

First Presbyterian Church
Greenfield, Indiana
Pastor John J. Paulson
February 20, 2011 Love, In The Name Of Christ Sunday
Fools For Christ!
February 20, 2011 (Green) Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

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| Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18 | Moses shares God's rules |
| Psalm 119:33-40 | God is always with us! |
| Matthew 5:38-48 | Jesus gives some guidance |
| I Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23 | Fools for Christ? |

Informally before the sermon starts: This is Love in The Name Of Christ Sunday, and you will hear more about Love, Inc. later. We will hear about what our local Hancock County Love, Inc chapter does for those in our community. But for now, let's take a look at to what our scriptures say about loving and caring for our friends and neighbors, and even for our enemies!

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O LORD, our Rock and our Redeemer! Amen

I hope you were listening to the scriptures as we read them this morning. It is almost hard to believe some of the stuff we Christians are supposed to do. I don't mean things like coming to Sunday School or Church on Sunday mornings, I mean some of those other things that Moses, Jesus and Paul talked about this morning.

Moses tells us to be holy and Jesus tells us to be perfect, and Paul tells us that our bodies are God's temples. And, that's not all...

Moses says that we are to care for the poor. How? When we take in our crops, we are to leave some behind so they can gather some for themselves. Now I'm not a farmer, but I do garden, and, I do my level best to get every tomato that turns red and every cucumber that grows.

Then he tells us not to lie or steal. That's not too much, I guess. Although that little white lie that we tell every once in a while makes us violators of this one! Going along with this is to be honest in our business dealings and in our interactions with others. Honest is the best policy is what we are being taught. Whether it is in paying our bills or paying our taxes, we are supposed to be honest. I guess that is not too hard, is it?

Helping the deaf and the blind seems to be something everyone ought to do. I worked at the Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired for several years, and I know the problems that face those who can't see very well or can't see at all. I think we do need to go out of our way to help people who are in these circumstances. Not feeling sorry for them, but actually helping them function in our society. I know someone who gives up his own time to record news papers and books that are distributed to the visually impaired so they can keep up with what is going on.

Moses gives us some really good and timely advice as well. Do not slander anyone. A good warning for all you who TEXT or use FACEBOOK and TWITTER; don't write anything that slanders another person. That old adage: if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything, applies to all forms of communication.

Both Moses and Jesus get in on the next one. Don't hate anyone and don't seek revenge. We are supposed to forgive others as God forgives us. Isn't our culture one that seems to bless revenge? Someone cuts you off on I-465, aren't you supposed to blink your lights and honk? Someone at school makes fun of you or one of your friends, isn't it expected that you will somehow get them back? Your wide receiver takes a particularly hard hit on the first play from scrimmage, isn't it your job to sometime during the game let that defensive back know that you won't put up with that sort play?

Both Moses and Jesus remind us that we are supposed to love our neighbors. How do you love a neighbor who has a pit bull that comes and does his business in your hydrangea bush? How do you love a neighbor who has friends who park their cars blocking half of your driveway? How do you love a neighbor that wants to cut down trees that are on your property and just seems to be looking for an excuse to cut them down?

Then to top it off, we are told that we are not only supposed to love our neighbors, we are supposed to even love our enemies! If it is hard to love our neighbors, it seems almost impossible to love our enemies. Of course, if you are lucky enough to not have any enemies, then it is easy to tell others what they are supposed to do! I guess the least you could do is to pray for your enemies. Not pray for bad things to happen to them, but pray for good things to happen to them, and pray that they may become your friends instead of your enemies. It might be difficult to be sincere in your

prayer at first, but with practice, you might find yourself really meaning it and caring for someone you thought you didn't really like.

Then Jesus gives us three illustrations that preachers and Bible commentators really love to play with. First Jesus says that if someone strikes you on one cheek, you should turn the other cheek. Then he says that if someone wants your coat, give him your underwear too. And, to top it off, he says that if someone asks you to carry their bag for a mile, carry it a second mile as well. I have heard many people explain these away as jokes. That Jesus' audience would be ROFLWJ or, to you non-TEXTERS, rolling on the floor laughing with Jesus when they thought about what he was saying.

