

# The Apostolic Patern



by Don Rumble

## Introduction

There is much teaching today on God's order in the Church. While a great deal of it has been valuable, we still have need of further insight. Many Christians equate order with how well a group of believers is organized. To someone who thinks along this line, Paul's thoughts in Philippians Chapter Three are rather startling. At first glance one might not even realize that this passage is addressing the apostolic pattern. However, the verse that draws our attention to this theme is Philippians 3:17. *"Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern."* Rather than focus on external forms of administration, *Paul opened his heart concerning His goals and desires. As the Philippians gained insight into the motives of this man, the foundation for godly order was being revealed.* Before any people will come into a proper expression of godly array, they must first have their hearts aligned with God's priorities.

First, Paul makes no apology to the saints for writing the same truths that he had taught them previously. He even points out the value of being reminded (3:1).

Second, he begins to lay out the apostolic pattern for the Church (3:2 – 6). At the heart of divine order in the Church is the call to walk as new covenant people. As such we will have three major characteristics: 1. We will worship God in the Spirit. 2. We will rejoice in Christ. 3. We will have no confidence in the flesh.

Third, Paul lays out for us the motivation for his lifestyle. His goal was simply to know Christ and to gain more of Him (3:7 – 14).

Finally, through his tears he challenges the saints to follow his example (3:15 – 21). Already, there were many in the early Church who had rejected the call to bear the cross as a lifestyle. These needed a change of heart. The transformation of the inner man was and always will be God's priority in building His house.

## Why We Need To Be Reminded

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PHI. 3:1 - Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.

One part of God's strategy in caring for His people is to stir our remembrance. The Lord repeats Himself not simply because "we didn't get it right the first time" but because there is redemptive help for us in it. There is safety in being reminded; there is also an arousing to action. Consider the words of Peter.

Therefore I will not be negligent to *remind* you always of these things, though you know them, and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by *reminding you*, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a *reminder* of these things after my cease. (2Pet. 1:12 – 15)

When the Lord reminds us, it stirs us up! Since we fall short of God's glory, we often need to be encouraged to obey God in what He has already said to us. Peter says it is right to do this.

Another example:

Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as *reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God.* (Rm. 15:15)

Did you ever hear someone share a word from God that powerfully affected your life? However, when you tried to share it with someone else, it did not have the effect on them that you thought God wanted it to. Then you heard the preacher speak again on the same issue and found a greater clarity on how to better deliver to your friend what God was saying. This was because there was grace on that preacher *to equip you* in sharing the gospel. Paul saw this and *because of the grace on his life to communicate God's word*, he sought to *remind* the Roman Christians of truth revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. This equipped them to communicate God's word more clearly.

## The Pattern - Revealed in the New Covenant

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PHI. 3:2, 3 - Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,

Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant people (Gen.17:11). Paul is contrasting the true covenant people with those who were false. Judaizing Christians who were teaching God's people that they *had to keep the Law* as well as believe in Jesus were in fact, a misrepresentation of God's covenant. They believed they were *in harmony with* what God was doing; Paul called them "dogs". ("Dogs" refers to those *outside* the covenant community – Mt.15:22 – 28, Rev.22:15). They thought they were workers of righteousness; Paul said they were "evil workers". They thought the external circumcision they taught was the biblical sign of God's covenant; Paul identified their practice as mutilation (a pagan practice expressly forbidden by God – Lev.19:28, 21:5).

Circumcision - the true mark of God's covenantal people has three distinguishing features:

1) We worship God in the Spirit. Worship is no longer relegated to a physical place.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when *you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.*" (Jn. 4:21)

Jesus said that worship would not occur in either place. What did He mean? Worship would no longer have to do with physical location. If someone believed they had to go to either place to minister to the Lord, their activity would not be true worship. We do not *go* to

church; we *are* the Church! We do not gather together so we can worship; *we gather so we can worship together!* In other words, our time together is to corporately express the reality of our individual relationships with God throughout the week. If we are not worshipers when we are alone, neither will we be true worshipers when we gather with the church. God does not want a part-time priesthood. We must become in practice His royal priesthood. God's covenant people do not require special buildings in order to worship; they live in the Spirit.

