

- I. Introduction
 - A. What does it mean to be a Christian?
 - 1. Words mean different things to different people. We have to always be asking and defining. It's exhausting I know, but unfortunately necessary.
 - 2. Surrender to and imitation of Jesus
 - a. Sin, sacrifice, and salvation
 - b. Transformation and obedience
 - 3. *There are a whole lot of things that rightly define our surrender to and imitation of Jesus, but there are also a lot of things that have, even in the church, wrongly been added to what it means to follow Jesus faithfully.
 - B. Recent cultural comments within church context about following Jesus
 - 1. "I think a lot of what the left supports is satanic."
 - 2. "The only time religious freedom is invoked is in the name of bigotry and discrimination."
 - 3. "Is it possible to be a good Christian and also be a member of the Republican party? And the answer is absolutely not."
 - 4. "Certainly from a biblical standpoint, Christians could not vote democratic."
 - C. *How do we navigate following Jesus faithfully in a culture that has a long history of "enhancing" what that means with its own values and desires?
- II. Cultural invasion of Christianity through an open door: a form of godliness that denies its power (2 Timothy 3:1-7)
 - A. Context: from a prison cell
 - 1. Be strong and faithful and even suffer hardships for your obedience to Jesus.
 - 2. Pursue godliness.
 - 3. Don't engage in word wars and quarrels stirred up by false teachers. There will be times to wisely and gently correct false teaching, but Jesus' way of doing that looks radically different from the world.
 - B. A culturally tainted Christianity (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (2 Timothy 3:1)

 - 1. "Last days" - time between Jesus' first coming and His return
 - a. Acts 2: Peter quoting Joel at Pentecost
 - b. Hebrews 1: in these last days God has spoken
 - 2. The human condition is a challenge to both holiness and discipleship (teaching and living)

For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (2 Timothy 3:2-4)

- a. Lovers of self: affections concerned chiefly with myself and my own advantages to the exclusion of others
 - b. Lovers of money: immoderately desirous of acquiring wealth; prioritize fondness of money
 - c. Proud: self-exalting, self-absorbed conceit of my own superiority; especially the belief that my achievements are of my own doing
 - d. Arrogant: unwarranted importance of overbearing pride
 - e. Abusive: taking advantage of their position of power, mentally, physically, emotionally, or spiritually to the detriment or control of others.
 - f. Disobedient to parents: Pride and arrogance applied toward parents
 - g. Ungrateful: not feeling or expressing gratitude; entitlement
 - h. Unholy: lacking moral or ritual purity; context often emphasizing one over the other
 - i. Heartless: lacking in affection for others; especially the affection between family (of God) members
 - j. Unappeasable: incapable of gaining good will or good faith; especially through any means of formal peacemaking
 - k. Slandorous: attacking the reputation of another by slander or libel
 - l. Without self-control: unrestrained by convention or morality
 - m. Brutal: wild and menacing; fierce and untamed
 - n. Not loving good
 - o. Treacherous: violating an expectation/commitment/agreement or betraying someone to whom faithfulness is owed.
 - p. Reckless: marked by defiant disregard for danger or consequences
 - q. Swollen with conceit: proud; puffed up with air
 - r. Lovers of pleasure (rather than lovers of God): back to the intimacy and faithfulness of our marriage
4. Form without power
having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. (2 Timothy 3:5)
- a. Sentence: have/contain some aspect or feature; appearance/fabrication of a moral or spiritual character formation; godliness/imitation of Jesus; power/supernatural manifestation of God's influence and supremacy; deny/refusal to recognize or acknowledge
 - b. Looks spiritual, like certain religious functions, involved in aspects of spiritual disciplines
 - c. *The evidence of denying the power of the Gospel is in the way that these things (from the list) are present in the lives and thinking of people. Behavior and character demonstrate that, although one may appear godly or spiritual, they don't know the transformational power of genuine godliness through Jesus Christ.
 - c. Avoid such people
 - 1) What people? see list
 - 2) Present in Timothy's day and present in ours
 - 3) *Deliberately stay away from their influence and the imitation of them

For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 3:6-7)

5. The vulnerable
 - a. Creep into households—see media, social media, blogs, podcasts, Reddit, etc.
 - b. “Weak women”
 - 1) Not demeaning women—both men and women are weak
 - 2) Description of the condition in Ephesus—false teachers uniquely preying on a certain class of women—gullible, guilty, and shame ridden.
 - c. *Taking advantage of people’s vulnerable condition. People who have lots of information but can’t really understand.
6. These people who we are warned about are people we can easily mistake for trusted Jesus followers.
 - a. People in the church or church adjacent doing “churchy” things - at all levels of influence and leadership
 - b. John Canning story
7. *Therefore, whether pastors or politicians, authors or podcasters, self-important Facebook live commentaries, or anyone else who attaches Jesus to anything unworthy of Him or competing with Him, avoid their influence and definitely don’t imitate them.

III. Wisdom and discernment

A. We look to Jesus and then to those who actually follow Him.

B. Flip-side of 2 Timothy

1. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. (Matthew 5:3-11)*
2. *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:1-8)*
3. *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him Who called us to His own glory and excellence, by*

which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:3-8)

C. *Pursue the influence of and imitate those who reflect these things.

IV. Application and Confession

A. Some question to consider

1. What character do I see in my own life? Maybe I should ask others, specifically others who aren't in my tribe.
2. What character do I see in the Christian community/church around me?
3. What character do I see within the causes and ideologies I witness about?

B. We don't expect that those who don't know Jesus will act like those who do.

However, we do expect that those who know Jesus will act like Jesus.

C. How this works

1. "80% or more of the evangelism in the early church was done by ordinary Christians just explaining their lives to their friends and families." British Theologian, Michael Green
2. It wasn't done at events or conferences or tours or rallies. It wasn't done during the altar call in the weekly gathering. Why? Because the weekly gathering was done in secret and no one outside the family of God was there.
3. "It was not Christian worship that attracted outsiders; it was Christians who attracted them, and outsiders found the Christians attractive because of their Christian lifestyle and practices, from which their spiritual formation and worship had formed." Alan Krieder, Christian historian (The Patient Forment of the Early Church)
4. It wasn't a cool church service or a great biblical sermon or criticizing the right contemporary issues. It was their love for one another, their joy in suffering, their generosity, their sacrifice and love and peace and wisdom and perseverance. It was their witness (Acts 1:8)
5. *When the people of God resemble the Right or the Left or anything else not described in Matthew 5 or Philippians 2 or 2 Peter 1, then we have compromised our witness and are modeling to the world the appearance of godliness but denying its power.