

Scripture Reading 1 Timothy 6:3–5

3 If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,

4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a sick craving for controversial questions and disputes about words, from which come envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,

5 and constant friction between people of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

Sermon Text 1 Peter 2:21–25

21 For you have been called for this purpose, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you would follow in His steps,

22 He who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;

23 and while being abusively insulted, He did not insult in return; while suffering, He did not threaten, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

24 and He Himself brought our sins in His body up on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by His wounds you were healed.

25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Sermon:

The Example of Jesus

Daniel Cote

2nd Cong. Church—Winsted

7/21/24

A little boy was in a heated argument with his sister about who was going to get the last brownie. His mother overheard the loud discussion in their kitchen and came in to resolve the conflict. Her two children were obviously very focused on getting that final treat. Sensing the need to teach a deeper truth, the mom asked her children that ever-relevant question: “What would Jesus do?” The older sibling immediately answered, “That’s easy; Jesus would just break the brownie and make five thousand more!” While we often hear and say, “What would Jesus do? We often don’t do what Jesus would do, and we find ourselves having trouble following the example found in His words and deeds. If we want to grow as disciples of Jesus, if we want to grow as a church, we must conform all things to His example and His words.

You might recall from the last time I preached that Peter called Christians to honor human institutions for the Lord’s sake. Furthermore, Peter called servants to be subject to their masters with all respect, even when they were unfairly treated. Respectful submission on the part of servants and slaves, and on our part when we are unfairly treated, demonstrates the grace of God exemplified by Christ, brings glory to God, and points others to God and his grace.

Today’s sermon text follows immediately after our text from last time. So, in context, Peter is speaking to servants and opens our text powerfully supporting his message to servants and slaves, saying “For you have been called for this purpose, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you would follow in His steps.” Peter’s message here is that it is a privilege to faithfully serve God, even when dealing with unfair and unjust treatment.

Christ is our perfect example, and we must follow in His steps. The word that is translated as *example* in this verse literally refers to a tablet for students that contained the entire Greek alphabet. Students would learn to reproduce the Greek letters from alpha to omega by tracing the characters inscribed on the tablet. The students would follow every stroke and curve of the letters until they could reproduce the Greek letters as perfectly as humanly possible. When we consider the life of Jesus, His life and ministry become like that tracing tablet, the perfect example of how we as Christians must walk and behave on this Earth. This

requires that we are intimately familiar with the words of Jesus and the entire New Testament. Then we will be able to faithfully follow Christ in our time here on Earth. Last week, Pastor McPheeters stressed the importance of quiet time with God in prayer and Scripture. How did that go for you this past week? I didn't do so well because there was always an urgent or pressing matter. Following Jesus faithfully requires developing discipline to make time in the Word a priority.

Dangers for Disciples and the Church

Failing to follow the example and teaching of Jesus poses great danger for personal discipleship and will stunt our growth and development as Christians, but it also poses a great danger to the church and results in bad theology that is misleading millions. Let's consider examples of bad man-made theology and doctrine that stem from not knowing and applying the words of Jesus in the church.

First, I'd like to consider the prosperity gospel, which is also known as the Word of Faith movement and is most often associated with some charismatic, Pentecostal, and evangelical denominations and televangelists over the last 50 years. It emphasizes that God's will is always to provide believers with financial blessings and physical well-being. In the movement, possession of health and wealth is seen as a sign of God's favor.

The prosperity gospel emphasizes the importance of positive confession and generous donations to religious causes. Positive confession is the idea that if you name it, you can claim it. So, it is the practice of stating boldly in faith what you want to happen with the expectation that God will make it a reality. It makes the Holy Spirit a power to be used for whatever the believer desires. Donations to religious causes are seen as seeds that will grow in value and be returned to the donor by God. Prosperity gospel televangelists, Kenneth Copeland, Joel Osteen, and Benny Hinn, are reported to have net worths of \$300 million, \$100 million, and \$60 million respectively. So we can see that much of what is donated to televangelists remains in their pockets.

The problem with the prosperity gospel is that it puts the will of man above the will of God; it teaches that humans are in control of their destiny, and it is completely contradicted by the life and ministry of Jesus. In 1 John 5:14, we read, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." Notice that God grants our prayer requests according to His will, not because we have boldly proclaimed our desires in faith. If we know the Bible, in particular the teaching of Jesus, we will have a much better idea of the will of God, and then we will be equipped to pray. Sadly, the notion that humans can bend the universe to their will is also a key teaching of the pagan New Age movement, in which humans are seen as divine beings. In a similar way, the prosperity gospel turns the Holy Spirit into the believer's cosmic bellhop to produce the wealth and health desired by the believer. According to Hebrews 13:5, Christians are to be free of the love of money because, as Paul teaches in 1 Timothy 6:10, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

Moreover, the idea that good health is a promise for believers is a lie from the pit of hell. The Apostle Paul suffered from what he called a "thorn in the flesh," which was some kind of physical ailment, and try as he might, he could not pray it away. In 2 Corinthians 3:8-9, Paul says that three times he pleaded with God to remove the thorn from him. In response, God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Notice in the Lord's Prayer that we pray, "Thy will be done," not "My will be done." It is the will of God that will be done on this Earth, as God declares in Isaiah 46:10 (NIV), "My purpose will stand; I will do all that I please."

