

Followers of Christ, Not Followers of Men

Servant Leadership Under Christ

We are still in the middle of a series entitled **Followers of Christ, Not Followers of Men**.

The last time we met, we began talking about divisions within a church. In the first book of Corinthians, Paul addresses a serious problem. The church at Corinth was divided between people saying, "I follow Paul," "I am of Apollos," "I am of Peter," and others saying, "I am of Christ."

Let's turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 3, just as a short review. Again, we will read 1 Corinthians 3:4–8.

Here the apostle Paul asks a question: "What then is Apollos? What is Paul?" He even points to himself and says, in effect, "We are only men."

In the ministry, we need to remember that we have all been saved by the same grace, by the same Savior, and placed into the same body of Christ.

Our churches and even our own personalities become unhealthy when we begin to center the focus on men instead of on Jesus Christ.

Today, we want to examine the biblical pattern, the pattern of our Savior, the example Scripture gives us, and how we are to lead the flock that God has given us.

Let's turn to Mark chapter 10 and begin by reading verses 42–45.

Here the Lord is talking about authority. There is a type of authority according to this world, according to human thinking, and according to our flesh. The world has its system, but Christ says in verse 43 that it is not that way among believers.

He says in verse 43, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant." The one who desires true greatness must become one who serves others.

The way God thinks and acts is many times the exact opposite of what we think and what the world thinks.

Verse 44 says that if you think you are going to be first, in the way God sees it, you are actually to become a slave of all. You are to take the lowest place in service.

The spirit of this verse is not wrong or negative. It is wonderful. If we are serving the rest of the people, then we are where our Savior is. That is a wonderful place to be, because we are following the example of our Lord.

In verse 45, our Lord said that He did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. That means He gave His life to save us.

Now let's turn to 1 Peter chapter 5 and read verses 1–3.

Here Peter is telling us wonderful things about the ministry. He also gives us information about his own participation in the church of his generation.

Many years have passed since our Lord restored Peter back to ministry. Many years have passed since our Lord ascended back to heaven. Many years have passed since the day of Pentecost, when Peter was used by God to speak to thousands of people.

Now, near the end of his earthly life, Peter is writing in chapter 5. He is saying, "I am a mature leader and example among many others in the church."

He is a fellow brother, a fellow leader, and a fellow servant with the others in the body of Christ.

Peter does not refer to himself as the pope or as the one in charge of everybody else. Peter does not refer to himself as being in authority over the other pastors or leaders. He says that he is a co-equal elder, an older, mature Christian among others.

The Catholic Church has elevated Peter to an incorrect position. It makes Peter into the first pope, as though he were the one in charge of everyone else. But this passage does not present Peter that way. This passage shows Peter as one elder among the other leaders.

Again, we are advised not to look to man, but to keep our focus on the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the church and the Head of the body.

In verse 2, Peter talks about our attitudes in personal leadership and in our relationship with one another in the church. If the Lord has called you and saved you to preach His Word and to lead others to follow Christ, then verse 2 tells us how we are to act.

We are to act like shepherds. We are to act like pastors who care for the people as sheep under our care. We are to oversee them, but not by force. Our attitude should be one of willingness, humility, following Christ, and giving a good example.

Our leadership and our way of showing people how to live the Christian life should be according to God, as this verse says.

We do not serve for dishonest gain. We do not serve for money, advantage, control, or personal benefit. Just as the verse says, we are to serve willingly, as servants, with eagerness to please God.

In verse 3, Peter says that we are not to have an attitude of superiority over other people. We are called to be examples to the people, so that they can follow the perfect example of our Savior.

The flock, the people, belong to the Lord. He bought them. He gave them salvation at the price of His own blood. God's people belong to Him, and we are one with them.

We live and speak the truth, just as they also should live, respond, and speak the truth. We are real shepherds, overseeing the welfare of God's people.

We have real responsibility, but we are not to act like bosses or lords according to this world.

Now let's turn to John chapter 21. This is very important. What we read here happened many years before what we have in 1 Peter.

Let's read John 21:11–19.

Here we need to understand a little history about Peter before the cross, and what our Lord is doing with Peter after He has risen from the dead.

Keep your finger in John 21, and let's turn to Mark chapter 14.

Just several days or weeks before John 21, during the Last Supper, Peter was with the other eleven disciples. This was the night before Jesus was betrayed, before He went to trial before Pilate, and before He was crucified.

In Mark 14:29, Peter boldly says, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be."

In verse 27, the Lord had told the disciples that He would be crucified and that they would all fall away. They would all run away. They would all desert Him.

In verse 27, our Lord is referring to His death on the cross. Then in verse 28 He says, "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

Peter responds in verse 29 in the strength of his flesh and in human pride. He says, in effect, "The others may fall away, but I will not."

Peter is speaking in the strength of his own will: "I will not."

Look at verse 30 to understand and appreciate how much the Lord knew about Peter, and how much He knows about all of us.

The Lord's Supper was late at night, or perhaps very early in the morning. It was still dark. Our Lord gives an answer to Peter. He says, "Even today, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times."

Now let's read Mark 14:50.

When Jesus was betrayed and taken to His trial, verse 50 says that they all left Him and fled.

We know that Peter followed the Lord from a distance, watching Him as He went before the high priest in His trial.

Later, in Mark 14:66–72, we see Peter denying that he knew Christ and that he had been with Christ. Peter denied knowing the Lord three times. In verse 68, verse 70, and verse 71, Peter says, "I do not know Him." "I do not know this Man."

This is the context just before our Lord was crucified.

Let's now turn to John chapter 13 and see the same thing. Read John 13:37.