2) We rejoice in Christ Jesus. He is the basis of our identity.

We do not rejoice in buildings, educational degrees, money or success in the eyes of men. We do not have any "claim to fame" other than Him. When He found us we were not pretty. We had ruined our lives. Our "best shot" at righteousness was nothing more than filthy rags before Him, and we had no way of making ourselves worthy enough to approach Him. So He came to us! He purchased us with His own blood and brought us to Himself. Now, *we who had nothing, have Him.* Any Christian who boasts in anything else has missed the whole point!

3) We have no confidence in the flesh. We simply do not have the ability in our own strength to extend God's kingdom.

We learn this principle from the life of Abraham. The New Covenant is actually older than the Old Covenant; it is tied directly back to Abraham. It is important to understand that the last 27 books of the Bible are not the New Covenant; they are the inerrant Scripture written about the New Covenant! The New Covenant is not written on paper; it is written on the tables of our hearts. The Scripture is written to help us *understand the process* as God writes His words into the fiber of our being. God's purpose is not that we simply memorize Bible verses (as helpful as that is), but that we become a tangible expression of His word. Sometimes this process can be painful. For example: learning about patience in a classroom setting is easy; having it written into our hearts in real life situations where it becomes part of our character is much more painful. Similarly, the first 39 books of the Bible are not the Old Covenant (Probably the best term for this section of Scripture is "The Law and the Prophets"). The Old Covenant was not written on paper, but on tablets of stone during the time of Moses. However, the New covenant that we are participating in is tied directly back to Abraham, and he predated Moses. The promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. *His seed is Christ and all who belong to Him* (Gal.3:16, 29).

When God spoke to Abraham, He promised that He would multiply him greatly. *The Abrahamic covenant has to do with procreation and multiplication.* It wasn't until Abraham heard this promise from God the third time that he believed Him (Gen. 12:2, 13:14 – 16, 15:1 – 6). Then God reckoned this faith in Abraham as righteousness. We who believe in the Lord (as Abraham did) are his children (Rom.4:11, 16). It was after he believed the Lord that he and Sarah decided that he should go in to Hagar. Ishmael was born from this union. What does this teach us in the Spirit? It is not false prophets who bring forth spiritual Ishmaels in our day. Rather, *friends of God do!* Abraham was God's friend. He loved the Lord, walked with Him and saw clearly what God intended to do. However, *he did not wait for God to bring to pass what He promised.* It was after Ishmael was born that God instituted circumcision. God brought the knife to bear on the place of *man's reproductive capacity.* Today the bloody knife of God's circumcising dealings is upon His people concerning our attempts to extend His kingdom (multiplication) in our own strength instead of waiting for Him to do what He said He would do. God does not need our attempts to bring in or extend the Kingdom of God. He longs for a people who will believe in Him, watch for His activity on the earth and move in step with Him. *This* is a key mark of the covenantal people of God. They have no confidence in the flesh.

PHI. 3:4, 5 - though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;

If anyone had a right to take confidence in his natural qualifications for kingdom life, it was Paul. He was circumcised eight days after birth. In other words, he was born into a Jewish home that observed the Law. He was not circumcised late in life as either a nonreligious Jew or a convert to Judaism would have been. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, indicating that he was raised in a home where his parents spoke the Hebrew language and taught him Hebrew culture. His background was that of a Pharisee. Of the two religious parties (the Pharisees and the Sadducees), he had been a member of the one committed to the literal interpretation of the Scriptures.

PHI. 3:6 - concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Paul was so zealous that he sought to stamp out this “sect of the Nazarene”, which seemed to him to be an “infection” of the purity of

Jewish religion. While his zeal caused him to advance beyond many of his contemporaries in Judaism (Gal. 1:13, 14), yet it brought him into direct conflict with God. Thus, his statement that he was blameless in the law's righteousness could only mean that he was *blameless in the eyes of men*. In other words, if you hired a private detective to follow him around, you would not have found any evidence with which to indict him for breaking God's law. However, in that state he was still an unrighteous man in desperate need of Christ's redemption.

