clude our being pragmatic in the implementation of that precedent. So it is that there are few, if any, inviolable “no-fly zones” separating the two alliances.

Nor should we assume that association with either alliance automatically produces a predictable result. For example, anti-historical, forward-thinking theology may be a legitimate reaction to an unscriptural tradition in which we are mired—or, alternatively, the worst possible kind of backward thinking from God’s perspective. On the other hand, backward-thinking, historical theology may be the most progressive thinking after all—or merely an excuse to maintain unscriptural traditions. “The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.” (All’s Well..., 4.3.74)

That said, we should not underestimate the crucial, fundamental differences between the two alliances and their overarching attitudes toward history...and thus toward Scripture. Because we are likely to get out of Scripture what we take to it, our particular perspective regarding things past and present is not just “much ado about nothing.” It is pivotal to everything else we think and do.

How, then, resolve the impasse? And what are the rules of engagement? To employ a legal analogy, it used to be that the burden of proof was on anyone proposing an innovation inconsistent with first-century practice. Today, that burden of proof has shifted to anyone insisting that we follow New Testament precedent. Time-honored assumptions no longer apply. Almost as a matter of principle, it’s out with the old and in with the new.

That is why this chapter undoubtedly is the most important in the book. If we can’t agree on the very idea of restoration itself, then radical restoration will make no sense whatsoever. To restore, then, or not to restore—that is the question!

Re-digging Ancient Wells

The idea of restoration is as old as history itself. There is, for example, that fascinating account in Genesis 26 of Isaac coping

ing with a famine reminiscent of the one which had earlier driven Abraham down into Egypt (Genesis 12). Something rings awfully familiar when Isaac lies to Abimelech about Rebekah, exactly as Abraham lied about Sarah, but this time the geographical setting is different. God had instructed Isaac not to go down to Egypt, as Abraham had done; but rather to “live in the land where I tell you to live.” (That land was Philistine territory, ruled by Abimelech.)

Whether it was Abraham or Isaac—or David, Naaman, or Paul—God has not left his people without direction. For, “a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). And “there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Proverbs 14:12).

As those passages suggest, Restoration’s threshold assumption is that without God’s guidance we are without hope. This initial premise is followed quickly by a second: that God is not silent, but has spoken...in such a way as to meet our every need. In light of those premises, God’s instruction to Isaac becomes the very watchword for Restoration: “Live in the land where I tell you to live.”

That watchword vividly describes our responsibility in the face of God’s having spoken, which is to be fully obedient to his leading. Yet, Isaac’s lying about his wife is a striking reminder that we are all disobedient servants. We stray from the path. We go in our own direction. Perhaps, like Isaac, we prevaricate. More often, we simply innovate. In short, we fill in gaps where God has not spoken.

Which leads us to the rest of the story....

Abimelech, of course, is piqued not only by Isaac’s deceit, but also by his threatening prosperity; and so he urges Isaac to move on. Isaac agrees, and settles in the Valley of Gerar where he “reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after
Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them” (26:17-18).

Who knows why we are given these details, or, for that matter, all the other seemingly irrelevant details found throughout Scripture? (Unless, perhaps, we are being told that no detail escapes God’s attention.) But there could hardly be a clearer picture of the process of restoration. Wells that were first dug by Abraham, then maliciously filled in by the resentful Philistines, now have to be re-dug by Isaac. Before life-giving water can flow, the wells must be restored. And when they are restored, even their names are restored.

Should it matter that he gave them the same names? Was it sheer nostalgia on Isaac’s part? I have no idea. I just find it interesting that when God himself restores, he restores completely. Just ask Naaman. Or Jairus. Or Lazarus.

What I do know is that when wells get filled in, they have to be dug out—whatever the effort, whatever the cost. More often than not, restoration is the high price of obedience.

**Restoring Fallen Walls**

In the story of Nehemiah, the metaphor of restoration changes from wells to walls. Instead of digging down, it is a time for building up. Indeed, the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls was itself a metaphor depicting God’s spiritual restoration of Israel.

While still exiled in Susa’s citadel, Nehemiah received news that the walls of Jerusalem were broken and in ruins. For days, Nehemiah mourned, and fasted, and prayed. On behalf of all Israel came this grief-stricken plea to God: “I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees, and laws you gave your servant Moses” (1:5-7). If ever there was a need for restoration, it was then.

Yet even before Israel’s descent into idolatry, God had promised that he would restore the nation. It is to this promise that Nehemiah appealed, pleading, “Oh Lord, remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name’” (1:8-9).