Consider the life and ministry of Jesus. If the prosperity gospel were true, Jesus, who led a sinless life and stood in perfect relationship with His Father, should have had a wealthy and healthy life. Jesus had no palaces; He didn't own a house. He had no servants or degrees. In

fact, He says in Matthew 8:20, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the sky *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” So too, crucifixion is very bad for your health, yet Jesus was willing to give up His health, even to the point of giving His life as a ransom for many. He could have called on legions of angels to protect Him, yet He submits to the will of the Father as recorded in Luke 22:42, saying, “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.”

Finally, the early disciples were often impoverished, tortured, and killed for their proclamation of the resurrection. Jesus’ Apostles were imprisoned, crucified, stoned, stabbed, skinned, and burned alive. Some estimate as many as 100,000 Christians were put to death in the first three centuries of the Roman Empire. The impact of Christianity on the Roman Empire was dramatic, and it is a little-known fact that in AD 117, Emperor Hadrian executed thousands of Roman soldiers who had converted to Christianity.

It seems that for Paul, the rest of the Apostles, and thousands of early Christians, the prosperity gospel did not work out very well and that it is contrary to the life and teaching of Jesus, and thus should be rejected by all Christians. There is a cost to discipleship, as Jesus says in Luke 9:23, “If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Cross-bearing is not optional for Christians.

Let’s move on to another theological mistake that flows from either not knowing or applying the words and teachings of Jesus. Given the events of last fall, we are quite familiar with 5-point Calvinism, and we were told that it was the gold standard of theology systems and that, in the words of John Calvin, sound Christian doctrine would be found. But what does Paul tell us about where sound doctrine will be found? Paul writes in our Scripture reading,

3 If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,

4 he is conceited and understands nothing . . .

Very clearly, according to Paul, sound doctrine must agree 100% with the words of Jesus. Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2), not the theologians who have come and gone throughout the centuries. All Christians should agree with that.

As you know, two key teachings of 5-point Calvinism are limited atonement and double predestination. Limited atonement is the doctrine that Jesus' death on the cross was only to provide salvation for the elect. Double predestination is the doctrine that God creates human beings in His image for the specific purpose of sending them to eternal torment in hell, and hates them, before birth, without regard for anything they will do in life. To reach these conclusions, 5-point Calvinists rely on unique interpretations of Romans 9 and other verses that were not found in the first few centuries of the church and, to this day, are rejected by the vast majority of Bible-believing evangelical Christians and scholars. But here is the main problem with Calvin’s doctrines of limited atonement and double predestination; it is that they are clearly contradicted by the words of Jesus. It is not an obscure little-known passage where Jesus says,

John 3:16–18

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸ The one who believes in Him is not judged; the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

That Jesus died to offer salvation to the entire world is the only reasonable conclusion that can be reached from Jesus’ words in John 3:16. As I have said another time, the word *world* is from the Greek word *cosmos*, which all the Greek dictionaries and lexicons define as the

universe, the entire created order, and, in this context, the inhabitants of the universe. We do not see the least hint of limited atonement or double predestination in this passage. Instead, we see that out of God's love for all humans, God gave His Son so that some would be saved. We also see clearly that condemnation comes from not believing in Jesus, not because God created people in His image for the specific purpose of sending them to eternal torment in hell.

If that were not enough evidence that limited atonement and double predestination are false doctrines, consider the words of three of our Lord's Apostles who echo Jesus' words.

In 1 John 2:1–6, the Apostle John writes:

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*.

Here, we learn from the Apostle John that Jesus is the propitiation (that is, the sacrifice that removes the wrath of God from us) for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world. John is writing to the church, but He goes out of his way to say that the sacrifice of Christ is not only for the church but also for the whole world. If God hated from birth some people of the world, why did he send His Son to die for the sins of the whole world? The obvious and clear conclusion is that God loves all the people of the world, and salvation is available to all who believe.

We then come to 2 Peter 3:9, which reads, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." Again, if God hated some people of the world from birth, why would the Apostle Peter say that He does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance? The clear conclusion is that God loves all the people of the world, and He offers salvation to all.

Next, in 1 Timothy 2:3–4, the Apostle Paul writes, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Does it not seem to you that the Apostles Peter and Paul are saying something very similar? They certainly are because there is only one gospel. Again, the clear conclusion of the Apostle Paul is that God loves all the people of the world. To make it even more clear, the Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:10, "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers." Here, Paul says that Jesus is the Savior of not only believers but all men.

So, we see that Jesus and three apostles contradict Calvin's doctrines of limited atonement and double predestination and they must therefore be rejected. We made the right choice last fall to reject 5-point Calvinism and to maintain unity and focus on the plain teaching of the Bible and the words of Jesus. We must be Bible-focused and Christ-centered. We must conform our lives and theology to the example and teaching of Jesus!

