

# What Do You Follow?

Series 1-20

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## **Introduction to the Series: What Do You Follow?**

There are some questions in life that cut deeper than all the rest, and one of them is the question that stands over this entire series: what do you follow? Not what do you claim, not what do you post, not what do you argue, not what do you say you believe when the pressure is low and the room is friendly, but what do you actually follow. The Bible is a book of roads, paths, ways, trails, and footsteps. It is a book that shows men moving, pursuing, turning, wandering, cleaving, departing, following, and being followed. From Genesis to Revelation, the Holy Ghost keeps pressing this truth into the conscience of man: nobody is standing still. Every soul is moving in some direction. Every heart is drawn by some object. Every life is being shaped by some voice, some fear, some love, some ambition, some idol, some truth, some lie, some god, or the true and living God Himself. That is why the word *follow* in Scripture is never a casual word. It is a revealing word. It uncovers allegiance. It exposes direction. It shows what has captured the heart. A man may hide behind religious language for years, but the trail of his life tells the truth.

This series is necessary because we are living in an age of confusion, imitation, spectacle, and seduction. Men follow crowds because crowds make them feel safe. They follow false teachers because false teachers flatter them. They follow vanity because vanity shines. They follow idols because idols promise power without holiness. They follow fables because fables make them feel enlightened without requiring obedience. They follow pleasure because pleasure is immediate. They follow the world because the world knows how to market itself to the flesh. They follow religion because religion can be practiced without surrender if it is corrupted enough. And in the middle of all that noise, the voice of God still speaks with terrifying plainness and heavenly clarity. The Lord still says, "Follow me." The Scriptures still say, "Follow not a multitude to do evil." The Holy Ghost still says, "Follow after righteousness." The New Testament still says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness." The warning still stands against following vanity, following pernicious ways, and following cunningly devised fables. And above all, the final glory of the redeemed is still this: "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." This series is going to trace that whole line of truth with a hard hand and a sharp eye, because the issue is not

academic. It is not merely literary. It is not a study for curiosity. It is a study for judgment of the heart.

So this series is meant to do more than inform. It is meant to search, expose, correct, warn, and call. It will show the difference between following the Lord and following the herd, between following righteousness and following vanity, between following Christ straightway and following afar off, between following godly examples and idolizing men, between following good works and drifting into passivity, between following the Lamb and ending up on the broad road with a religious excuse in your mouth. It will show that what a man follows will eventually shape what follows him. It will show that every road has an end, every path has a master, and every follower will arrive somewhere. Some roads end in emptiness. Some end in shame. Some end in blindness. Some end in ruin. Some end in exposed hypocrisy. But the right road ends in life, light, honour, usefulness, and glory with the Lamb. So do not read this series like a spectator standing on the side of the road with folded arms. Read it like a man looking at his own feet. Read it like a soul that knows eternity is real. Read it like someone who understands that the end of every path is coming. Because in the final analysis, the issue is not what you say you are following. The issue is what trail your life proves you are on.

## **1 of 20: What Do You Follow? - The Law of Direction in Scripture**

### **Introduction**

There is a law running through the Bible that most people never stop to study, although they live under it every day of their lives. It is the law of direction. A man is headed somewhere, whether he knows it or not. He is moving toward something, yielding to something, listening to something, chasing something, imitating something, and becoming like something. The modern world talks about freedom as though freedom means standing still in some imaginary neutral zone where nobody influences you and nothing governs you. The Bible does not teach any such nonsense. The Scriptures teach that a man is always under some pull, some authority, some affection, some persuasion, some voice, some lord, some spirit, some appetite, some object, some goal. In plain words, he is following something. He may follow the Lord. He may follow a lie. He may follow righteousness. He may follow the crowd. He may follow his belly. He may follow tradition. He may follow his own heart. But he is following something.

