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“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation” ~ Romans 1:16

AN AVERSION TO “RULES”

Barry O'Dell

With the subject of this article it is very important to define our terms. *Aversion* means, “a feeling of repugnance toward something with a desire to avoid or turn from it; a settled dislike.” Rule(s) means, “a prescribed guide for conduct or action; a regulation or bylaw governing procedure or controlling conduct.” Many people make the statement, “Christianity is not about rules, it is about a relationship with Jesus.” Let’s be clear – living the Christian life is synonymous with having a relationship with God. For example, in baptism we are “baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). The phrase *into the name of* shows that it is at the point of baptism that one is placed into a relationship with the Godhead. Christians are children of God (Gal. 3:26-27) and heirs (Rom. 8:16-17). Members of the body of Christ are brothers and sisters (Rom. 12:1-5). We are members one of another and we “should have the same care one for another” (1 Cor. 12:12-27). Christians are now the children of God who live in the hope of spending an eternity in His presence (1 Jn. 3:1-3)! As the church, we are also referred to as the bride of Christ (Rom. 7:4). Christianity is indeed about man having a relationship with God.

Another interesting parallel that is used to describe our relationship with God is athletics. Paul wrote that his manner of life as a preacher was comparable to a runner and a boxer (1 Cor. 9:24-27). He spoke of the temperance (self-discipline) that one must have in order to obtain an incorruptible crown. He spoke of it this way to Timothy: “And if a man also strive for masteries, yet he is not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (2 Tim. 2:5). The New King James reads this way, “And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” What?!! The rules? Doesn’t Paul know that Christianity is not about rules? Some today would call Paul a legalist! Going back to our definitions above, many have a feeling of repugnance or a settled dislike for rules in Christianity. Many want a relationship with Jesus with no “rules.” Many who hold to this line of thinking often talk of “being spiritual without being religious.” “Give me Jesus, but not the church.” Should we have an aversion to rules? Consider some thoughts from Scripture...

First, God desires that all men be saved and know

the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). His saving grace has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). He is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). To make these things possible He has provided for us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3).

Second, all men CAN be saved, but that does not mean that all men WILL be saved. There were those in the first century and still some today who reject the truth of God’s word (Acts 13:44-46). There were some then and there are some now who are not willing to turn to Christ that they might live (Jn. 5:40). God sacrificed His only begotten Son to save the world, but not everyone in the world believes in Him (Jn. 3:16-17). A failure to recognize Christ as “I AM” is to be lost in sin (Jn. 8:24, 58).

Third, we cannot be saved on our own terms. We do not have the right to determine how we ourselves please God apart from His word. We must submit ourselves to His will. We must not try to “establish our own righteousness” (Rom. 10:1-3).

Fourth, to have a relationship with Him we must do as He says. Remember the definition of the word *rules*? “A prescribed guide for conduct or action; a regulation or bylaw governing procedure or controlling conduct.” Jesus told His apostles, “If a man

love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him. He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings” (Jn. 14:23-24). The prescribed guide for the Christian’s conduct is the New Testament of Jesus Christ and His apostles. That which governs our procedure and controls our conduct is the Holy Spirit inspired New Covenant. We are also told that the things that were previously written (i.e. the Old Testament) are for our benefit (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). While we are governed by the words of Christ and His apostles, there is a lot to learn from the Old Covenant. Yet, Jesus tells us that only a fool would hear what He had to say and then not do it (Matt. 7:24-27). We are going to be judged on the final day by His words (Jn. 12:48-50). We are not going to be judged by Moses and the prophets. We are not going to be judged by our own feelings or traditions.

Do we want to receive the crown of life? Do we want to be the good soldier that pleases God? Do we want to be the spiritual athlete whom God rewards? Listen again to Paul: “And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Tim. 2:5).

