

Patterson's Principles



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Lee Purgason was a staff member of Frontier Ventures for over 40 years. This article is excerpted from "Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches," pp. 601–602 in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*.

In many settings, the drive to supply information has not been matched with a drive to influence the formation—the character development—of the learner. These excerpts from George Patterson's writings help us see another dimension of training, often lacking in formal degree programs. For more, see <http://www.mentorandmultiply.com>.

Teach and Practice Obedience to Jesus' Commands in Love, Above and Before All Else

Jesus, after affirming His deity and total authority on earth, commissioned His Church to make disciples who obey all His commands (Matt. 28:18-20). His commands take priority over all other institutional rules (even the hallowed church constitution and bylaws). This obedience is always in love. If we obey God for any other reason, it becomes sheer legalism; God hates that.

Start Right Out With Loving Obedience to Jesus' Basic Commands

The aim for each community is to have a group of believers in Christ who are committed to His commands. Other types of learning are fruitful only if this principle is lived out as a foundation for leaders and followers.

Define Evangelism and Theological Education Objectives in Terms of Obedience

Only disciples produce a church that multiplies itself spontaneously within a culture. Consider the two commands: "Repent and believe" and "Be baptized." In Western culture a man stands alone before his God and "decides" for Christ. But in other cultures sincere conversion needs interaction with family and friends.

Classroom instruction is appropriate and helpful for mature believers. But teaching heavy theology

before one learns loving, childlike obedience is dangerous. It leaves a person assuming that Christianity is merely having Scripturally correct doctrine. He becomes a passive learner of the Word rather than an active disciple.

Orient Your Teaching to Loving Obedience

We taught our pastors to orient all church activity to New Testament commands. As they taught the Word of God, they accustomed their people to discern three levels of authority for all that they did as a body of disciples:

1. New Testament commands. These carry all the authority of heaven. They include the commands of Jesus which inspired the apostles in the Epistles. They apply only to baptized, more mature Christians who are already members of a church. We don't vote on them nor argue about doing them. They always take precedence over any human organization's rules.
2. Apostolic Practices (not commanded). We cannot enforce these as laws because Christ alone has authority to make laws for His own Church. Nor can we prohibit their practice because they have apostolic precedent. Examples include: holding possessions in common, laying hands on converts, celebrating the Lord's supper frequently in homes using one cup, baptizing the same day of conversion.
3. Human Customs. Practices not mentioned in the New Testament have only the authority of a group's voluntary agreement. If it involves discipline, the agreement is recognized in heaven (but only for that congregation; we do not judge another congregation by the customs of our own: Matt. 18:15-20).

In all these areas, the formation of character takes precedence over formal classroom training. For younger leaders, personal mentoring and training in practical obedience will give a foundation on which further training can be beneficial and fruitful.

It is not theology, but obedient disciples who bring glory to God. Such followers of Jesus are necessary for a vital, replicating church movement. ❏