That is why the word "follow" in Scripture is never a throwaway word, never an empty motion word, never some little filler term to be skipped over on your way to a doctrinal

verse. That word shows the movement of the soul. It shows allegiance. It shows direction. It shows pursuit. It shows attachment. It shows devotion. It shows surrender. It shows influence. It shows imitation. It shows destiny. When the Lord says, "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), He is not asking for a casual stroll. When Moses says, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2), he is not merely giving social advice. When Paul says, "Follow after charity" (1 Corinthians 14:1), he is not suggesting a hobby. When Peter warns that "many shall follow their pernicious ways" (2 Peter 2:2), he is not describing a harmless trend. The Spirit of God is showing you that men move in trails, and the trail they choose tells you what owns them.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible presents life as a road with voices calling on both sides. The Lord says, "follow me" (John 21:19). Idols pull men away into spiritual fornication. False prophets draw disciples after them. Strong drink has followers. Vanity has followers. Rewards have followers. Evil has followers. Righteousness has followers. Peace has followers. Holiness has followers. The Lamb has followers. Death itself is followed by hell in Revelation 6:8. So this first study must lay down the foundation stones for the entire series. The question is not whether you are a follower. The question is what you follow. The question is not whether you are on a path. The question is where that path ends. And the question is not whether your life has direction. The question is who set the compass.

## **1. No Man Stands Still**

One of the first truths you have to get into your head is that no man in Scripture is presented as spiritually stationary. The Bible does not know anything about the fantasy of the detached observer. There is no man floating above the battle with no commitments, no influences, no loyalties, and no object of pursuit. Even the man who boasts that he follows nobody is generally following the pride of his own heart and congratulating himself on his independence while marching in step with his lusts. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matthew 12:30). That verse destroys the whole myth of neutrality. A man who claims to be standing in the middle is already moving in the wrong direction.

In the Old Testament this law shows up in seed form everywhere. Rebekah must decide whether she will follow the servant into a new land (Genesis 24:5-8). Israel is warned not to follow a multitude to do evil (Exodus 23:2). Caleb is praised because he "hath followed me fully" (Numbers 14:24). The people are told, "That which is altogether just shalt thou follow" (Deuteronomy 16:20). Right there the issue is settled. God does not deal with man as though man is an idle lump of clay sitting by the roadside. He deals with him as a moving

creature whose steps reveal his desires. A man can claim one thing with his mouth and expose another thing with his feet.

When you get into the New Testament the matter gets even plainer. Christ says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Notice that the transformation comes after the following. Men want the making without the following. They want the crown without the road, the reward without the obedience, the fruit without the attachment, the blessing without the surrender. But the Lord never offers any such bargain. He shows that life is movement toward a person, toward a voice, toward a master. If you are not following Christ, you are following something else. There is no vacuum in the human heart. Whatever does not belong to God will fill up with substitutes.

## **2. Following Reveals Allegiance**

A man may say many things about himself, but what he follows gives him away. A fellow can talk about liberty, intelligence, sincerity, education, spirituality, authenticity, or whatever fashionable word he wants to use this week, but his path will betray him sooner or later. The Bible constantly links following with allegiance because the object followed is the real lord of the soul. Elijah stood before Israel and thundered, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). That is one of the greatest questions ever thrown at a backslidden people. Elijah did not say, "How long will you admire both?" He said, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" because divided allegiance cripples a man. He cannot walk straight because his heart is split.

That is why idolatry in Scripture is so often described in terms of following. Israel "followed other gods" (Judges 2:12). They "followed Baal-peor" (Deuteronomy 4:3). Ahab "followed Baalim" (1 Kings 18:18). The issue was not merely that they had wrong ideas in their heads. The issue was that their loyalties were transferred. Their affections were stolen. Their fear, expectation, dependence, and devotion were given to that which was not God. A man follows what he trusts to supply him, protect him, please him, justify him, or define him. That is why people can make an idol out of money, sex, applause, politics, entertainment, church tradition, or religious experience just as certainly as a pagan can bow before a statue. The modern idol just wears nicer clothes and speaks with a more polished accent.

