

Narrative, Pattern, and Authority

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I. Introduction

A. How should we read and understand Scripture?

1. Many religious people today view Scripture as a narrative from which we can draw broad, big-picture concepts emphasizing love and unity, with little to no emphasis on details such as the organization of the local church, the form of worship, the work of the church, or the pattern of marriage.
 - a) Scripture becomes a rough outline rather than a pattern for fellowship with God.
 - b) The result of this approach is a broadening of fellowship across traditional lines of division by removing any practical sources of disagreement.
 - c) Fellowship is determined by agreement on basic facts such as the deity of Christ, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and little else.
2. Others see in Scripture a set of patterns or doctrines that provide a detailed picture of the life of a faithful child of God. These patterns are understood to be inspired and handed down by the Apostles and needed to shape not only the church but also the daily lives of believers.
 - a) Those who hold this view often look for commands, examples, and necessary inferences to determine the shape of the pattern.
 - b) Fellowship is determined by adherence to these patterns, particularly regarding the organization, function, and worship of the local church.
 - c) When held too narrowly, this view can lead some to ignore the “weightier matters,” such as love and mercy. - Matt. 23:23 KJV

B. A comprehensive view

1. Scripture does provide us with a narrative. The main thrust of this story is how God established His kingdom and enthroned His Son as King.

- a) Within the story, we learn of the nature of God, His holiness, judgment, mercy, and love, as well as the failings of mankind to reflect His nature and share in His fellowship.
- 2. Within this narrative, we see a pattern. This pattern is meant to shape us for the good works God has prepared for us. - Eph. 2:10
- 3. When correctly viewed, this pattern encompasses both the broad principles and the details of Godly living. This pattern describes the church and its work, enabling us to carry out the mission God has given His people in a manner that reflects not only His purpose but also His wisdom. When the narrative of Scripture is understood in this way, the tension between seeking authority and embodying the love and mercy of God is resolved.

II. Discussion

A. "Retain the standard of sound words..." - 2 Tim. 1:8-13

- 1. Paul wrote 2 Timothy from prison, and he anticipated dying in this imprisonment. - 2 Tim. 4:6-18
 - a) The fact that the Gospel presents a suffering Savior who died on the cross was viewed as scandalous (a source of shame) by many in the first century - Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18ff.
 - b) Paul's imprisonment likely added to this scandal, and some false teachers used his suffering as an opportunity to present an overly spiritualized gospel. - Phil. 1:15-17; 2 Tim. 2:18
- 2. Paul did not view suffering as shameful.
 - a) He understood that salvation was made available through suffering (2 Tim. 1:8-10). Without the cross, there would have been no resurrection. Death was defeated through resurrection, and "life and immortality" were "brought to light" through the Gospel.
 - b) He viewed his suffering through the same lens.
 - c) He was imprisoned because he taught the Gospel. Thus, he viewed his suffering as following the pattern established by Jesus in His suffering. - 2 Tim. 1:8, 12; 2:3, 10-13

3. Through the Gospel (the presentation of a suffering Savior who is ultimately vindicated through the resurrection), we find salvation and a “holy calling.” Through the Gospel, God invites us to participate in the life and immortality provided by Jesus (2 Thess . 2:13-14).

a) Salvation is found through the Gospel, not through our works.

(1) “Works” cannot refer to acts of obedience in this context. Paul calls Timothy to boldly join him in a life of sacrificial obedience, even as Jesus sacrificially obeyed the Father.

(2) By “works,” he refers to an effort to find salvation apart from the Gospel through a different pattern of teaching and living than Jesus modeled and commanded.

b) The Gospel is a story that contains a pattern. The pattern is one of complete submission, sacrifice, service, and love demonstrated by Jesus in His life here on earth.

(1) It is this pattern or “standard” that Paul encourages Timothy to keep.

B. Pattern - A rough outline or a standard to be upheld?

1. There is some debate about what Paul means by “standard” (NASB), “form” (KJV), or “pattern” (ESV).

a) “An interesting word is used to denote the pattern of sound teaching which Timothy is urged to guard. Hypotypōsis means an outline sketch such as an architect might make before getting down to the detailed plans of a building. The importance of this pattern cannot be over-emphasized. It means that the apostle claims his own teaching to be no more than a starting-point. It was to be a guideline rather than a stereotyped form of words. It would allow for growth within that guideline (cf. 1 Tim. 1:16 for a discussion of the word hypotypōsis). Timothy is not told merely to repeat what Paul taught, but to follow that teaching as a basis.”¹

b) John Mark Hicks takes a similar approach. He argues that Galatians 6:14-16 presents the “canon” or rule “by which the church walks”²

¹ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 149–150.

² Hicks, John Mark. *Searching for the Pattern: My Journey in Interpreting the Bible* (p. 94). Kindle Edition.

