

# 1 John 2:1-5 John as an example leader

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[0:00] And yeah, we're in 1 John this morning, 1 John chapter 2, and we're going to do something! a little unusual this week with this particular text, and it's something that I learned from a football coach way back in my high school days. Sometime you ought to Google Jefferson City Jays undefeated streak or something like that. There were multiple decades where my football team didn't lose a single 5A football game, and there's actually a whole bunch about the coach and so forth.

And I remember as a kid watching as a teenager, you know, being involved in practices and so forth, and paying attention to two things at the same time. I was trying to learn the play or whatever that was being taught to me, but I was also, I think just because I was curious, I was also paying attention to the way he was leading. So I was trying to follow my coach's lead while also kind of trying to understand how he was such a good leader. And so I think that you can do both of those things at the same time when you read God's Word. You can be led by it, but also be influenced by the way that it leads you and leads others. I think when it comes to the subject of Christian leadership, you know that our church has a passion for producing Christian leaders. And I think that as we consider this subject so routinely, one person who might be completely off our radar in terms of a leader worth listening to and looking at is this apostle who wrote 1 John. You know, he was, of course, the youngest by church tradition, the youngest of all the apostles. He soon became a part of Jesus's inner circle along with

Peter and James. He was present at the Mount of Transfiguration, seeing the glory of Christ overtake his humanity. He accompanied Jesus into Gethsemane and saw the sweating of the blood.

He was entrusted while Jesus was on the cross. He was one of the few followers who did not completely run away. And he was entrusted in that moment with the care of his, Jesus's mother, Mary. He was the first to reach the empty tomb in terms of the disciples. He wants you to know that he beat Peter in a foot race. You could read that at the end of John. And of course, he was present when Jesus ascended into heaven. John was one of the first preachers in the early church and performed some of the earliest miracles in the church age. And unlike all of his other apostles, we believe that John lived to an advanced age. And according to early church traditions, spent most of his time of ministry in Ephesus. And unique to John, we actually have a lineage of early church fathers that descended directly from John. So it was John and then a man named Polycarp and then a man named Irenaeus. And so in many cases, John's leadership has more influence in church history than we realize. There's actually a coaching tree for John the apostle in particular. So I want us to explore the text today, which is

John, first John two, one through five. And I want to understand what he's telling us, but I also want to draw your attention to how he's leading us. This verse has some connections to the whole letter that I want to bring to your attention. Look at verse one of first John chapter two. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. Okay. So one of the things to point out to you as we're this early on in the book still is that this phrase, my little children is going to appear a whole lot in this short letter. And we've got those proof texts for you up on the screen. And there's another phrase that appears in very significant places. In verse one, not only does he say my little children, but the next phrase is I am writing these things so that you may not sin. He uses that phrase.

[ 4 : 20 ] I am writing these things multiple times in the letter. And I want to walk you through sort of the motivation and approach that John is taking as he leads this local church. And to do that, I would say the first thing I'd want you to think about when it comes to leading as a Christian, by the way, parenting is Christian leadership, neighboring is Christian leadership, co-working is Christian leadership.

You know, we're all called to be Christian leaders to at least someone, or at least in some moment of our lives. There'll be conversations you're engaged in this week where you should emerge as the Christian leader. There are people in your life right now, you're the Christian they know. You're the one.

You're called to lead them and so on and so forth. So this is of keen relevance to everybody here. And I want to walk you through kind of how John is leading this church while explaining what he's saying in this section as well. So look back. This all starts in many ways in verse four of chapter one. So if you've got your Bibles, look back at chapter one, verse four. It's the first time we see this phrase, I am writing these things. He says, I am writing these things so that our joy may be made complete. And the first thing I want to point out to you about some of the nuances, important details of Christian leadership is that a Christian leader must have godly affections for those he is leading.

A Christian leader must have affections, godly affections for those he is leading. Here he says, I am writing all of this. I'm undertaking this exercise of leadership, of ministry, of teaching, in part so that my joy as someone who loves you will be made complete. Now he doesn't say that all of his joy, I'm a pastor, I've walked through this for 27 plus years. There's a difference between having all of my joy located in your sanctification, which would make me really sad, right? Like that's not a recipe for winning. It's one thing to say that all of my joy is rooted in your success as a Christian.