Are we to believe that Nehemiah’s subsequent reconstruction of Jerusalem’s crumbling walls was the point of the exercise? Not a chance! It was Israel herself who needed to be restored; and even now it is we who need to learn the same lesson of restoration. It is we who are repeating the sins of Israel in not seeking justice for the oppressed, or answering the desperate cry of those in need. Ironically, it is we who continue to worry more about whether we are doctrinally restored than about whether we are spiritually restored! “Day in and day out we may seek the Lord and seem eager to know his ways” (Isaiah 58:2), but Isaiah’s call to Israel is our call as well. “If your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings” (58:12).

I’m aware, of course, that this use of Isaiah’s prophecy in the context of the present discussion could have the whiff of bait-and-switch. After all, who among us would deny that, as a people of God, we stand perpetually convicted of our failure to do social justice, and therefore continually need to be restored? By contrast, the type of restoration we are primarily talking about in this book is of a wholly different kind...at least at first blush. Whereas every denomination in the nineteenth century would have agreed on the need for ongoing spiritual restoration, what became known as the Restoration Movement took particular aim at church doctrine, organization, and practice.
Yet, we should not be overly hasty in dismissing any connection between the two types of restoration. If, in fact, we are not doing social justice as we ought, there may be reasons for that, which themselves might well be associated with issues of doctrine, organization, and practice. Certainly, such was the case with Israel herself, which had evolved into a formalistic system of worship that eventually became a substitute for personal, individual acts of righteousness.

If, then, we truly wish to be Repairers and Restorers of the broken lives around us, we may need to reconsider our self-perception as God’s people, and radically re-think how we are to function as a church in the midst of a hurting world. Doing business-as-usual as a church may be the very thing standing in our way of doing righteousness as never before as a called-out people.

A Patterned People

For those of us who grew up with words like “Restoration” ringing in our ears, it is nigh unto impossible to think of restoration without simultaneously thinking of the word “pattern.” After all, how can you possibly restore something without having a pattern to follow? Restoration and pattern are like horse and carriage, love and marriage. You can’t have one without the other. Yet, I am painfully conscious that this paired association of words and ideas is mostly lost on a younger generation. So, for those who’ve heard “the pattern sermon” a thousand times, please forgive the repetition. Within my own lifetime, familiar wells have caved in and are in dire need of re-digging.

The “pattern principle” emerges, first of all, from a number of passages in the Old and New Testaments where either the word “pattern” or some close equivalent is actually used. It is used most often in connection with the building of, first the tabernacle, then the temple. For example, the Lord said to Moses (Exodus 25:9): “Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.” What follows thereafter is incredible detail, right down to the “blue, purple, and scarlet yarn” (26:1), the “curtains of goat hair” (26:7), and “fifty bronze clasps” (26:11). God obviously had definite ideas about how he wanted things done.

And that, really, is the whole point. If God has given us detailed instructions or patterns of worship, then who are we to do things differently? Naturally, that “If” is crucial to the discussion. But when we finally get to the point of “Where God has spoken...,” then our duty is clear.

Just to cite the full record, God repeats himself (in Exodus 25:40), saying, “See that you make them [the lampstand and the seven lamps] according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” And again (26:30): “Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain.” And yet again: “Make the altar hollow, out of boards...just as you were shown on the mountain” (27:8).

I particularly like the nice touch we get in 2 Chronicles 24 where we find both restoration and pattern explicitly linked together. When Joash sets about to restore the temple, the record tells us that, “They rebuilt the temple of God according to its original design and reinforced it” (24:13). That’s what Restoration is all about: replicating the work and worship of the early church according to its original design.

The writer of Hebrews, of course, draws directly upon this pattern principle. Arguing that Christ was not just an earthly priest but our High Priest in heaven, the writer parenthetically notes that earthly priests serve in a sanctuary that is only a “copy and shadow” of what is in heaven. He immediately follows on with the intriguing statement: “This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’” Why follow Christ? Because he is our High Priest (which is to say, God!), and what he has directed us to do on
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earth is but a preview of what it will be like in heaven. Get it wrong here, and we will have gotten it wrong for an eternity!

Indeed, Jesus Christ was himself a pattern. “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,” Jesus said to the apostles on the night he was betrayed (John 14:9). No wonder he had said to them in the beginning, “Follow me,” as if also to say, “I am the divine Pattern revealed in human likeness.” He didn’t simply mean, “Tag along after me,” but “pattern your life after mine.”

