**Did God Give a Pattern to Man?**

*by Harry Osborne*

God has always demanded that people obey His will as He delivered it to them. In the beginning, God demanded this of Adam and Eve. When they disobeyed that will, they were condemned by God. In every age, God has continued to insist upon people obeying the standard He has declared binding. God has never given man the right to legislate his own standard, but has demanded strict adherence to the standard He delivered through inspiration. Moses stated it clearly in these words: "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2).

God still demands that we obey His commandments (1 Jn. 2:3-6). The destiny of our soul depends upon abiding within His teaching. "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

Though God has clearly required people to strictly obey His will, it is clear that disobedience has occurred in the past and continues today. Jesus said this would happen. In fact, He declared that only a minority would stay with His truth while the majority would be lost in error. Notice His words:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matthew 7:13-14).

That way to destruction is broad due to the innovations of man by change and apostasy from the unchanging will of God. The Bible repeatedly declares that apostasy from God's truth will occur. Let us notice a few such passages:

**1 Timothy 4:1-3** - Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

**2 Timothy 4:3-4** - For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-3** - Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him . . . let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.

Since God demands people to obey Him and it is clear that the majority are not doing so, what can be done? If we are in violation of God's will, what would He have us to do? It is clear that once we have disobeyed God, we cannot go back in time and undo that action. How, then, can we be right before God?

The Old Testament provides us with several good illustrations about the action God demands of the disobedient. As we noted earlier, Moses delivered God's commandment unto the people of Israel and told them that strict obedience was required. The people, however, repeatedly violated God's will and went into apostasy. Restoration of the people to God's favor could only take place when the people forsook their disobedience and returned to the path required in God's truth. Josiah led the people to restoration by reading them the law and persuading them to return unto it (2 Kings 23:1-3). Asa did much the same (2 Chron. 14 & 15). Jeremiah summed up the plea for restoration:

Thus says the Lord: Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls (Jer. 6:16).

In our time, there is a need for honest souls to leave the commandments of men and return to the old paths commanded by God. The vast majority of the religious world has changed God's revealed will. Their changes have not produce greater adherence to God's will, but a satisfying of their own desires. Like those in Jeremiah's time, we find a great need in our day of leaving the traditions of men and returning to the commandments of God. If we are to accomplish that return to God's will as He declared it, we must return to the right standard. That standard is not found in human creeds, manuals, catechisms, or disciplines. Neither is it found in human thoughts, feelings, popular opinion, eloquent oration or the desires of the rich and powerful. However, the inspired writers of God's word direct us as to where it may be found.

Scripture Provides the Pattern for Us

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). If the Bible is **complete** and it **thoroughly equips** us to **every** good work, nothing else is needed. It alone is sufficient to guide us in God's will!

"Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13). The words of the inspired writers constitute a ***"pattern"*** for us to follow. Since that pattern was revealed through the Scripture, we can learn what God expects from us by studying our Bible.

"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11). The implication of this passage is obvious. It declares that any religious teaching which cannot be proved from the Bible has no place being spoken. We are instructed to abide **within** the revealed will of God.

"He answered and said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men.' And He said to them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition'" (Mk. 7:6-9). There should be no doubt that the modern practice of writing and adopting human standards for religious conduct is not according to the will of God. What should be done about it? Should we just forget about it and keep them anyway? No, the principle of restoration teaches us to put them away and seek the old paths of the Bible as our sole standard.

Conclusion

Religious division is due to the changes man has made in God's instruction. The result has been the establishment of a multitude of churches teaching every doctrine conceivable and practicing things that attract more people. Man may love it, but God abhors it! The denominationalism we see today can be ended immediately if we simply let the divine standard of God's word govern us in all things. Once the commandments and traditions of men are taken away, unity can be achieved with the Bible as our sole guide. This plan for unity through restoration has worked among God's people in the past and will work today. Though men's thoughts and ways change with the times, God's way of righteousness remains unchanged as the narrow and difficult way that leads the few to life.