The same law applies positively to the saints of God. Caleb "wholly followed the LORD" (Joshua 14:8). David is commended because he "followed me with all his heart" (1 Kings 14:8). The difference is allegiance. One man is attached to God, while another man is attached to a substitute. One man has settled the question of who owns him, while another is forever drifting after the next voice, the next crowd, the next trend, the next sensation, the

next excuse. So if you want to know who your god is, do not start with your speech. Start with your direction. What do you protect? What do you chase? What do you excuse? What do you fear losing? What do you obey at the point where obedience costs you something? There sits your lord.

### **3. Every Path Has a Voice**

The Bible never presents following as blind motion. There is always a voice attached to it. There is always some call, some persuasion, some influence, some word going out ahead of the feet. The sheep "follow him: for they know his voice" (John 10:4). "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:5). That passage is not sentimental farm poetry. It is one of the sharpest laws of discernment in the entire New Testament. A man follows the voice he has learned to trust. If he is trained by the words of God, he will develop an ear for truth. If he is trained by the world, the flesh, and the devil, he will run after noise, novelty, charisma, and religious theater.

Look how the Lord ties hearing to following. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). First comes hearing, then knowing, then following. That is why doctrinal corruption is so dangerous. It tampers with the voice. It confuses the sound. It introduces counterfeit authority. Once the ear is corrupted, the feet are not far behind. Eve listened to the wrong voice before she ever reached for the wrong fruit. Israel heard the lies of false prophets before they followed after their idols. Churches today are filled with people who cannot distinguish between the voice of Scripture and the voice of religious salesmanship because they have conditioned themselves to respond to style over substance.

This is also why you cannot treat preaching lightly. A man is not merely accumulating information when he hears preaching. He is letting a voice map his trail. If the preacher is exalting Christ and teaching the Book, that voice can help straighten a path. If the preacher is a deceiver, a performer, a merchandiser, or a doctrinal clown, that voice can warp the whole course of a life. Peter warns about false teachers and says, "many shall follow their pernicious ways" (2 Peter 2:2). Why? Because pernicious ways do not travel alone. They come with persuasive voices. So the path is never detached from the word that authorized it. Show me what voice a man permits to govern his inward life, and I will show you the trail he is already on.

### **4. The Crowd Is a Direction**

One of the most dangerous forces in human life is the multitude. The crowd gives weak men courage to sin, fools the conscience into feeling safe, and allows the individual to hide his guilt inside a larger movement. That is why the Lord gave the command, "Thou shalt not

follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2). He knew the tendency of the human heart. Men are often less afraid of being wrong than of being different. They would rather march into judgment with a crowd than stand with truth by themselves. That crowd instinct is one of the devil's favorite tools because it baptizes cowardice and calls it consensus.

Israel again and again went bad as a people because they took social comfort in collective rebellion. The people in Judges followed the local idols because everyone around them was doing it. The prophets were rejected because the nation preferred a religious mood that made them feel normal in their disobedience. When Christ came, multitudes followed Him at times for the loaves, the healings, or the excitement, and then the same public spirit shifted, and the same nation cried out against Him. Crowds are fickle because crowds are seldom rooted in conviction. That is why a man who lives by public approval is one gust of social pressure away from betrayal.

The modern application is so obvious a blind man can see it. People follow denominational trends, celebrity preachers, political waves, online outrage, academic fashions, cultural slogans, and emotional movements without once asking whether they are true. If enough people repeat a lie, weak men start calling it wisdom. If enough people mock a truth, weak men start calling it embarrassment. But the Bible never measures right by numbers. Noah stood against the world. Caleb and Joshua stood against the spies. Micaiah stood against the prophets. Paul stood against the religious establishment. The broad road still has the heaviest traffic. The question is not how many are walking on it. The question is where it goes.

## **5. The Heart Always Chases a Treasure**

Following in Scripture is connected not only to outward motion, but to inward desire. Men follow what they love, what they fear, what they crave, what they imagine will satisfy them. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). The heart is not a static organ in the biblical sense. It moves. It inclines. It seeks. It clings. It runs. It follows. That inward pursuit becomes outward direction sooner or later. A man's feet will eventually go where his affection has been wandering for months or years.