Nor did Jesus leave his apostles without guidance after his ascension. “I will ask the Father,” he promised, “and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth” (14:16). “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (14:25-26). “When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth” (16:13). A truth that forms the divine pattern...about God...about us...about how we should live as followers of Christ...about how we should worship him...even about how we are to judge our fellow Christians.

Ironically, that judgment is to be based upon how faithful our fellow Christians are to the pattern. “Join with others in following my example,” Paul admonished his Philippian brethren (3:17), “and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.” Or rather (as the context clearly implies), take note of those who don’t.

And to Timothy, his young protégé, Paul wrote: “Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me...guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us” (2 Timothy 1:13-14, RSV). That Paul in both instances is referring to a theological pattern as compared with a specific pattern for church worship and practice does not detract from the principle of pattern itself. Even those who reject patterns of form quite happily regard themselves as “patternists” relative to theology and function.

Given this pervasive biblical emphasis on following divine pattern, whether it be for temple furnishings or core theology, is it so unreasonable to accept that apostolic practice in the years immediately following Jesus’ ascension is our “best evidence” of what we are to be and to do as God’s people? God has spoken not only through the Word-made-flesh, Jesus of Nazareth, but also through his Written Word, which reveals to us indirectly what the Holy Spirit revealed directly to first-century Christians. His pattern became theirs; their pattern has become ours.

Barring personal visions, how could our link to God’s own mind possibly be any closer? Of necessity, anything beyond the New Testament record is only rumor, hearsay, conjecture, or innuendo. Or, more likely, human invention. One of the great unheeded lessons of history is Israel’s repudiation of the warning: “Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you” (Deuteronomy 4:2). As long as the Israelites were faithful to the divine pattern, they were blessed. When they ignored the pattern, there was nothing but disaster.

Dare we scorn the hard lesson Israel learned when they moved the ark in an unauthorized manner? “It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the Lord our God broke out in anger against us,” David lamented. “We did not inquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way” (1 Chronicles 15:13).

Israel should have known better than to think that God is indifferent to how we live and move and worship in his presence. From the very beginning, Israel had been forewarned: “Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. Offer them only at the place the Lord will choose...” (Deuteronomy 13:13-14).

The lesson from history is clear: Not just any way we please, but the prescribed way. The patterned way. God’s way.
Choose Your Pattern

That there should be (particularly from among ourselves) serious criticism of “pattern thinking” defies belief. But of one thing we can be certain: contrary to what some critics might lead us to think, the debate has nothing to do with whether we ought to follow a pattern, only which? For either we are following the pattern of primitive Christian practice or else we are following the “pattern of this world” (Romans 12:2). Everyone is following some pattern! If it is not God’s pattern, then what’s left?

I’ve purposely framed these two choices in terms of the starkest possible dichotomy, fully aware that current discussions about pattern are couched in far more thoughtful nuances. While I think I understand what is being presented in the debate over scriptural pattern and precedent, I nevertheless fear that even the most sincere arguments against pattern are prompted, at least in part, by a worldly pattern that stands in opposition to divine authority.

My own comfort zone with arguments critical of pattern would be increased considerably if only I could hear sharper distinctions being made between the abuse of pattern theology and the use of it. Unfortunately, much of the talk about abuse of pattern seems to be little more than a convenient rationalization for avoiding its use. Winning that game, of course, is a slam-dunk. It takes little imagination to parade forth all the abuses of pattern which can be observed within our fellowship. Too many times, we’ve made pattern itself our idol. For too many of us, meticulously following pattern has become a matter of works-righteousness. And too often we’ve turned pattern into an indiscriminate smorgasbord, picking and choosing with seeming abandon which examples we will follow and which we will not. So if you want to find pattern abuse (call that “patternism,” if you will), it’s on every tree and vine, ripe for the picking.

But this only begs the obvious plethora of questions: What are we to do in the absence of any such abuse? Suppose, for a moment, there simply weren’t any. Now what pattern do we follow? How do we know what God desires and expects of us? If God’s mind is not to be found in Scripture, then where? The direct leading of the Holy Spirit? In paths and directions quite unlike primitive Christianity? Different paths and directions for some, but not for all? One generation being led differently from another?

“That way madness lies!” (King Lear, 3. 4. 21)

Fortunately, no one I know is suggesting that we are simply left to our own devices, or to revelations capriciously received from the Holy Spirit. Everyone I know is pointing to Scripture as the basis for how we should live and worship as Christians. Therefore, the debate about pattern must surely be concerned with something other than the notion of pattern or precedent itself. Is not the question of the hour: What is the pattern? Or, perhaps: The pattern for what?