That would be inappropriate. But it's nothing to say that some of my joy is indeed linked to your growth as a Christian. This is 101 of what it means to be a Christian leader, whether we're talking about a father, a husband, a mother, whatever we're talking about in terms of leadership, there must be a kind of affection that is tied up in the other person's sanctification. I cannot be full of joy. I cannot have complete joy if you are not you, the people I'm called to love and care for and lead, are not walking well in Christ. So John is undertaking all of this because the Lord has done something in his heart that he does with every good Christian leader. He ties at least a portion of the leader's happiness to the faithfulness of the follower. Paul does the same thing. One of the great miracles of Christian leadership. If you're a father, if you're a mother, if you're a leader of any kind, ask the Lord to do this for you. Ask the Lord, would you put in my heart the affections that Jesus has for these people?

[ 7 : 51 ] And that's something you should pray regularly. Lord, would you give me the affections of Christ for these people? Paul talks about that. He's in prison and he's writing to the Philippians and he says, for God is my witness how I yearn for you all, not with his own affections, but with the affections of Christ Jesus. And in chapter two, we get more of this joy, complete language from Paul. 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. So when we're talking about leadership, one of the things we've got to underline is you should not be totally okay unless your people are totally okay. And this means that one of the things we've signed up for as Christian leaders, or one of the things that's entailed in Christian leadership is to acknowledge the brokenness of this world and to just understand that if I'm going to lead sinners, I will be to some degree limited in my happiness because that's just what it means to lead sinners. Signing up to love someone in a real meaningful way is also signing up to not be as independently happy as you might have been if you hadn't committed to loving and walking with this particular person. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul is listing all of his hardships and he's like, labors, imprisonments, countless beatings, five times I received from the Jews 40 lashes,

I was beaten with rods three times, I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, on frequent danger, adrift at sea, dangers from robbers, and he goes on and on and on, he makes this whole list.

What's the very last thing he puts on this list of sufferings? And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. So right now we're talking about how John is writing his letter because he is, his, some of his joy is bound up in the sanctification of his people. And I would just tell you like a lot of dads don't understand that they have been essentially a little emotionally immature and they have not been as invested in their children's sanctification emotionally as they ought to have been. And I want you to understand, men, no matter how old you are, this is ground zero for whether or not you're leading like Jesus. You cannot be the happy-go-lucky guy with zero affectional, you know, attitudinal baggage. If your household isn't doing well, you should not be okay. If the people that you're called to love aren't thriving, you should not be thriving. There should be a drain on your heart as you watch those people you love drift from the Lord.

There has to be an actual emotional connection to the people you lead so that you could, like John, like Paul say, I need you, I'm longing for my wife, I'm longing for my kids, I'm longing for so-and-so to follow Christ so that my joy can be made complete. Okay? So that's the affection related to Christian leadership. Next is the agenda related to Christian leadership. Thomas Aquinas once wrote that love is nothing other than to will the good for someone. Love is nothing other than to will the good for someone. And the truth is, is that I think basically the whole world agrees with this.

It's the breakdown becomes when we go to various other places for our definition of the good. Right? So this is where the real breakdown in Christian leadership, even if you have the affections, you might immediately be led to sort of say, okay, I want the good for my wife, I want the good for my children, I want the good for my nation. And then you might go to the wrong place to define the good.

[ 12 : 35 ] There are three kind of places that people go where they shouldn't to define the good. There's the kind of people who would say that what's good for you is what's good for me. So, so my definition of good is my ambition. My definition of good for my wife is my own ambition. And this is in the Bible what the hirelings are doing all the time. The false apostles, they're, they're really leading and loving based on their own selfish ambitions. But an equally wrong perspective would be to say that, that my wife's good is what she thinks is her good. Right? That would also be wrong.

And this is like the felt need empathy approach. Like you tell me what your good is, that's your good. Nope. Nope. I am a servant leader by God's grace, but it's not because I show up like a butler to listen to what my wife and kids want and give it to them. That's not what being a servant leader means.

So I'm not using my own ambitions to determine what's good for those I'm called to love. Neither am I using their perception. Finally, I'm certainly not using the world's latest definitions of what it means to love or what it means to do good to someone. There are many churches in America that should go and replace all of the crosses in their buildings with weather vanes because that is actually how they determine what is true, good, and beautiful. By the way the wind is blowing. By the way the culture is telling them to do things. And so these are the wrong places to go to determine what is the good. And the right place is of course the good book, the Bible. We figure out what it means to love someone wanting their good by going to God's word. And so I mentioned that John uses, I write these things, this phrase three or four times. The first one is a selfish one. I write this so that my joy could be made complete. But we also see his agenda for them in the next three.