That explains why the Bible can speak of men following strong drink, following after mischief, following vanity, or following after rewards. Isaiah says, "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink" (Isaiah 5:11). David says of his enemies, "They draw nigh that follow after mischief" (Psalm 119:150). Isaiah rebukes princes because "every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards" (Isaiah 1:23). There you have the law operating in plain sight. What they love, they follow. They follow drink

because they want its forgetfulness. They follow mischief because they delight in corruption. They follow rewards because their god is gain. The feet are simply carrying out the desires of the heart.

That is why no man can fix his life merely by changing some surface habit while keeping the same inward master. The issue goes deeper than behavior management. The issue is treasure. It is worship. It is affection. It is lordship. If the heart is in love with vanity, it will keep wandering toward vain things even if the body is temporarily restrained. If the heart is captured by Christ, then the soul begins to seek Him, hear Him, obey Him, and follow Him. The law of direction starts inside. The outward path is the visible trail of an invisible devotion.

## **6. Christ Turns Following Into Discipleship**

When you arrive at the Gospels, the doctrine of following comes into blazing focus in the Person of Jesus Christ. The prophets had called men to follow the Lord, righteousness, and truth, but now the Lord Himself stands in flesh and says, "Follow me" (Matthew 8:22). That statement is one of the greatest claims of deity in the New Testament. No mere prophet could rightfully stand before men and make himself the object of their total spiritual direction. Moses pointed beyond himself. John the Baptist pointed beyond himself. Paul pointed beyond himself. But Jesus Christ says, "Follow me," because to follow Him is to follow God manifest in the flesh.

Notice also how this following demands decision. When Christ called Matthew, "he arose, and followed him" (Matthew 9:9). When He called Peter and Andrew, "they straightway left their nets, and followed him" (Matthew 4:20). The call cuts through earthly attachments. It exposes priorities. It reveals what a man thinks is worth losing and what he thinks is worth keeping. That is why some people wanted to follow, but only on their own timetable. One wanted to bury his father first. Another wanted to bid farewell at home. But the Lord was not interested in followers who kept Him waiting behind their excuses. He was exposing the heart's resistance to absolute authority.

This is where a lot of soft religious people get nervous, because they want Jesus as an addition, not as a center. They want a little inspiration, a little comfort, a little help with their guilt, a little uplift on Sundays, but they do not want to reorient the entire course of life around Him. Yet Christ never invited men to that kind of decorative religion. He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). There is the issue in black and white. Following Christ is not adding a religious sticker to your luggage. It is taking a road where self is dethroned and the Master sets the pace.

## **7. The End of the Path Shows the Master of the Path**

The Bible never talks about following as though it were a harmless temporary motion with no final consequence. Every path leads to an end. Every trail has a destination. Every following lands somewhere. That is why Scripture keeps pressing outcome. "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Psalm 23:6). "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after" (1 Timothy 5:24). "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Revelation 14:4). "Their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13). There is always an end hanging over the road.

That final end reveals whether the path was worth taking. The prodigal followed the lust of the far country and found famine. Balaam followed wages and found judgment. Israel followed idols and found ruin. False teachers follow covetousness and carry multitudes with them into destruction. On the other hand, the righteous follow after righteousness and find life, righteousness, and honour according to Proverbs 21:21. The sheep follow the Shepherd and find pasture. Those who follow the Lamb are seen in purity and victory. You can tell what kind of master a man has by the country where his road ends. The devil advertises the first mile and hides the last mile. God warns you about the last mile before you ever take the first one.

So the law of direction in Scripture is not some abstract theological curiosity. It is one of the most practical truths a man will ever learn. Your life is headed somewhere now. Not tomorrow. Not after you get older. Not after you settle down. Not after you fix a few habits. Now. Your feet are already voting. Your habits are already declaring your master. Your desires are already carving the road. Your influences are already pulling you. The voice you tolerate is already training your ear. The treasure you protect is already steering your heart. The question is not whether your life has direction. The question is whether the direction agrees with the Lord God of the Book.