## Paul's Motivation

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PHI. 3:7 - But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

One of those gains was the reputation of being righteous under the Law. Whatever other gains there were that Paul used to enjoy, they were now nothing to him. Consider what "perks" a military man might have if he was "moving up the ranks" in a military oriented society. He would have recognition, reputation and the applause of men. There would undoubtedly be financial rewards as well. So also, consider the gains or "perks" a successful religious man might have in a religious society. He would be admired by so many. Yet Paul laid it all aside for a Person. Not a ministry. Not fame. Jesus had captured his heart! Paul had studied at the feet of Gamaliel, a famous teacher of Scripture in Jerusalem. He memorized whole books in the Bible, he studied the great doctrines of the faith and he thought he understood what life was all about. However, he had been studying a "shadow". When he met He who had cast that shadow, he realized there was no comparison between mere knowledge and the person of Jesus. Jesus was the reality that Old Testament Scripture was written to reveal. From that time on, the glory of Christ became his life message. His ministry was not to teach a new philosophy; it was to reveal Jesus through his words and life. True apostolic ministries in our day will not propagate a method; they will impart the life of the Son of God!

PHI. 3:8 - But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of (in view of the surpassing value of knowing – NASB.) Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

Notice that verse 7 speaks in the *past* tense and verse 8 speaks of a *present* attitude in Paul. He *had* counted as loss whatever things

were gain to him. However, just as importantly, he now *continued* to count everything loss.

When we started out in the kingdom, we looked at all that the world had given us and threw it all aside because of the impact Jesus made on us. However, is that still our attitude today? After years of walking with Him have we grown complacent toward Him? Even the blessings He has given us could begin to occupy too important a place in our priorities. He must be first.

Paul was not writing from a comfortable setting, but from prison. There in his jail cell (rats, dank and dark atmosphere, chains) he looked back at the reputation, recognition and comfort of his old life and was able to say, "I'd rather have this cell and Jesus than all that." How could he say this? He had seen the value of knowing Him. Consider the two words, price and value. Price speaks of what is paid for something; value is what it is worth. If you paid \$20.00 for an item and later found out it was only worth \$5.00, you were "ripped off". If, on the other hand you found out it was worth \$100,000 that would be considered a fabulous bargain. God never gets "ripped off". He paid a great price (the blood of Jesus) for our salvation and the Church spends much time speaking about this. While this is appropriate, it is not the complete message. If we would begin to recognize the value of what He purchased for us, it would radically affect our lifestyles. Walking in intimate communion with the one and true God is valuable far beyond our ability to understand. However, as we enter into and abide in this relationship, our ability to estimate its worth grows in our hearts. Thus our commitment to Him should grow as well.

Paul not only *had counted* his gains as loss (past tense), he *counted* them loss (present tense). However, beyond that, *he suffered the loss of everything as well*. He had lost it all. It is one thing to count something as gone even while it is still in your possession. It is another thing altogether to have it physically removed from you. Paul counted it all as rubbish in order to *gain Christ*. He wanted the increase of Christ in his attitudes, preaching, prophesying, serving, writing, etc.

PHI. 3:9 - and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

The phrase, to "be found" by the Lord is probably an eschatological one (referring to the end-time – Mk.13:36, Luke18:8, Matt.24:46).