When we ask, “What is the pattern,” inevitably we are led to a number of thorny issues. For instance, was a particular practice of first-century Christians (such as footwashing) actually meant to have the force of precedent? And how do we safely distinguish trustworthy apostolic doctrine from practices which were merely cultural? (Consider, for example, the wearing of veils.) And might there be some primitive practices (notably the charismatic gifts) which were set in place solely as “start-up” measures, but never intended to last beyond the apostolic era? Those difficult issues, and more, will be the subject of our discussion in the next several chapters. Nobody ever promised restoration would be easy!

In fact, complete candor compels acknowledgment that the pattern of first-century faith and practice is not nearly as clear-cut and straightforward as we’ve typically assumed. Unlike the minute details given for the construction of the temple, we don’t always have the luxury of explicit details regarding the early church. It’s more a matter of reading between the lines, or piecing together a complicated puzzle. I
take it that this is intentional on God's part, consistent with the broader pattern of minimizing externals under the new covenant, and allowing for necessary cultural adaptation throughout the centuries. Yet, to the extent that intended divine pattern can be determined with any reasonable assurance (admittedly always the fly in the ointment), then that must surely become the model which we commit ourselves to follow. Any other response—as virtually all of us agree—would be a blatant disregard of God's leading.

When we ask, on the other hand, "Pattern for what?" we turn our attention to exploring possible distinctions between form and function. Assuming we are meant to restore primitive Christianity, some are now asking whether that necessarily includes restoring identical first-century forms, or only the underlying functions which those forms were meant to advance?

More on this momentarily. The immediate point is that both of these questions—however we might answer them—bring us back full circle to pattern theology. Or apostolic practice. Or biblical Christianity. However you wish to put it, we simply have no other way to know the will of God but to follow in the footsteps of our Christ-centered, Spirit-led, apostle-taught forebears in the faith. That, in a nutshell, is the very idea of Restoration!

**Restoring Form Or Function?**

Before we leave this chapter, let me briefly share some further thoughts about the case now being put forward for the proposition that first-century forms are not really important as long as first-century function is achieved. A forceful argument for that position has been put forward in a recent book titled *A Church That Flies* by Tim Woodroof, who happens to be a much-loved cousin of mine.

We are never quite sure whether we should acknowledge that we are related!

Strange is it that our bloods,
Of colour, weight, and heat, poured all together,
Would quite confound distinction, yet stands off
In differences so mighty.

*(All's Well...*, 2. 3. 118)*

I suppose only a cousin would dare say of his book, "While I applaud both Tim's heart and his vision, if his *Church That Flies* happens to crash and burn instead, his book will be the black box that explains what went wrong!" Not surprisingly, that recommendation never made it to the back cover!

Initially, I had hoped that Tim and I might respond to each other's books within this volume, but space simply did not permit. Hopefully, we will have opportunity for further dialogue in a future book. For now, however, let me briefly outline the issues involved.

I think it is fair to say that Tim and I are equally concerned about a stagnant, institutionalized church which no longer seems to "take off and soar." (Hence, the title for his book.) However, we could hardly be farther apart on the solution to the problem...or even its cause. In Tim's view, the villain of the piece is the church's rigid adherence to archaic first-century forms which, he believes, are a barrier to our reaching a vastly-different contemporary culture and generation. The solution he proposes is to move away from restoration of form and concentrate, instead, on restoration of function.

Whatever its merits, that perspective is hardly "Restorationist," as it is presented. ("Our desire is to remain firmly within the Restoration Heritage...") To the contrary, the argument for "function rather than form" rips the very heart out of the Restoration concept. While Restoration thinking never consciously elevated form itself over function (and would be
wrong to do so), the essential, indispensable, non-negotiable crux of the Restoration idea is that first-century, apostolic forms, themselves, were ordained of God.

In that light, interestingly enough, Tim’s major premise—that “form follows function”—actually works! For, having determined at the dawn of eternity which functions he desired for those who would become his chosen people, God specifically and purposely designed forms of worship, organization, and practice which would achieve his eternal purpose. His forms were designed to function! Believing that those very forms were given to the early church by the Holy Spirit, we maintain that they represent our best hope for achieving the results which God intends. Divine function led to divine form, which even now leads us back to divine function.