But, what if Jesus really means it. What if he really means that we should surprise our attacker by turning the other cheek? Make him wonder what we really had in mind and what we might be planning? What if he really means to give all our clothes to someone who needs them, to really help them out, not just give them a token of what they ask for? What if he really means that when we help someone we should help them all the way, not just a little bit. You know, help them the way we would want to be helped if it was us who is in need?

Just to make sure we all get his point, Jesus reminds us that if we love those who love us in return, we are just doing what everybody else does. We need to go that extra mile and love those who don't love us in return. And, he says, don't only say hi to your friends when you pass them in the hallway or in the mall or on the sidewalk, greet everybody that you pass. I love the rule at the Springhurst Health Campus here in Greenfield that reminds the employees to greet anyone who they meet as they walk around in the buildings. It is so pleasant to have your "Hi" returned by one of the nurses or aides instead of having them look down at the floor as they do in some of the other nursing homes I visit. It is just a little thing, but how often has "just a little thing" made your day a bit brighter and enjoyable?

Then there is Paul. You know before he began teaching others about Jesus and planting churches in the region around the Mediterranean Sea, Paul was an arch enemy of the Christian movement. Not only an enemy in his beliefs and feelings, he was an enemy in action as well. With permission of the Jewish religious leadership, Paul headed out from Jerusalem on a mission to destroy Christianity by capturing, imprisoning, and even killing those who were promoting Christ. Through the action of

God and the Holy Spirit, he had an encounter with the risen Jesus as he was traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, and his life was changed forever.

This morning we find Paul writing to one of the churches he founded in the city of Corinth in Greece. He reminds them that Jesus is the foundation for all their religious beliefs and that they should be cautious about adding to what he taught them. If he was speaking to us today, he would be telling us that this book, our Bible, has all the information we need to know about God and Jesus. That anything we try to add to it distorts the true meaning of what God is saying to us in these pages. But enough about that warning; I don't think we have any problem with treating the Bible as the complete word of God. Although, we do believe that the Holy Spirit helps us understand what God is saying to us in the Bible. Sometimes it is hard to accept that God may be saying one thing to some of us Christians and a different thing to others of us Christians, but that appears to be a fact. That's something we have to pray about, isn't it?

But back to what Paul is saying about our Christian lives and how we should act and do. He tells us that our body is God's temple. Now we don't have temples today like they did in Paul's day. There was the temple in Jerusalem where the Jews worshipped and sacrificed; there were temples to other so called gods in other cities and countries. Certainly right in Corinth there were temples to the various gods that the Greeks worshipped. Gods with names like Aphrodite and Apollo, Hades and Hermes, Poseidon and Zeus. Each god had a temple that tried to outdo the temples of the other gods in their ornate design and beauty. These temples also had very specific rituals surrounding them, and people had the utmost respect for the temple itself as if it were the actual god. There were rites of purification before they could enter, specific bowing down and sacrificial requirements were also enforced, statues of the "gods" were washed and perfumed and draped in special cloths. In short, the temple was sacred and special. It was an honor and a privilege to enter the temple.

When Paul tells these Greek Christians, and us, that our bodies are God's temple, it means that our bodies are sacred and that in some way, when we accept God into our lives, God actually becomes part of us. We should treat our bodies the same way that the ancients treated the temple – with respect and care.

Paul then gets to a topic that we all can relate to. He tells them not to think too highly of themselves. Don't think that you know everything, he tells them. Don't think

that your culture and your friends have all the right answers. You can easily be lead astray by following what is popular.

Following Christ is in many respects counter-cultural. Just look at the ads in the papers and the programs on TV. Very few, in any, celebrate the ideals that we have heard from Moses and Jesus and Paul. If you believe what you see on TV, it is OK to strike back; to hate; to put yourself first; to ignore your neighbor in need; to cheat or steal if it seems to be in your best interests. It is OK to follow the crowd wherever they are leading. Just be yourself. Care for number one!

That's not the message of the Bible. That's not the message of Moses and Jesus and Paul. Following what they teach may seem foolish in our world today, but if it is, then being Fools for Christ is exactly what we are supposed to be.

AMEN.