***“He that loveth Me not
keepeth not my sayings”
John 14:24***

THE AUTHORITY OF APOSTOLIC LITERATURE

David Lemmons

I can recall a time when many brethren began to speak about the matter of “plugging into the power” of the gospel accounts. By this figure they were seeking to draw a line of distinction between the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and the other sections of the New Testament. Those using this figure were interested in drawing more attention to this section of the New Testament because, according to them, this is where the “real” power is to be found in Scripture. They actually tried to draw our attention away from the epistles in favor of concentrating on the first four books. Along with many others, I believed (at the time) they had somewhat of an aversion to doctrinal matters addressed so thoroughly in the rest of the New Testament. To make such a division is certainly an attack on God’s Book, and it was properly resisted by faithful brethren to the degree that we do not hear so much of this idea any more. Had this concept been widely accepted, the numbers of the faithful today would have been so greatly diminished!

There is a letter mentioned in Acts 15 which demonstrates quite well the power and authority of the apostles’ writing. Acts 15 deals with the false teaching of the Judaizing teachers that Gentiles must be circumcised before they could be saved. Luke begins the chapter with these words: “And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). This matter became the subject of a meeting requested by Paul and Barnabas (v. 2-6). Notice that the apostles and elders came together to deal with this problem. That which came out of this meeting was a letter authoritatively answering this question of circumcising Gentiles and brought rejoicing (Acts 15:31). The letter begins at verse 23 and continues through verse 29. When we read verse 28 we have to be impressed with the claim of authority presented: “For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.” The document carried forth to Antioch thus is to be accepted based upon the authority of the Holy Spirit!

How is it that a letter written by apostles carries such weight? The answer is quite simple. These men, the apostles of Christ, had received a promised blessing from the Lord Jesus Christ. That promised blessing was that they would be guided into ALL truth. John 16:13 is the record of that promise: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.” The same promise is stated by Jesus in similar words in John 14:26: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things,

and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” Thankfully, mankind would not have to rely upon the memory of any one apostle nor the collective memories of all of the apostles to teach God’s will authoritatively! Rather, their teaching, their writing, would be guided by the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. How blessed we are that this is the case! Not only would this be true for the apostles, but also for certain ones to whom they would pass on the gift of prophecy. Prophecy was one of the nine spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. The day such authority first became a reality for these apostles was that Pentecost Day described in Acts 2, when the apostles finally received the promised power: “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 1:8).

Please consider how beautifully the Apostle Paul describes the church of Christ in Ephesians 2:19-22! Having such a description ought to provide all Christians powerful motivation to love the church and to work diligently to promote her welfare in every possible way. He uses three figures to paint the word picture of the blessedness of being in Christ: a kingdom, a family, and a building. He helps you and me to see that God’s building, the church, rests upon the foundation of Jesus Christ as the chief corner stone (v. 20). The practical means of the Christ being the church’s foundation is through His teaching provided us by the apostles and inspired prophets. Their writing, preserved for us in the New Testament, provides the foundation that promotes the well-being of the body of Christ. That is so vital for all men everywhere to know.

The most damaging and hurtful way to attack the unity that Paul wrote so much about in Ephesians, and that Jesus prayed for in John 17, is to seek to spread the authority of Christ to unauthorized sources. Some groups today say that they love the Bible and promote the Bible, but they also have as authority added books (e.g., Book of Mormon, Doctrines and Covenants, The Pearl of Great Price). Others would have us submit to church tradition and the words of the pope. Some reject extra books and church tradition, but would promote so-called “Pentecostal experiences” as authoritative. Then there are always those creed-books of men. None of these latter day revelations are in any way authoritative.

When we make the commitment to go back to the Bible, we stand firmly on the authority Jesus granted the apostles. Their writing in the New Testament will bless us with correct doctrine. We have no need to reject any part of the 27 books of the New Testament. Rather, we must live in that doctrine (2 John 9)!

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Benton, KY*

***“...their writing would be
guided by the Comforter,
the Holy Spirit.”***

A PATTERN TO BE FOLLOWED

Russ Earl

What is a pattern? "Something designed or used as a model for making things" (Merriam-Webster). In the Bible we find words like pattern, form, and example. What does this mean? Is there a pattern, form, or example that we are to follow? Let's see what the Bible says.

IS THERE A PATTERN IN THE BIBLE?