He wants them to be holy. He wants them to be holy. I write these things. Chapter two, verse one, I write these things so that you do not sin. He wants them to be safe. Chapter two, verse 26, I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. And he wants them to be sure.

He wants them to have assurance of their status in Christ. Verse 13 of chapter five, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

[ 15 : 09 ] So, so far we've talked about you have to have as a Christian leader, real affection for those you lead. It really has to be to some degree dependent on their sanctification, their growth, your joy does to some degree, not completely, but to some degree. And secondly, we've talked about the agenda. It's like, okay, I want you to be an affectionate, godly Christian leader. That means leading people to their good. And I'm not using the world or them or myself to define what the good is. I'm using the word of God, which John does here. And he says, there are three goods that he wants to lead his love, his loved ones into holiness, discernment, and assurance. And so he gives us his reasons in these, I write these kinds of statements. Now, those two are real simple ideas. And the third one's pretty simple too. We move from the affections of Christian leader to the agenda of Christian leadership, now to the approach of Christian leadership. And the question we're asking in this point is, how does John go about accomplishing his agenda? What approach does he take to accomplish this agenda?

And the answer is, is that he points them to Christ. He points them to Christ. What does it mean to be a Christian leader? It is extremely simple. If you are the Christian leader of a thing, then you should be the person most consistently pointing everybody who's following you to Jesus. It's really that simple.

Like, what does it mean to be a Christian leader? It means to lead people to Christ. Christ. It means to point people to Christ. It means to love Christ so much that when people hear you talk about Jesus, they feel the affection that you feel for Christ. It means to point people to Jesus.

This is a common denominator of all true Christian leaders. The Apostle Paul makes this plain, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 1, when I came to you brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Galatians 6, 14. But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. So the three points, real simple, you should love your people. Number two, you should lead them according to God's word. And number three, you should lead them specifically to Christ. Now, what does it mean to lead somebody to Christ? We use those phrases a lot. What does it actually mean? How can you help someone grow in godliness by consistently showing them Christ? I want to suggest that the answer to that is just bound up in a phrase that's been popular since the very beginning. And that phrase is the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. There's a reason that that phrase has stuck around for 2,000 years. There's a reason it has stuck around in the order it's in for 2,000 years. And I want to just suggest that if you're thinking about being a Christian leader and you're like, okay, how do I show people Christ? If you will just lean into this concept, Lord and Savior, you'll understand. Because what's going on in Lord and Savior is two things. Number one,

He is the Lord. We obey Him. We do what He says. We follow His lead. We serve Him. Jesus is the rule of life. And when we fail to faithfully follow His Lordship, He is our Savior. Jesus is both law and gospel.

[ 18 : 58 ] He is both the pattern by which we must live and the propitiation for our sins when we fail to live up to the pattern. And so if you want to faithfully show people Jesus, you're going to need to learn to show Him both as the standard and as the Savior when they fail to meet that standard. When we really get serious about Christian leadership, it needs to be uneasy to do, clear, and simple. And the truth is, is that all we need to do is point people to Jesus, just avoiding one common error so consistent in this particular era of the church. And that is, we almost always only portray the gospel of Jesus and not the law of Jesus. We almost always give people the assurance for forgiveness that Jesus brings without helping them to see that actually He's also the standard that reveals the existence of sin in your life.

And if we can just keep those two things together, Christ as pattern and propitiation, Christ as standard and Savior, we're going to faithfully give our children, our loved ones, whoever we're trying to lead, we're going to be faithfully presenting Christ to them as long as we keep those two things front and center. The whole letter of 1 John is just John jumping back and forth between these two categories. And that's actually what's happening even in our text today. How does our text start?

I write this to you so that you do not sin. Where does he define sin? How do we know what sin is? He tells us what sin is in verse 3. By this we know if we've come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

So sin is not keeping His commandments. By this we know that we are in Him. This is verse 5. If we walk in the way that He walked, sin is not walking in the way that Jesus walked.