This is the same context. It is during the Lord's Supper, and Jesus predicts the denial of His disciple. Peter says, "I will lay down my life for You."

With this information, let's now go back to John chapter 21.

When Peter heard the rooster crow, he saw the Lord eye to eye, though from a distance. He began crying, and he ran away in shame.

After his denial, I can imagine Peter's emotions. He must have thought, "How could I deny Jesus?"

Remember, in his own excitement, human strength, and pride, he had said, "I will never deny the Lord."

After Jesus Christ was crucified and laid in the tomb, on Sunday morning Peter had the chance to see the empty tomb with his own eyes. He began to understand the truth: "This Jesus, whom I saw crucified, truly did rise from the dead. His body is not there anymore."

In John chapter 20, on the very same day of His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples gathered in the upper room. Peter was there, and they were amazed. The same Jesus Christ who had been crucified and buried was standing before them in full resurrection life, glory, and power.

I am trying to help your minds imagine all that is going on in Peter's mind, heart, and life. I am trying to help us 3 understand the greatness of God's plans for us, even in the light of our failures.

In John chapter 21, after Jesus had shown Himself alive in Jerusalem in the upper room, Peter and six more men left Jerusalem and went back north to the Sea of Galilee.

In John 21:3, Peter says, "I am going fishing." In other words, "I am going back to what I know, to what I used to do." The other men say, "We are going with you also."

Peter and John were business partners. They were professional fishermen. Peter, John, and James had lived in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. That was their physical home. These men had been fishing for years. They knew the Sea of Galilee. They knew what they should do.

But verse 3 says that night they caught nothing.

I am sure all of us have had seasons in life when we thought we would accomplish something, and the results were zero.

Our Lord had risen from the dead in Jerusalem. Before He was killed, He told them, "I will see you again in Galilee."

Jesus, in His resurrected body, somehow went from Jerusalem north to Galilee.

In John 21:4, Jesus is on the shore. He is by the water of the Sea of Galilee, within sight of the men in the boat. The boat is not too far away, and He calls out to them in verse 5, "Children, do you have any food?"

They are still not sure who He is, and they answer, "No."

In John 21:6, this Man on the shore of Galilee tells them how they should fish. He tells them to throw the net on the other side of the boat, and they will find some fish.

In verse 7, the disciple whom Jesus loved, John, realizes who it is. John was one of the sons of Zebedee. He says to Peter, "It is the Lord."

When it finally dawned on Peter's understanding that the One telling them how to fish was the Lord, Peter became very excited. He did not wait. He jumped into the water. He forgot about his partners. He forgot about the great catch of fish. He just wanted to get to Jesus as soon as he could.

In verse 11, Peter helps the others bring in the net full of fish, 153 fish.

In verses 12–14, our Lord provides and invites these seven disciples to come and have breakfast with Him.

Peter is with six other disciples, and they are all together publicly with Jesus. Jesus invites them all to come and have breakfast. They were afraid to ask Him directly, "Who are You?" because they knew He had to be the risen Savior.

Verse 14 tells us that this was the third time Jesus showed Himself to the disciples after He had risen from the dead.

Now we come to the highlight of the story and the main point of the message.

Read John 21:15.

Jesus is speaking to Peter in front of everyone else. Our Lord says to Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"

Our Lord is going to ask Peter this question three times. He says, "Do you love Me?" in verse 15. He asks again in verse 16. Then He asks a third time in verse 17.

Each time, Peter responds that he loves Him.

But it is interesting to understand the words that our Lord uses and the words that Peter uses in response.

In verse 15, Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him with the kind of love God has used to love the world, a self-sacrificing, serving love.

Peter responds, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." But the word Peter uses for love is not the same depth and type of love that our Lord used. Peter responds with the idea of brotherly affection, the love of friendship.

There is a contrast between what Peter said before the cross and what he now says to Jesus.

Before the cross, Peter said in his own strength, "I will never leave You. I will never deny You."

Now our Lord is using this public moment to restore confidence and hope in Peter. The Lord still has a place for him in service.

Peter responds to our Lord by saying, "You know." In other words, "Lord, You know everything. You even know the limit of my love for You."

And our Lord tells Peter in front of everyone, "Feed My lambs."

This happens two more times, for a total of three times that our Lord asks Peter, "Do you love Me?"

Two times our Lord uses the word for God's sacrificial love. "Do you love Me this way, Peter?"

Two times Peter responds with a different and more limited word for love.

And yet our Lord tells Peter, "Shepherd My sheep."

Finally, our Lord comes down to Peter's level and asks him, "Peter, do you love Me like a friend, as you have said?"

In verse 17, Peter understood this change in the use of the word love, and he was grieved when our Lord said it that way.

Peter no longer responds in his own strength. He says, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."

And the Lord responds again, "Feed My sheep."

The Lord is restoring Peter to usefulness and service.

Let me finish with this point.

In our service to the Lord, we can make all kinds of promises to Him. But the main question should be: How is our love for Him?

Do we love Him? Are we willing to return love to Him because He first loved us?

The people we work with are not our own. They have been bought with Christ's blood. The people we work with do not belong to us. They belong to the Lord. They have been bought, and their salvation has been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ.

When we keep this attitude in mind, it ought to change our understanding of how we deal with one another in the church.

A godly leader feeds and takes care of the sheep. He does not try to control them, force them, pressure them, or use them. These people belong to Christ.

The church belongs to Jesus Christ. He is the Head. The ministry is His. It is not ours.

We are meant to be overseers, but we do not own the people. We are called to serve one another, and we all follow Jesus Christ.

What type of ministry and service do you practice in your life and in your church?

Christ said that we are to be servants like He was, when He gave His life as a ransom to save us.

I would like to ask someone to close in a word of prayer.