birds. I'm going to go find a good Bible church. Is it because the pattern was wrong? No.

It's because we weren't what we ought to be. So what we could say is, well, we want to follow the pattern. We really do.

We realize it's important. This is so important. This is the house of God.

You're wiser than us. You know exactly what you want. You've got the perfect order.

And we're going to show that over this weekend, that this order is perfect and why it's perfect and why it magnifies the Lord Jesus so much. And yet the problem is, Lord, our hearts are so cold. Will you do something to our hearts? My prayer this weekend is that we'll be fervent about the pattern, but we'll be fervent about following it with zeal for the house of God.

And if that could happen, I'll tell you this, you won't be able to recognize this meeting even in six weeks. Can it change that quickly? It can change overnight. It's amazing how quickly an assembly can be turned around.

But an assembly never rises above the quality of the individuals that make up the fellowship, does it? So it starts really with me. It's that old saying, isn't it? It's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord. Standing in the need of prayer, it's me.

Lord, help me by your grace to be what I ought to be. If everyone in the assembly was like me, what kind of an assembly would there be? I challenge one place, make a quote of that, stick it on the mirror in your bathroom as a perpetual reminder. If everyone in the assembly was like me, what kind of an assembly would there be?

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/GL5-a5qx5-0.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/mike-attwood/new-testament-church-principles-part-1/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net