I really think that for the rest of this sermon, we're getting close to being done, we ought to really double down on this idea of Christ as the law, Christ as exemplar, Christ as pattern. I think we ought to zero in on that. And then next week, you know, we'll definitely get to Christ's propitiation when we do the Lord's table here in a minute. But let's really take some care today to wrap up addressing this particular area that is often neglected in the modern church.

[ 21 : 42 ] A.W. Pink, a great theologian from the early 20th century, he writes this, if those a century ago are to be blamed for misusing the example of Christ in connection with justification. So earlier on, he's arguing, hey, there used to be this other error where people would say, you can be saved if you just act enough like Jesus. And he's like, that's an error related to justification. Like you're telling people that they can earn their salvation by acting like Jesus.

Okay, that's the context of what's going on when he says this. And then he says, if those a century ago are to be blamed for misusing the example of Christ in connection with justification, we are guilty of failing to use it in connection with sanctification. So if you want to help anybody discover true Christianity, you really just open a gospel and you read the gospel with them, but you make this point. Are you like this man? Do you think like this man? Do you act like this man? Do you feel like this man? Do you love like this man? That's all law. That's all pattern to follow. And if the Holy Spirit convicts them of their sin, the answer is, of course, no, I do not love like this man. I do not talk like this man. I do not think like this man. And so you say, well, here's good news. This man isn't just the law. He's also the gospel. He's not just the pattern to follow. He's the propitiation for when you fail to follow the pattern. But we've got to get back to using the example of Christ in the way that the Bible commends it to be used. There are many reasons why I would encourage you to do this, but one of them is really simple. In order to bring about unity in any organization, whether it be unity in yourself, unity in your marriage, unity in your home, unity in your church, or even, Lord willing, unity in our nation, you have to have both Jesus as law and gospel. You have to have Jesus as the thing we're all trying to be like, as the person we're all trying to be like, and the person who extends grace and forgiveness when we fail to be like him often hurting one another. The law of Jesus gives us all a common sheet of music to sing from, and the gospel of Jesus makes that music sweet so that when we fail, there's grace and mercy, as John will teach us as we progress.

I don't know of any other theologian who was more on top of this so early than this particular theologian named A.W. Pink, who died in total obscurity. His letters, his works were later discovered by Martin Lloyd-Jones, and that's why we know about him at all. He was a man who wrote a ton of things. No one ever paid any attention to him. He died. He had about a couple hundred subscribers to a newsletter that he mailed out, he and his wife in a little cottage in Wales or something, and only after Martin Lloyd-Jones brought to the forefront, and really A.W. Pink has been massively influential in modern reformed church life, but he knew nothing of any of this during his lifetime. Just a faithful, quiet man who had a series of failed pastorates and eventually gave up and just started writing full-time. But he's very much on top of this idea of using Christ as the model, and I'm going to do some podcasts on this just because I want to get this deep into our bones. Listen to a few things that he talks about as he makes reference to this idea of, hey, if we all use Christ as our pattern, there's something really unifying about that. Listen to how he talks about this. Christ is not only the perfect, but also the patterned man, and therefore is his example suitable for all believers. This lets all believers at this point. This remarkable fact presents a feature which has not received the attention it deserves. There is nothing so distinctive in personality as racial and national characteristics. The greatest of men bear unmistakable marks of their heredity and environment. Racial peculiarities are imperishable to the last fiber of his being. Luther was a German.

Knox was a Scot. And with all of his largeness of heart, Paul was a Jew. In sharp contrast, Jesus Christ rose above heredity and environment. Nothing local, transient, national, or sectarian dwarfed his wondrous personality. Christ is the only truly Catholic man. Catholic means universal. He belongs to all ages and is related to all men because he is the Son of Man. This underlies the universal suitability of Christ's example to believers. He is the only true faith in the perfect realization of their ideal. Well, let me just be super, super provocative and offensive.

The world, our country, is so radically broken along the lines of race because Jesus Christ has been stolen from us as the center of our public sphere. As the center of our home. As the center of our university.

[ 27 : 19 ] The one person that everybody could be like and nobody could be like. The one person who was simply the man. The ideal has been taken from our public discourse, has been taken from our public imagination, and that's why we are all breaking into a thousand pieces. There's really only a few things that can hold a multicultural society together. And one is civil war, and the other is Christ. And I only say civil, I would say civil war jokingly. Of course, we're not together for fighting each other, but at least we're all doing the same thing, I suppose. So I think the idea is we will either kill each other, or we will all follow Christ. And when you hear people talk about Christ or chaos, what we're saying is, is that there's not that many things that can bring a bunch of wildly different people from wildly different backgrounds together. In fact, there's really only one that's been proven. And it's Jesus Christ.

