

CREEDS AND DEEDS

1 Timothy 6:11-16

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/creeds-and-deeds/>

Mahatma Gandhi had a complex relationship with the Christian faith. He once told the Methodist missionary pastor E. Stanley Jones that he would love to see Christianity become a more organic part of India's life and culture. When Jones asked him how that might happen, Gandhi replied, "I would suggest, first of all, that all of you Christians...begin to live more like Jesus Christ" [*Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha and Mohammed Cross the Road?* by Brian McLaren, pp. 267-8].

Ouch! He wasn't trying to be flippant or cruel. He was making an earnest observation. Another quote, more on the sarcastic side, was offered by George Bernard Shaw: "Christianity isn't a bad idea. Someone ought to try it sometime." Double ouch.

The sad part is that we often don't see the inconsistency between what we profess and how we live. I heard about a man who was in the locker room of his fitness center. He was indignant. "Nothing is safe anymore. Someone took my towel, the one that has 'Holiday Inn' embossed on it." Our witness (generously offering Christ to others) must always be balanced. Our behavior ("righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness" in v. 11) backed up by beliefs ("the good confession" in v. 12). Words matching actions. Creeds matching our deeds.

By the way, these six virtues, the behavior of a Christ-follower, are evenly divided: the first three are virtues toward God and the second three are toward others. But be careful. This is not a works-salvation model. If we're paying attention, nearly every Sunday, our text guides us to understand our relationship with God is a gift, not something we can earn. Our works flow out of that. Good works do not produce a relationship with Christ; a relationship with Christ produces good works (see v. 12, "take hold" of the gift offered to us, eternal life).

But...but...our walk with Christ should be balanced with words and deeds, meaning we cannot neglect our "word witness" any more than we can neglect our "deed witness." There is a reason the phrase "good confession" is used twice (vv. 12,13). There are hints in Paul's letters to Timothy that Timothy was on the timid side. I wonder. Is there some evidence that our witness is too timid? Dr. Elijah Brown uses the phrase "bold humility" when it comes to our witness. What does he mean by that? Respecting other viewpoints but having deep convictions of our own?

Notice that the older, wiser Paul encourages Timothy (and us) with two motivations: 1) Go back to your own conversion and calling to the faith (v. 12); 2) Go back further to Jesus standing before Pilate hours before his crucifixion (v. 13). Even in the face of death, Jesus did not back down. I remember Dr. Bill Coble, my New Testament professor at seminary, encouraged us to never get away from the truth that we follow the Suffering Servant-Messiah (we often leave

out the “suffering” part). In those times at school or work or over coffee, when we are tempted to take the easy route, will we have the courage of Jesus to make the good confession?

Put simply, our spiritual life is not just our own private business. It impacts others. Paul insists that we guard the gospel’s reputation (v. 14). Jean Twenge (*iGen*) has written much from her research of young adults in the U.S. Among adults 18-24 years old, 62% see Christians as generally judgmental; 64% believe that Christians are hateful toward gays; 58% see us as hypocritical. Would you agree we all have some work to do, aligning our creeds and deeds?

Late one night mom and dad heard a thud in the next bedroom and rushed in. Their little boy had fallen out of bed. When they asked him what happened, he replied, “I don’t know. I guess I fell asleep too close to where I got in.” That could be true for a lot of followers of Jesus! Dallas Willard once remarked that what Jesus made primary (inner transformation) we have made secondary. How tragic.

Reading our text this morning reminds us: following Jesus is not about making new discoveries every day but about renewing old commitments every day. Refreshing our commitments even as God’s grace refreshes us.