In other words, he wanted to be found relying only on the righteousness of Christ when Jesus returned. While Paul was already standing in righteousness by faith, he did not want to fall back into a reliance on works as his basis for acceptance by God. When we are involved in much ministry, it can become easy to point to our works as we come into His presence. The temptation is to feel just a little more worthy of God's love because "this week I witnessed to five people". Paul saw this trap and wanted no part of it. He knew he was accepted before God simply because of the blood of Jesus. He wanted to maintain the simplicity of that faith. *All ministry must reflect our acceptance in Him. When it does not, it will misrepresent Calvary.*

PHI. 3:10 - that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead resided within Paul and is in us as well today. Paul wanted to intimately experience this power not just as a one-time experience (initial conversion) but as a continual operative force in his life. Part of such a lifestyle is the fellowship of (participation in) the Lord's sufferings. God is intimately involved with His creation. He grieves over the lost, the deceived, the backsliders, the immoral. When one of His people has a burden to minister to some of these folks, it is not his own burden he is carrying. God is allowing His child to participate with Him in what He is feeling. We cannot participate in God's redemptive pain without it affecting us. The result is that we are increasingly conformed to what was exemplified at Calvary. **The cross is the highest example of obedience ever witnessed on the earth.** There we see God embracing the ultimate pain and sacrifice. Herein lies our goal.

PHI. 3:11 - if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Notice that conformity to Christ's death is progressive (vs.10). Therefore, this resurrection is probably progressively attained also. Paul was already assured of being in the physical resurrection of the righteous (vs.21). However, here he is speaking of coming into a dimension of resurrection life while yet in this life.

PHI. 3:12 – 14 - Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.



Paul humbly realized that he had not arrived at the fullness of God's intention for him in this life. He saw a prize set before Him in the race he was running and he pressed toward the goal line to win it. That prize was Christ Himself. *Everything Paul did was that he might gain more of Him.*

## The Challenge

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PHI. 3:15 - Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

Our attitude ought to be the same as Paul's. We have not yet attained full maturity. We are pressing on to lay hold of what He has for us. However, one problem *we have is that we often do not recognize our own pride*. If there is any area in our lives that we think more highly of ourselves than we ought, Paul indicates *that we will not recognize it*. God will have to *reveal* it to us. When He does, our response must be to humble ourselves.

PHI. 3:16 - Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

In other words, we must recognize how far we have come and live accordingly. If we are twenty years old in the Lord, let us live as a twenty year old. We must not act as a five year old and call that humility. That is just religious pride.

PHI. 3:17 - Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

Paul has laid out for us the apostolic pattern for the Church. Many have thought that divine order was found in proper local church government and correct understanding concerning the gifts of the Spirit and the gift ministries found in Ephesians Chapter Four. *However, the pattern for building God's house is revealed in the heart attitude that pursues Christ even to the point of losing all possessions if necessary. The people who give Him His rightful place in their hearts individually will then give Him His rightful place in their midst corporately. Proper church structure will then become the reflection of those lifestyles.*

PHI. 3:18, 19 - For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame – who set their mind on earthly things.

Paul saw that divine order in the Church could only be established as the people of God wholeheartedly gave themselves to Christ as he had done. *The key was not primarily that there be a strong leadership in each church. Every Christian had to offer himself unreservedly to the Lord.* Paul had given his life in apostolic ministry for this one major goal – to see Christ revealed on the earth through His body. However, he began to weep as he viewed the Church. He realized that multitudes were failing to pay the price and that the Church was going into decline. Paul does not say that these Christians were enemies of Christ, but of His cross. Of course, in opposing His cross as a lifestyle, they were opposing Him. They wanted to have forgiveness of sins without being conformed to Christ's death. What Paul had poured his life into was not going to bear the fruit he had hoped for. In the last epistle of his life that we have in the canon of Scripture, he tearfully acknowledged that all Asia had turned away from him (2 Tim. 1:15). Notice some of the last words we read from his hand.

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. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Tim. 4:3 – 7)

The early Church did go into decline. By the second century she looked very little like the simple apostolic bridal company she was in the first century. Within time, there was much more of an emphasis on buildings, education, external forms of worship, etc. Something of the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ had been lost. However, at the end of the age there will be a people who will pay the price. The apostolic pattern will again be seen in the Church. There will be a bride without spot or wrinkle. Jesus will get so excited about this company that He will split the sky and return for her!

PHI. 3:20, 21 - For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

All Scripture quotes are from the NKJV

## About the Author

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