

“Is What You Are Doing of Benefit to Christ and His Church?”

I Tim. 6:6-19

Last week, we tackled some of the more challenging words from Paul’s letter to Timothy: the blessing of a peaceful and quiet life; the blessing of submitting to authority; the burden of authority; the blessing of men and women serving in their unique vocations. When understood this way, which is the way Paul presents it, his message of quietness, submitting, and women being “saved through childbearing” begins to make sense. If you weren’t here last week, as our St. James families were all singing at St. James, I encourage you to go online and watch last week’s sermon.

The one part of Paul’s discourse that I wasn’t able to talk about, because the sermon was getting a little long already was what he said about respectable apparel. Paul said, “Likewise . . . women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness – with good works” [1 Tim. 2:9-10].

Several things are going on here. The reference to “braided hair” is because certain elaborate hair styles were worn by women to let the male clientele know that they are available – if you know what I mean. In your Christian freedom, Paul says, don’t dress like a prostitute. This does not benefit Christ and His Church.

That is really the litmus test for what we do. It is not about obeying the law, and what is right and wrong, and what is the line that we can't cross. Because then we spend our time figuring out how close we can get to that line without touching it, and we focus all of our attention on sin. And then we either feel guilty for crossing that line, or we feel really good about ourselves because I am not like those other people who cross the line.

Is what you are doing of benefit to Christ and His Church? That is the operative question when you are looking at the words and actions of your life. You sin and cross the line all the time – no matter how good you think you are. We have all sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. You are saved by grace, not by works.

So what does it matter if my wife dresses in costly attire? Well, in the 1st Century, especially among the Gentiles, the vast majority of people were either slaves or common workers. The vast majority of people within the church were slaves or common workers. A denarius was a typical day's wage. My Lutheran Study Bible notes say that the finest garments could cost up to 7000 denarii. That would be about 20 years worth of wages for the common worker.

What benefit is it to Christ and His Church for you to come on Sunday morning wearing an outfit that costs \$1 million? How could this be seen as being done to the glory of God, rather than the glory of yourself when some of your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ may not have solid plans for having a meal the rest of the day? This is not some rule to obey that we need to be "plain" like the Amish. Paul is teaching the people to see the

daily actions of their life as a response and a reflection of the faith, love, and holiness to which we have graciously been called.

Which brings us to Paul's words read in our Epistle lesson today, also from 1 Timothy. Paul says, "Be content; don't love money; don't let your craving for the pleasures of this world cause you to wander away from your faith. Don't be haughty (that is a good word), don't be proud or boastful about what you have; don't set your hopes on the uncertainty of riches."

If you are going to boast, boast in the Lord and what He has done for you. If you are going to set your hope on something, set your hope on Christ and the good news of the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

He says, "Be rich in good works." Just like we heard Paul say last week about how women should dress – don't adorn yourself with that million dollar dress and gold and pearls; adorn yourself with good works (besides, that is more beautiful than any clothing you can wear. To paraphrase Forrest Gump "Beauty is as beauty does"). Again, in all that you do, the operative question always is, "Is what you are doing of benefit to Christ and His Church? Having wealth is not the problem, just like having fine clothing is not the problem.

Paul is not laying down rules for what you must or must not do. These are not rules to obey. Like the prophet Amos, who warned the lovers of money in his day who "felt at ease" and "secure" as they "lie down on beds of ivory" and "drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils"; where you place your trust, that is your god.

There is but one treasure that will last. Your house, your car, your money, even bars of gold will not see eternity. Jesus tells of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man's sin was not that he was rich. The rich man's sin was that he did not listen to Moses and the Prophets. He had no interest in the words of Amos. He "feasted sumptuously every day" while Lazarus laid at his gate and fought dogs for the table scraps. And, by the way, the dogs licking his sores was not a source of comfort. No Jew would think that this was a good thing.

Again, this is not about Paul or Jesus setting up rules or guidelines by which you must live. There is no line in the sand that shows how much you need to care about your neighbor. As if I could tell you "If you care 'this much' or if you give 'this much' then you are a good Christian. You need to be on the good side of the line." That is not the Gospel. If you hear that preached, "Run away."

There is no "good" side of any line dividing right and wrong. We are all poor, miserable sinners. But we are also the forgiven children of God washed clean of all our unrighteousness through the blood of Jesus Christ. That is the Gospel.

Your response to the grace and mercy you have received leads you to ask the operative question, "Is what I am doing of benefit to Christ and His Church?" In thankfulness to Him, we are to be rich in good works; clothe ourselves in the beauty of good works that our neighbors (who benefit from these works) may see the good deeds done by the children of God and praise our Father in heaven. That is a benefit to Christ and His Church. Amen.