What strikes me about our Scripture reading is the scathing rebuke that Paul reserves for those who distort the gospel and teaching of Jesus Christ. According to Paul, those who teach doctrines that contradict the words of our Lord are conceited, understanding nothing, and sick with a craving for controversy and disputes, which leads to constant friction between people possessing depraved minds. These are Paul's words, not mine.

You have probably noticed that after the church rejected 5-point Calvinism in the fall, I discontinued the credal reading taken from the reformed creeds such as the Westminster Confession, The Savoy Declaration, The Cambridge Platform, and the many others. The reason I did this is that the theology they contain is filled with manmade presuppositions and 5-point Calvinism, including limited atonement and double predestination. Thus, I believe they contain the type of false doctrine that the Apostle Paul condemns in our Scripture Reading.

Now, I would agree with about 90-95% of what is found in those reformed creeds, but they are the mere words of men. I have about six systematic theologies in my library, including the works of Calvin. I get great ideas and insights from them, but I also take them with a large grain of salt because they are not the inspired Word of God. Only the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. Feel free to study the works of theologians over the last 20 centuries, but always be a Berean and compare what they teach to the teaching of Jesus and the Bible.

Moreover, anything that you need to know about our faith can be taught by bringing together the appropriate Bible verses and applying the basic rules of biblical interpretation. Furthermore, any text that contains even a small percentage of false doctrine should not be read indiscriminately in the church. What should be read in the church are the books of the Bible with emphasis on the teaching of Jesus.

Christ is the Messiah

Let's turn to the remainder of our Sermon text, where Peter paraphrases that great Messianic passage from Isaiah 53:1-12 written seven centuries before Jesus' death on the cross. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, over 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah, who is the Servant of the Lord, would be despised and forsaken, that He would be pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity and offered as a guilt offering for our sins. Isaiah adds that because of His sacrifice, we were healed and that the suffering of the Messiah was necessary because, like sheep, all of us had gone astray. Isaiah prophesies that the Messiah, in His torment, would not open His mouth to defend Himself. Instead, He would allow Himself to be led away to be slaughtered and placed in the grave of a rich man, even though He had done no violence or spoken deceitful words.

This will be a review for some of you, but we have new people, and this is a very important topic that bears repeating. As I mentioned last year, Messianic prophecy is found throughout the Bible. Our call to worship from Psalm 22 contains important prophecies about the Messiah, including the facts that the Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced and that His clothing would be gambled for. I included a table on page 8 of the bulletin that is found in my recent book summarizing the 57 most obvious Messianic prophecies. In our text, Peter emphasizes the Messianic prophecies found in the Book of Isaiah because anyone familiar with the OT would have recognized that Jesus' life and ministry were a fulfillment of those prophecies and others throughout the Bible. These prophecies lead us to the inescapable conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, and that the Bible is the word of God. Consider the following deductive logical argument I use in my book, which is also provided on page 8 of the bulletin. The argument goes like this:

1. The Bible foretells details of the ministry of Jesus hundreds of years in advance.
2. Only God could know the future in advance.
3. Therefore, the Bible is from God.
4. Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies.
5. Therefore, Jesus is the Messiah sent by God.
6. The Messiah is the Son of God (Psalm 2).
7. Therefore, Jesus is the Son of God.

It is true that the Bible foretells the details of Jesus' ministry hundreds of years in advance and that only God knows the future in advance. Therefore, it must also be true that the Bible is from God because He is the only one with knowledge of the future. The fact that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies shows that He is the Messiah promised by God, and as we learn in Psalm 2, the Messiah is the Son of God. Thus, Jesus is the Son of God. The implications of the Messianic prophecies are that the claims of Christianity are true and that our faith is rooted in the evidence of prophecy and history. Nothing like this can be found in the

other religions of the world. Thus, the unique truth of Christianity is established by the solid evidence of fulfilled prophecy.

Peter closes our sermon text with a great message of hope, saying, “For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.” Once we were all lost sinners, like sheep who had escaped their sheep pen, wandering in dangerous places. But now, by the grace of God, our great Shepherd has died to return us to the fold, and we are under the watchful Guardian of our souls, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus left the splendor of heaven to reclaim that which was lost and died on a cross so that we might live. He is our example in word and deed, and we must follow Him.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe, the former pastor of Moody Church and prolific Christian author, writes of our sermon text:

Here, then, is the wonderful truth Peter wanted to share: as we live godly lives and submit in times of suffering, we are following Christ’s example *and becoming more like Him*. We submit and obey, not only for the sake of lost souls and for the Lord’s sake, but also for our own sake, that we might grow spiritually and become more like Christ. The unsaved world is watching us, but the Shepherd in heaven is also watching over us; so we have nothing to fear. We can submit to Him and know that He will work everything together for our good and His glory.¹ Unquote.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, take comfort in the amazing grace and love that God has shown us through His Son. Amen.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [*The Bible Exposition Commentary*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 407.