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The New Testament Pattern -poonen - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2008/3/25 17:27

The New Testament Pattern

by Zac Poonen

Right from the beginning of our work in India, we decided that we would follow the pattern found in the New Testament in every aspect of our ministry - and not what we saw in the churches around us.

In the first century, the Lord used apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers to build His church (Eph.4:11). We prayed that we would have all these five ministries to build the church in India in our day as well.

Apostles: Apostles were those who planted churches and appointed their elders (Acts 14:23). They were spiritual fathers to the elders and guided the churches that they planted. They did not make their churches into a denomination, but allowed each church to be self-governing. We did not see any apostolic ministry in the churches around us. What we saw among them mostly were two man-made systems of church government:

(i) The pyramid system. This was a centrally-controlled system headed by a Pope or a Superintendent or a President, who had bishops under him, who in turn had pastors under them who ran the churches. All these posts were filled by election! This hierarchical pattern imitated the business world exactly.

(ii) The independent system. In this system, each church was totally independent and answerable to nobody. An elected board would invite a man with a Bible-college degree to be its salaried pastor. After a few years this pastor would discover a larger church where he could get a better salary - and he would move there. Then the board would advertise and find another pastor for their church!!

In both these systems, there were no spiritual fathers - only elected and paid leaders. We rejected both these man-made systems and chose to follow the apostolic pattern described in the New Testament.

Prophets: Prophets (1 Cor.12:28) were those whose ministry revealed the secret sins and failures in a church and who could prescribe the remedy as well (1 Cor.14:25). Their ministry was to challenge, encourage and build-up the church (1 Cor.14:3). But such prophetic ministry was rarely seen in our day. What we did see were false prophets who deceived the believers by pretending to predict their future (like fortune-tellers do). The Lord protected us from such deceivers and gave us genuine prophetic ministry in our midst.

Evangelists: Evangelists were those who brought people to Christ and added them to the local church. But in our day, we saw the emphasis on "evangelistic crusades", where those who came to Christ were not being gathered together and built up into a local New-Testament church. Most of the conversions recorded in the book of Acts, came through personal evangelism. And God gave us some outstanding personal evangelists, who not only brought people to Christ but added them to the local churches as well. We also urged our brothers and sisters to pray that the Holy Spirit would lead them to those around them who were seeking for a God-fearing life. The Lord answered those prayers and added many disciples to our churches. We were about four families when we first met in my house in August 1975. But God added many thousands to us thereafter, from all parts of the world - and most of this was through personal evangelism.

Shepherds: The shepherd (translated as "pastor" in Eph.4:11) is a gift given to the church - and not the title of the leader of a church (as in churches these days). The leaders of the New Testament church were called elders - not pastors - and there was always more than one elder in every church. So we decided that every church that the Lord planted through us, would have at least two elders. At times, we had to wait for some time before we could find men who qualified to be elders. But gradually, the Lord gave us godly elders to lead each church. But we needed many shepherds (pastors) in every church (besides the elders) to help in shepherding the flock. Jesus' example showed us that one man could effectively shepherd only 12 people. So a church with 120 people would need at least 10 shepherds (pastors). God gave us many brothers with a shepherd-heart to care for the lambs and sheep, but we have not attained the proportion of 1 shepherd for 12 people.

Teachers: The teacher in the New Testament had the task of teaching believers "to do everything that Jesus had commanded" (Matt.28:20). They did not expound the Scriptures academically. Their teaching was always practical and designed to lead people to obedience to our Lord's commands - commands such as "Don't get angry, Don't lust after women, Love all your enemies, Don't seek man's honour, Don't love money", etc., (Matt.5:22,28,44; 6:1-18,24). We never heard any teaching on these truths in most of the churches around us. But God gave us teachers who taught the believers how to obey such commands of the Lord.

Financial support for workers: In the New Testament, the Lord's workers were supported financially in two ways: Some were supported by the gifts of believers, while others like Paul supported themselves. But in India, almost every Christian worker was either a salaried worker of a church or supported by gifts from believers. So we saw a great need for some workers in India to support themselves and thereby demonstrate the second method of support found in the New Testament - and thus restore the balance. So I decided to support myself and to serve the churches in India freely. I also decided that I would not receive any royalties for my books and audio-tapes that our church published. I encouraged my fellow-elders also to follow my example. The amazing miracle we have seen is that we now have more than 70 elders in the churches in India, who have been serving the Lord freely for many, many years. And some of them are serving in India's poorest villages.

Reports: The New Testament contains many letters written by the apostles. But they never gave any reports about their work in those letters. Nor did they ask for any money to support themselves or their ministry. But almost every Christian organization (that we knew) sent out reports of their work regularly - and brazenly asked people for money. We decided to follow the example of the apostles - and never to send out any reports or photographs of our work, or to hint about our financial needs to anyone but our heavenly Father. We have followed this policy from the time we started the work in 1975 - and God has abundantly supplied all our needs. Paul shared the reports of his labors only with his fellow-workers - and we have done likewise.

Fellowship: Fellowship and unity among His disciples was the primary burden of Jesus' prayer in John 17. And this was the goal of the apostles too. Most of the churches around us however emphasized activity - meetings and more meetings - and not fellowship and unity. We valued meetings. But we felt that fellowship was more important. So we organized picnics and other functions, at which we got to know each other better. We played games at these picnics with our young people and children and thus deepened our fellowship with each other. Thus we built a depth of fellowship among us that was precious and unparalleled.

There were many other areas like this, where we did things differently from the churches around us. It was a battle to pioneer these new ways of doing things and to return to the practices of the New Testament. Satan opposed us vehemently and many Christians criticized us. But God was with us - and that was all that mattered.

Re: The New Testament Pattern -poonen - posted by crsschk (), on: 2008/3/26 6:16

Pattern, 'like unto' would seem to be the definition. This is excellent! Seems so incredibly simple ... that it ought to be the norm, rather than the exception.

Quote:
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