- (1) “In other words, the rule or canon by which Christians walk is not fundamentally or foundationally the New Testament as a written document but the mighty act of God in Jesus by the Spirit. Or, to put it another way, the criterion of the gospel is what God has done. It is a theological criterion, which the written New Testament proclaims. The rule is about God, what God has done, and God’s faithful enactment of the promise to Abraham. The rule or pattern, according to the apostle Paul, is not a detailed blueprint for church practices but the cross of Christ and the inauguration of new creation.”³
- (2) He then quotes several passages, including 2 Tim. 1:13, to prove that the rule of faith is not what is written in the Epistles but what God has done through the cross and the resurrection.
- c) However, John Stott demonstrates that this is not a proper understanding of *hypotypōsis*.
 - (1) “The only other occurrence of hypotypōsis in the New Testament is in Paul’s first letter to Timothy where he describes himself, the object of Christ’s amazing mercy and perfect patience, as ‘an example to those who were to believe in him ’(1:16). Arndt and Gingrich, who give ‘model ’or ‘example ’as the usual translation, suggest that it is used ‘rather in the sense prototype ’in 1 Timothy 1:16 and ‘rather in the sense standard ’in 2 Timothy 1:13. In this case Paul is commanding Timothy to keep before him as his standard of sound words, or ‘as a model of sound teaching ’(neb mg.) what he had heard from the apostle. This certainly suits the general teaching of the letter and faithfully reflects the emphasis of the sentence on the first word ‘model ’or ‘standard’.”⁴
2. When Paul speaks of the “standard of sound words which you have hear from me...” does this include 1Timothy?
 - a) Hicks lists 1Tim. 3:16 in his list of summations of the Gospel (ibid)
 - b) Should we separate 1Tim. 3:16 from the rest of 1Timothy?

³ Hicks, John Mark. Searching for the Pattern: My Journey in Interpreting the Bible (p. 94). Kindle Edition.

⁴ John R. W. Stott, [*Guard the Gospel the Message of 2 Timothy*](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 43–44.

- c) 1 Timothy provides a blueprint for action that is very similar to O.T. blueprint patterns.
 - (1) Chapter 1 - Dealing with false teachers, Chapter 2 - Behavior/Roles in worship assembly, Chapter 3 - Qualities of local church leadership, Chapter 4 - Work of a preacher, Chapter 5 - Use of funds, Chapter 6 - Instruction to godliness.
- 3. Why not view 1Tim. 3:15-16 as an overview of the church's work (being a pillar of the truth that is the Gospel), and the rest of the letter as a pattern for accomplishing this work with divine wisdom?
 - a) Rather than making arbitrary distinctions about which parts of the New Testament are binding, we would do better to see the Epistles as a detailed picture of how God's work shapes our lives and churches.
- 4. Paul preached far more than a few simple facts about Jesus. - Gal. 1:11-12
 - a) He did not need a divine revelation to know that the Christians he persecuted believed that Jesus was the resurrected Son of God; this he knew long before meeting Christ on the Damascus Road.
 - b) He certainly proclaimed Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. However, he also preached about the pattern of moral living (Eph. 4:17-32)
 - c) He preached the love of Christ, but he also preached about the organization and worship of the local church. - 1 Tim. 3:1-15
 - d) He preached the grace of God, but he also preached "the mind of Christ" regarding marriage (1 Cor. 7), the use of liberties (1 Cor. 8-10), spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12), proper worship (1 Cor. 14), and benevolence (1 Cor. 16:1,2; 2 Cor. 8-9).
- C. The story of Israel demonstrates the union of narrative, pattern, and authority.
 - 1. The story gave context to the commands. It did not replace them. - Dt. 6:20-25
 - 2. In the creation, God acted alone through patterns. From this, we see that patterns are intrinsic to His nature. - Gen. 1
 - 3. The pattern of marriage lays out the parameters of an exclusive relationship, which is ultimately God's purpose for man. - Gen. 2:18-25; Gen. 1:26-27

4. The pattern of the ark reveals that there is no conflict between blueprint patterns and grace and covenant. - Gen. 6:8-22
5. The pattern of the tabernacle shows that fellowship with God is found through adherence to His patterns. - Ex. 25:8,22, 29:42-46; 40:16, 19, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32; cf. Ex. 25:40, 39:32; 39:42-43; Ex. 40:34-38
6. The pattern of the camp placed God in the center of the camp and allowed Israel to maintain its identity and purpose throughout the wilderness wandering. - Num. 2
7. The pattern of the cross again shows that patterns are intrinsic to God's nature, both in His actions and in the revelation of His acts. - 1 Pet. 1:20-21; Lk. 24:26; Rom. 3:21-26; Heb. 9; Heb. 10:1-10

D. Answering Common Objections

1. The patterns are often inferred rather than explicit, such as in the Old Testament.
 - a) The Narrative Theological approach leads us to infer the practical significance of who God is and how His might act should shape (if it should shape) our lives.
 - b) When it comes to the shape, work, and worship of the church, we are given tremendous information to inform our inferences. It is not a blind inference.
2. The CENI hermeneutic is too complicated.
 - a) It is the natural way in which we all communicate in every area of life.
 - b) Any process, no matter how simple, can be described in a way that makes it seem complicated.
3. We should pursue love and grace rather than judge one another by a strict pattern.
 - a) This false dichotomy seems to lie at the heart of the issue. The pattern itself shows us how we can express love and share God's grace; it is not in conflict with grace.
 - b) We must be willing to recognize that all covenant relationships are exclusive, including the relationship with God.