

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Seeing a Pattern

(Jerry Fite)

Viewing digitized maps today is interesting. When we “Google” a destination, point “B” may at first glance be shown at a location without much specificity. But, by moving the cursor on the side bar we see a more detailed picture for our destination with specific streets appearing.

Seeing the pattern formed by Scripture is a demand God places upon each one of us. Paul writes, “*Hold to the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Timothy 1:13). The character of the words forming the pattern is “sound” or healthy words coming from the verbally inspired apostle Paul. Hearing or reading the authoritative words, one is to hold to the pattern established by such words. Despite the charges of “legalism” from those who decry placing a “pattern grid” over the Scriptures, one can hold to the God revealed pattern in “faith” and “love” as one continues to live godly “in Christ Jesus” (cf. 1 Tim. 1:10-11, 6:3).

Controversy and division have occurred among brethren over determining if we have an unalterable pattern revealed by God or not regarding “church cooperation”. E.R. Harper delivered a sermon entitled “Misapplied Patterns” over WLAC radio in Nashville. In the 1955 broadcast he commented on the scriptures of “church cooperation” declaring that because there were differences in the methods of cooperation, then no unalterable pattern exists regarding subject.

The problem with his presentation is that he was establishing the pattern for church cooperation with a general view, where the pattern of sound words has more revealed specificity. For example, He pointed out that churches cooperated in one place by sending funds to a church in need (1 Corinthians 16:1-4, 2 Corinthians 8-9, Romans 15:25-27). Then in another place, churches cooperated by sending funds to Paul (2 Cor. 11:8). Which is the unalterable pattern? A closer look reveals that the first cooperation is for “benevolence”, where the second is for “wages” to one

preaching the Gospel. Recognizing this distinction, one sees the unalterable pattern.

A church or churches cooperated in the spread of the Gospel by providing wages for Paul in his preaching the saving message (Phil. 1:5, 4:14-16, 2 Corinthians 11:8). Churches cooperated in benevolence or supplying funds to a church in need by sending funds to the church currently unable to provide necessities for its saints (1 Corinthians 16:1-4, 2 Corinthians 8-9, Romans 15:25-27).

Sound words from Scripture take us to a more distinct view of church cooperation wherein we do find a consistent unalterable pattern. In evangelism, a church or churches always sent directly to the one doing the preaching. In benevolence, churches under the guidance of Christ’s apostles always sent directly to the church in need. Sound words never provide the pattern for practices of setting up human organizations through which funds are funneled for evangelism and benevolence. No Scripture offers such a pattern.