

1 Peter 2:19-25

¹⁹For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God. ²⁰For what credit is it to you if you receive a beating for sinning and patiently endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God.

²¹Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps. ²²He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. ²³When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed. ²⁵For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

He Left You an Example

I.

One of my favorite movie lines of all times is Clint Eastwood as Harry Callahan saying; “A man’s got to know his limitations!” It’s a phrase I use often.

Knowing your own limitations is good. When you look for a hero—someone to emulate, someone to be your example—you want to find a person you actually *can* learn from and follow. Whom do you choose? In your job—in your field of expertise—perhaps you look for someone from whom you realize you have something to learn. Someone, perhaps, who manages to get better results than you currently do. Results aside, maybe the person who serves as your example just has a better outlook on life; somehow he or she is able to be cheerful, regardless of the circumstances.

It is a simple fact that only a few people reach the very, very top of any profession. If you are expecting exactly the same results in your life that the person you seek to emulate achieved, you are likely to be disappointed.

There is also no doubt that the individual you place on a pedestal is flawed. Look hard enough and the people you have chosen to be your examples in life will let you down. Outwardly things may appear glamorous, but there are deep secrets lurking beneath the surface.

In fact, even the examples given to us in the Bible show limitations. In talking about faith, Hebrews 11 gives many examples of people who lived by faith, people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We can think of many more. Heros of the faith like King David, who wrote many of the Psalms. People like the Apostle Paul, or even people like Peter, who was the writer of today’s Second Lesson that serves as our sermon text today. They are heros of the faith, but every one of them was a flawed human being. The Apostle Paul called himself the Chief of Sinners; Peter denied he ever knew Jesus; King David went to extremes to cover up his adultery; Abraham tried to pass off his wife as his sister because he was afraid. Every one of these “heros of the faith” was a deeply flawed individual. Every one of them had limitations.

When you read about the flawed heros of the faith, do you ever wonder why God had so many of their flaws written down and recorded for posterity? Do you wonder why some of those heros of the faith *themselves* wrote about their own flaws so poignantly and so honestly, laying bare everything for all the world to see?

II.

A man's got to know his limitations! Each of us must realize there are some things we just cannot do—we don't have the knowledge; we don't have the skill set. People today have recognized the value of specializing for exactly this reason; let the professionals do what *they* are good at, and I'll stick to areas of my own expertise and ability.

Then...along comes Peter and says this: "If you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God. ²¹Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:20-21, EHV).

First of all, Peter points to something I don't like very much—suffering. *Then* he tells me that Jesus suffered to give me an example, so that I could follow in his steps!

There was a saying that was popular a few years ago—I don't see it quite so much anymore. The saying was "What would Jesus do?" Peter's words telling me that Jesus left me an example to follow makes me feel exactly the way that question does.

I cannot follow Jesus example. Neither can you. A man has *got* to know his limitations.

Peter's next words, paraphrasing verses from Isaiah 53, show it. "He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22, EHV). Jesus never, *ever*, committed a sin. No deceit was in his mouth. Jesus didn't tell little white lies to make things easier for himself. He didn't resort to trickery. You and I think nothing of telling a little white lie to make things go more smoothly with a spouse or a boss or a police officer. We can't live up to Jesus' example.

"When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23, EHV). Human nature is to give as good as we get—really, we give as *bad* as we get. If someone says something mean to us, we want to retaliate with harsh words, too. Insults have started fights; on a grand scale, insults even start wars. Jesus didn't lash back with biting words at those who insulted him or spit on him. He never made any threats. Rather, he prayed—even from the cross—for those who threatened and beat and insulted him. There is no way you or I could live up to his perfect example.

"He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24, EHV). God's punishment for every single sin is eternal death. Jesus carried them all—every sin—to the cross.

I can't pay the price of my own sins. *One* of my sins would cost me eternity in hell. I'm doomed.

A man's got to know his limitations. How can Peter say: "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21, EHV)? I cannot do it. Jesus is *not* an example I can follow. How can Peter speak this way?

III.

Look again at the list of things Jesus did that you and I *cannot* do. "He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. ²³When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed" (1 Peter 2:22-24, EHV). Look at the end. Jesus did all those things "*so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness.*"

A man's got to know his limitations. Jesus knew *our* limitations. He *knew* that we could not live up to the Heavenly Father's expectations. He *knew* that, left to our own devices, we would be doomed to eternity in hell.

As the Athanasian Creed summarizes the incarnation, “Our Lord Jesus Christ also took on human flesh.” The writer to the Hebrews says he was “Tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15, EHV). Even the limitations of the human form couldn’t stop our Savior.

Jesus did it all “So that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24, EHV). That was what the Heavenly Father wanted all along for his people. Luther says it this way: “[God] sent His Son into the world, heaped all the sins of all men upon Him, and said to Him: ‘Be Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer, and assaulter; David the adulterer; the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; the thief on the cross. In short, be the person of all men, the one who has committed the sins of all men. And see to it that You pay and make satisfaction for them’” (Luther’s Works, Vol. 26 p. 280).

IV.

“What would Jesus do?” I don’t need an example; I need a Savior. So do you. Jesus was that Savior. Jesus *is* that Savior. He purchased and won salvation for you.

Back to Peter’s assertion: “Indeed, you were called to do this [suffer, as mentioned in the previous verse], because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21, EHV).

Our Lord Jesus is an example we *can* follow. We can follow because his work redeems us and empowers us. When Peter listed what Jesus did to win our salvation for us, he does so as a motivating factor. The Christian no longer feels a sense of *obligation* to follow the example of Jesus. Instead, there is a *desire* to follow Jesus because of the great love he displayed toward us on the cross.

We follow Jesus in humility. Grateful for the way Jesus fulfilled the words of Isaiah 53 and suffered in silence, taking the insults and the threats without retaliation, Christians can learn to bite our tongues when insulted and threatened because of our faith.

Jesus did everything for our salvation so that “We would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24, EHV). Following Christ is not a moral decision on our part. Instead, we have experienced a rebirth.

“He left you an example,” Peter told us. A man’s got to know his limitations. Knowing our limitations is why the Christian comes back to the well of God’s Word again and again to be refreshed and renewed. Knowing our own limitations is why the Christian realizes we can never earn any part of God’s favor. Knowing our own limitations is why we look to *Jesus* to live in us, so that our Christ-like actions might lead others to know him better, too. Amen.