

Christ Our Great Example.

Text: 1 Pet 2:21-25

Suggested Hymns:

336, 387, 361, 283, 600

1) In What Things Christ Is An Example For Us

2) How We Are Enabled To Follow His Example

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Peter 2:21–25, ²¹ *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:* ²² *“Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;* ²³ *who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;* ²⁴ *who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed.*

²⁵ *For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In our text Jesus is held up for an example. All Christians will admit that Jesus has left them an example, that they should follow His steps. There are even Jews and unbelievers who will admit that Jesus’ life was a model life worthy to be imitated by the children of men.

But a large number of so-called Christians in our days will see in Christ nothing more than an example. Their religion consists in nothing more than to imitate Christ, to ask themselves: *What would Christ do?* and then to do what in their estimation Christ would do under the existing conditions and circumstances.

And by their own deeds, by imitating Christ to the best of their ability, they expect to reach heaven. All this has a fine Christian tint, and appears to be Christ-like; but it is heathenism, rank heathenism, sailing under Christian colours.

The person who expects to gain heaven by his own deeds, even if he performs these deeds in imitation of Christ, practices heathenism. For what is the difference between Christianity and heathenism? It is this: Christianity teaches that we obtain heaven by faith in the Saviour Jesus, and heathenism teaches that we obtain heaven by doing good.

When the keeper of the prison asked Paul and Silas: *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* did they tell him to do good and to lead an honest life? No; they said: *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”*¹

We must not place Christ on a level with other founders of religions who did nothing more for their followers than to leave them their teachings and their examples.

Christ is the eternal Son of God who came down from heaven to redeem the whole sinful world. We are all sinners, lost and condemned under the wrath of God, and Christ came to save us from the terrible doom which is awaiting us in the hereafter. This was the real purpose of Christ’s mission upon this earth.

First of all, we must see in Jesus Christ, our blessed Saviour who has taken away the guilt of our sin and procured for us eternal life by His vicarious suffering and death. We must also believe in our dear Redeemer, and it is by faith in Him, and not in any other way, that we reach heaven.

Then, and not until then, are we qualified to take Christ for an example and to follow His steps. He left an example for those who believe.

Let us consider, with the help of God’s Holy Spirit: *Christ Our Great Example*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. In What Things Christ Is An Example For Us

Our text says, ²¹ *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.* The context shows that the Apostle addresses these words to servants, to slaves, who had formerly been heathen, but had now embraced the Christian faith.

He admonishes them that they should be subject to their masters with all fear, and that in their station and calling they must expect to suffer. And to comfort them, he reminds them of Christ’s suffering for them and says, *because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example.*

Behold, then, Christ has given an example for us, not for the slaves only, but for us, for all Christians. The question, then, is, *In what things is Christ an example for us?*

In the first place, in His innocence. The Apostle says, ²² ***“Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth.”*** This is a quotation from Isaiah 53 where of the suffering Messiah the Prophet says: ***“He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.”***²

Christ had to suffer as no man ever suffered. He was falsely accused, mocked, spitefully treated, buffeted, spit upon, scourged, crucified, and put to death.

But in His own person He was perfectly innocent. He had done nothing worthy of punishment. ***“[He] knew no sin,”*** says St. Paul.³ Christ could stand up before His enemies and challenge them, saying: ***“⁴⁶ Which of you convicts Me of sin?”***⁴ and not the slightest offence could they lay to His charge. He was innocent.

And herein He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. If you are a Christian, my friends, you can depend on it that you must suffer in this evil world. Jesus says, ***“whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”***

But if you do suffer, see that you are innocent, and that you must not blame yourself for the evil that has come upon you. What comfort have you if you have done wrong and must suffer for it,⁵ for instance, if you have lied, and people will not put any confidence in you, or if you have defamed your neighbour, and your friends desert you?

You are not suffering then as a Christian, but as a sinner who is reaping the harvest of the seed which he himself has sown. Shun sin in every shape and form!

Rather walk in the commandments of the Lord! Then whatever sufferings may come upon you, you will be innocent, you will not be the direct cause of your own suffering. True it is that we are never innocent as Christ was, who did no sin, and in whose mouth no guile was ever found.

True it is that we sin daily, and deserve nothing but punishment. But if we shun sin, we avoid those sufferings that are caused by sin, and follow Christ, who has given us an example in His innocence.

Secondly, Christ is an example for us in His patience. We are told, “²³ *who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.*”

How patient Christ was in His last suffering! Most of the time He observed silence. *As a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.*⁶ When He poured out His life on the accursed tree, they insulted Him, and abused Him with their vile tongues, and provoked Him!

We read in Mark 15:29–30, ²⁹ *And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ save Yourself, and come down from the cross!”* But did Christ answer them back? Jesus had the power to shatter His revilers to pieces with a single look — but did He punish them for their blasphemies? No; He *did not revile in return; He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.*”

Patiently He bore all His sufferings, and even prayed for His murderers when they crucified Him, and said: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”*⁷ Take Christ for an example in His patience.