Tim contends the exact opposite: 1) That many primitive Christian forms were a cultural and coincidental response to the Gospel, unique to their time and circumstance; 2) That New Testament “pattern” has little to do with form, and everything to do with “the seven eternal, immutable functions” of Worship, Holiness, Community, Maturation, Service, Witness, and Influence; and 3) That, as long as we are attempting to “restore” these same seven functions, then (with the exception of baptism and the Lord’s Supper) the forms we happen to choose are a matter of indifference to God. (“In the end, we believe it is a functioning church that is important to God—whatever forms that church adopts.”)

With that argument, of course, virtually all Christian denominations could agree. In fact, have always agreed! Had that been the “restoration” argument in the nineteenth century, there never would have been a Restoration Movement.

This explains, of course, why the denominations—despite their avowed commitment to Scripture—feel no compelling need to justify practices which significantly deviate from the New Testament pattern. (On a sliding scale, merely consider infant baptism, women in leadership, or instrumental music). Once the pattern principle is repudiated, any reference to first-century practice (unlinked to specific doctrinal teaching) becomes entirely moot. Paul’s statement, “We have no other practice” (said regarding gender roles) simply no longer matters. And whatever mode of music was used by the early church (even if there is overwhelming evidence that it was non-instrumental) has now become immaterial.

By focusing on “form and function,” doctrinal debate is won by sheer premise and conclusion—which is to say, by completely ignoring the issue. If (premise) function is all that matters, then (conclusion) primitive Christian practices simply aren’t precedent. From that starting point, we can be as pragmatic, inductive, anti-historical, and contemporary as we wish to be in aid of what we perceive to be biblical functions.

No matter how well-intentioned, at its root this argument maintains that the ends justify the means—or, as Shakespeare titled it, All’s Well That Ends Well. Indeed his famous play is a classic tale of form following function, which, in the end, justifies various and sundry dubious deeds done to bring about a legitimate purpose. When young Bertram runs off to war to avoid consummating his forced marriage to the lovely Helen, a resourceful Helen follows Bertram to Italy and tricks him into her bed under the ruse that he is seducing another woman. Confronted with the fact that he has unwittingly consummated his marriage, Bertram is shame into acknowledging Helen as his wife.

Naturally, Helen rationalizes her cunning scheme ever so easily, saying:

\[
\text{Let us essay our plot, which if it speed} \\
\text{Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed} \\
\text{And lawful meaning in a wicked act,} \\
\text{Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact.} \\
(3. 7. 44-47)
Yet, having acknowledged her own deception and Bertram's lustful intentions, Helen nevertheless points to the inherent lawfulness of their liaison to conclude that:

*All's well that ends well; still the fine's the crown.*
*Whate'er the course, the end is the renown.*

(4. 4. 35-36)

Unlike Helen's connivance, of course, there is nothing impure in motive about worship forms and practices sincerely aimed at better achieving biblical functions. Even so, for us to rationalize innovative forms and practices on that basis alone does not preclude the possibility that, as Helen put it, they are "yet a sinful fact." When God himself has married together form and function, dare we divorce them for even the noblest of reasons?

Merely consider what surely must have been only a superficially happy ending for Bertram and Helen—finally wed but likely locked in a loveless marriage. Just when you think there could not be a better example of the lack of intended function justifying a change in form, we are brought face to face with the reality that choosing man's way (a seemingly merciful divorce) is not God's way at all. Indeed, the trouble came much earlier when God's way was unheeded in the first place. Surely, it is a vivid reminder that to dispense with divine form is, ultimately and inevitably, to invite the risk of compromising the divine function itself.

As it was in the beginning, so it is even today: It is not within man to direct his own steps...nor to dare presume that "all's well that ends well."

'Let me not live,' quoth he,
'After my flame lacks oil, to be the snuff
Of younger spirits, whose apprehensive senses
All but new things disdain....'

(1. 2. 58-61)

For almost a week, I had been wandering around the Old City of Jerusalem in search of various significant sites, only to get hopelessly lost, particularly in the Arab quarter with its complex maze of souks crowded with merchants and shoppers. Even when I was guided by my friend and resident expert, Joseph Shulam, I could hardly make sense of all the ruins he would show me: a wall from the time of Ezra, here; a column from the Byzantine era, there; a street built by Herod, over there. By the end of a week in the Old City, Jerusalem was beginning to look like little more than ruins and rubble.

How is a person ever supposed to get a feel for the reality of the first-century world of Jesus and the apostles when it lies mostly buried under layer upon layer of political and military conflict? Where does a person begin to get his bearings when one ancient wall has been replaced by a more modern one; and that one replaced by yet another?

You can imagine, then, how thrilling it was for me to find a true-to-life model of Jerusalem during the Second Temple period, constructed (next to the Holyland Hotel) under the direction