Now, that's Pink talking about the racial aspects of this, but he goes further and he talks about how even, this is incredibly unique that Jesus can be the pattern for a five-year-old and a theologian at the same time. Listen to this. This is indeed a miracle and exhibits a transcendent perfection in the man Christ Jesus, which is rarely pondered. How remarkable that the converted Englishman may find in Christ's character and conduct a pattern as well suited to him as to a saved Chinese.

that his example is as appropriate for a regenerated Zulu as for a born-again German. The needs of Lord Bacon and Sir Isaac Newton were as truly met in Christ as were those of the half-witted youth who said, I am a poor sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all in all. How remarkable that the example of Christ is as appropriate for believers of the 20th century as it was for those of the first and that it is as suitable for a Christian child as for his grandparent.

John is a loving man. He wants them to be in fellowship with one another and with him. This is, I think, in verse 3 of chapter 1. He wants them to grow in all these important things, holiness and discernment and assurance. How does he do all of that and find his joy made complete, if not in this life, in the life to come when he presents his sheep to the master shepherd. He shows them Christ and not just the atonement of Christ, but the pattern of Christ and says we all must follow him. We all must walk as he walked. And all of the great unifiers that had a Christian, or you know, all the great unifiers for Christians, and all of them had something like this at work in their particular approach to life.

William Wilberforce, credited with ending slavery in England, right? He has the same exact perspective. Listen to how he talks about it. Thinking, speaking, hoping, planning, dreaming are all to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[ 30 : 44 ] His love and his life are to color and shape our ambitions and accomplishments. In him, as a plant and soil, in rain and sunshine, we are to live, growing up by him and into him. In his name, we are to work, to pray, to suffer, to rejoice, and at last to go home. It is only another way of saying, for me to live is Christ.

So, dear friends, as you grow in your Christian leadership, you must have affection for those you lead. Your agenda must come from God's word. And your approach to leadership is real simple.

Hold up Jesus Christ as both Lord and Savior. Show the people that you lead that he is the rule to follow and the Redeemer when you fail to follow him. That's what John's doing in verses 1 through 5.

He says, I'm writing this so that you do not sin. And sin is, verses 3 through 5, when you don't act like Jesus. That's the rule. But what happens if you break the rule? What happens if you, Romans 3, fail to live up to the glory of God?

Verses 1 through 2, John 2. My little children, I write these things so that you may not sin, but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. He is the propitiation of our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. So today, for the Lord's table, we want to approach it with what John Piper refers to as gravity and gladness. Simple question before you come to the table. Have you this week lived up to the perfect standard of Jesus Christ in your affections, in your emotions, in your actions, not only not doing what Jesus wouldn't have done, but also doing all the things that Jesus would have done if he were walking in your shoes? Have you been faithful to the pattern of Jesus Christ? If not, you've sinned, and you need forgiveness. That forgiveness is brought to you by the very same person who is also your pattern. He is your advocate, and he is the propitiation of those very sins to end God's wrath against your failure to conform to Christ. And so this table is presented to you as both law and gospel. You are a sinner in need of a Savior, and the very same one who will judge the quick and the dead has offered himself as atonement to pay for your many sins.

[ 33 : 18 ] And so if you're here today, whether you're a member at Providence or just attending, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, would you join us in celebrating the once and for all atonement that Jesus Christ, our pattern and propitiation, has made? Would you come and join us by taking the elements, returning to your seat, and I'll lead us together. Let me pray. Father God, we praise your holy name for being both the just and the justifier. All of it in Christ. Lord, would you teach us to love Jesus? Would you teach us to live like Jesus? Would you teach us to be so grateful that Jesus has offered himself as payment for our many sins? Would you make us, Lord, into good Christian leaders like John is? Give us a real affectionate tether to our people. Fill us with the very affections of Christ so that to some degree, if they're not well, we are not well. Lord, give us a godly agenda for the people we lead, and let us take the same approach we see from all the leaders in Scripture, and that is to point people to Jesus Christ as both pattern and propitiation. We praise your holy name for your faithfulness to us.

Now bless our time of partaking of your table. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.