When we must suffer, we are often tempted to lose patience, to murmur against God because He imposes on us such heavy burdens, to seek help in an unlawful way, to resent the evil which is done to us, to wrong those who have wronged us, to revile, to threaten, to take revenge.

Let us learn from the patience of Christ when we must suffer, follow His great example, and walk in His steps.

Thirdly, Christ is an example for us in His humility and love. We are told that in the night in which He was betrayed He washed His disciples’ feet and said in John 13:15, ¹⁵ *For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.*

This washing of the feet was a symbolic act, by which He taught His disciples that they must not exalt themselves one above the other, but serve one another and not shrink back from the lowest service in doing good.

Let us take Christ for an example and humble ourselves, ***Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion,*** the Apostle says,⁸ not thinking a great deal of ourselves, but considering ourselves servants in duty bound to help one another.

Let us take Christ for an example and do good to others wherever we can. Did you ever take notice how much of your Saviour's life was spent in saying and doing good things? Follow His example!

Remember that on the last day He will say to those on His right hand, as written in Matthew 25:34–40, ***'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'*** ... ***'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'***

If in true faith you do good to others in word and in deed, then you are taking Christ for an example and walking in His steps.

2. How We Are Enabled To Follow His Example.

This takes us to the second topic, which is to show how we are enabled to follow Christ's example. The answer is: Not by our own natural power, but because by His great redemptive work He furnishes us with power and willingness to do so.

We cannot follow Christ's example by our own natural power. Many people think that they can, and this is what they consider the essence of Christianity, to follow Christ's steps, to look upon Christ as a model and to do, in their estimation, as Christ would do.

And when they have done a charitable deed, or performed an act of kindness, or brought a sacrifice in some way, they think that they have followed Christ's example even though their hearts remain unchanged, and they love sin as much as

ever, and though it is only from selfishness, for the sake of gain and reward, that they do good to others.

What a serious mistake! How can a person imitate Christ and follow His example as long as he is in the condition of which the Apostle says at the end of our text: ²⁵ *For you were like sheep going astray?*

How can a person imitate Christ and follow His example as long as he is in his natural, unconverted state, an enemy of God, hardened in his sin, averse to that which is good, and prone to that which is evil?

Even if he does things which seem to be an imitation of Christ, he does not follow Christ's example; for to follow His steps is not merely to perform the outward deed, but to perform it in the Spirit of Christ and from the motives which actuated Christ, to perform it in the faith as we read in Romans 14:23, *for whatever is not from faith is sin.*

The power and the willingness to follow Christ's example we must receive from Christ. Christ alone can endow us with power and strength to follow His steps. As long as of our own natural power we endeavour to imitate Christ in our lives, we fail, we deceive ourselves, we sink into self-righteousness, and increase our own damnation.

First of all, our eyes must be opened by the Law of God, and we must see our natural sinful condition, and see that we are damnable sinners, and that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. We must also be filled with longing for a Saviour to redeem us from sin and death and hell. And God be praised that in Jesus we have a Saviour who is mighty to save, who can furnish us with power and strength to be His true followers and to walk in His steps.

To be enabled to follow Christ's example, you must believe in Christ "who," as the Apostle says, *bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed.*"

Above all things, see in Jesus your Saviour who brought for you the great sacrifice of His life, who took upon Himself all your sins, and bled and died for them on the cross. Imitating Christ will never save you, even if you could accomplish ever so much in the way of following His steps.

It is believing in Christ that saves, faith in Him, and nothing else. But if you believe in Christ, if by His stripes you are healed, you will also be enabled to follow His example, and you will be filled with willingness and with a fervent desire to imitate Him.

When you look upon the cross and think who it was that suffered there for you, you will draw from the death of Christ a hidden source of strength which will help you to crush sin and to walk in true holiness.

You *having died to sins*, as the Apostle says, *might live for righteousness*. Then you will be in a proper state and condition to imitate your dear Saviour, to follow His example in innocence, in patience, in humility, and in love, and prove thereby that your faith in Christ is not a delusion, not a dead faith of the lips, but a mighty and a living thing.

Let us not be content, then, with confessing the name of our Saviour with the lips, but show by our lives also that we are His true followers. Let us follow His example and walk in His steps.

For, as the Apostle says, ²⁵ *For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls*. As the sheep hear the voice of their shepherd and follow him where he leads them, so let us obey the voice of the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls who laid down His life for us, and let us follow Him and remain with Him in the days of prosperity and in the days of adversity, until He shall lead us into the heavenly pastures where we will abide forever and ever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Acts 16:30

² Isaiah 53:9

³ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁴ John 8:46

⁵ 1 Peter 2:20

⁶ Isaiah 53:7

⁷ Luke 23:34

⁸ Romans 12:16