We find examples of patterns in the Old Testament: 1) Noah did according to all that God had commanded him (Gen 6:22; 7:15). God gave Noah a pattern to follow and Noah followed it. 2) Israel did "according to the word of Moses" (Ex 12:35; 12:50; 17:1; 39:42). 3) Aaron and his sons did "according to all that I have commanded thee" (Ex 29:35). We could give many more examples of a pattern being followed in the Old Testament. Does the New Testament have forms or patterns? Let's look at some scriptures and see for ourselves.

ROMANS 6:17 - "*But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.*" What does this verse tell us? What did they obey? Paul was thankful that these individuals were no longer servants of sin. But, how did they come out of sin? What did they do? Paul wrote "*but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine*". There are various forms of doctrine in the world today. However, there is only one form of **true** doctrine. There is only one form of doctrine, that when obeyed, brings man to God. This is what these individuals followed. They followed the form or pattern of doctrine that provides the forgiveness of sins. These individuals had this form of doctrine, this teaching delivered to them. It was delivered from God to them by men like Paul and others who would preach in Rome. What was the form of doctrine they obeyed that freed them from sin (6:18)? Romans 6:3-4 reveals to us that they had been buried in baptism and had been raised to walk in newness of life. Incidentally, this is exactly the same message that saved the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

ACTS 18:8 - "*And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.*" These individuals also obeyed a form of doctrine. The form of doctrine is found in their actions. Crispus and his household obeyed a form of doctrine by first hearing God's Word. They then continued to obey a form of doctrine when they believed in Christ as the Son of God and were baptized

for the remission of sins. This same form of doctrine is found in Acts 2. Those who heard Peter's sermon on Pentecost obeyed a form of doctrine as well. What was it? They heard just as Crispus and his household did. They believed and were baptized just like Crispus and his household (Acts 2:38, 41).

WHAT HAS CHRIST SAID ABOUT PATTERNS?

Jesus said, "*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*" (Jn. 12:48). Paul said that we are judged by the gospel that was delivered to him by Christ. It was the Gospel of Christ and the pattern from Christ. "*In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel*" (Rom. 2:16). Paul also reminds us that we are only to follow one gospel (pattern) as we read in Galatians 1:6-8. "*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*"

"There is only one form of doctrine that, when obeyed, brings man to God."

ACTS 22:16 - "*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" What did Saul do when he obeyed? He obeyed the form of doctrine (the gospel) that was taught to him by Ananias (Acts 9:17-18). This form of doctrine (the gospel) included being baptized. So following the pattern found in the New Testament results in obeying the gospel, as Christ gave the pattern of obedience. There is even a pattern for worship given to man by God through Christ and His apostles. While there are those today who deny any pattern, form, or example that is to be followed, an honest person can see that there are numerous examples of a pattern throughout the Bible - over and over again. To deny a pattern in the Bible is to deny and reject the words of Christ (Jn. 12:48). When we look into God's word we find patterns. We find a pattern of worship in the Old Testament and a new pattern in the New Testament. We find a pattern to deal with sin for Israel in the Old Testament. We find a pattern to follow for the remittance of sins in the New Testament. When we follow the same patterns and forms those in the time of the apostles followed, we become what they became - New Testament Christians. Let us be humble enough to follow the examples and patterns we see in the Bible.

Russ preaches for the Oologah church of Christ in Oologah, OK

September/October 2017 Contributors

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Pilot (Mammoth Spring, AR)	\$700.00
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Crossroads (Gepp, AR)	\$200.00
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Lowell (Springdale, AR)	\$150.00
Souder (Wasala, MO)	\$150.00
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Sturkie (Salem, AR)	\$100.00
Dellhalf (Myrtle, MO)	\$100.00
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Parsley (Columbus, NE)	\$25.00

Biblical Worship

- Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-24)
 - Prayer (Acts 12:5; Phil. 4:6-7)
- Vocal music only (Eph. 5:19; Heb. 13:15)
 - Giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7-8)
 - Preaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7)

The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (Rom. 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:3)
 - Name (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
 - Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Body of Christ and Christ alone is the Head and Savior (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23)
- Added to the church today just as in the 1st century (Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Cor. 12:13)

Salvation

- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
 - Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
 - Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
 - Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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