### **Conclusion**

So the foundation is plain. No man is spiritually motionless. Every man is following something. He follows a lord, a love, a lust, a light, a lie, a leader, or the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible does not flatter you with fantasies of neutrality. It does not pat you on the head and tell you that you are merely exploring, processing, considering, deconstructing, or searching. It puts the matter in concrete terms. You are on a road. You are under a voice. You are after a treasure. You are headed toward an end. If you are not following the truth, you are following error. If you are not following righteousness, you are following corruption. If you are not following Christ, you are following a substitute.

That is why this word study matters. "Follow" is not a small word in your Bible. It is a spotlight on the soul. It reveals allegiance. It exposes desire. It uncovers influence. It identifies masters. It traces consequence. It is one of those little Bible words that opens up into a whole theology once the Holy Spirit starts connecting the dots. It reaches from Rebekah leaving her old home to follow the servant, all the way to the redeemed in Revelation following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. It covers Caleb's loyalty, Israel's apostasy, Christ's discipleship call, Peter's distance, Paul's example, the saint's pursuit of peace and charity, and the doom of those who follow pernicious ways. It is a trail word. It tells you where the feet of the soul are moving.

So before this series moves into all the branches of the subject, the first question must be nailed down. What do you follow? What voice gets the final word? What trail are you worn into by habit? What master is revealed by your direction? What end are you approaching by the road you are on now? A man may deceive his neighbor, impress a church, fool a family, flatter himself, and hide under a pile of religious vocabulary, but he cannot change the law of direction. Sooner or later his path will speak. So let the Book search you before judgment searches you. Let the Shepherd's voice correct your course before the cliff appears. Because in the end, the trail tells the truth.

## **2 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Follow Not a Multitude to Do Evil**

### **Introduction**

One of the oldest tricks the devil ever pulled on the human race is to make people feel safe because they are surrounded by other fools. He knows that most men do not want truth badly enough to stand alone for it. They want the comfort of numbers. They want the reassurance of a group. They want the courage that comes from hiding their cowardice inside a crowd. That is why the Lord put a commandment in His Book that cuts right across the grain of human nature. He said, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2). That is not a suggestion. That is not a proverb for occasional use. That is a standing law for every generation. It tells you plainly that a multitude can be wrong, that a crowd can be wicked, that popularity can be corruption with good publicity, and that a group can march straight into judgment while congratulating itself on unity.

Most people live as though the exact opposite were true. They act as though numbers prove truth, as though consensus proves righteousness, as though majority opinion proves wisdom, and as though a thing becomes safe the moment enough people approve of it. The Bible never teaches any such thing. In the Scriptures the crowd is regularly behind the

wrong man, defending the wrong cause, mocking the right preacher, resisting the right message, and rushing toward the wrong end. If numbers proved truth, Noah was wrong and the flood was a mistake. If numbers proved truth, Elijah should have joined the prophets of Baal. If numbers proved truth, Micaiah should have learned to get along with four hundred preachers of lies. If numbers proved truth, the nation that cried, "Crucify him, crucify him" (Luke 23:21), must have been the voice of moral sanity. But numbers do not prove truth. Numbers prove only that sin is sociable.

The danger here is more subtle than people realize. A man does not always follow a multitude because he has carefully studied their claims and become convinced by evidence. Very often he follows the multitude because it relieves him of personal responsibility. If everyone else is doing it, he feels less guilty. If everyone else is saying it, he feels less exposed. If everyone else is laughing at the truth, mocking the preacher, excusing the sin, tolerating the compromise, or celebrating the perversity, then he can join in and borrow courage from the group. That is the devil's psychology of the herd. He knows men fear isolation. So he turns the crowd into a counterfeit refuge. This essay is about that danger. It is about the madness of trading conviction for convenience, truth for belonging, and the fear of God for the approval of a mob.

### **1. The Command That Exposes the Crowd**

The first thing to notice is that the Lord did not say a multitude might possibly be dangerous under rare conditions. He said flat out, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2). That command assumes something about fallen human nature. It assumes that multitudes have a tendency to move in the wrong direction. It assumes that evil gains momentum when it becomes collective. It assumes that the presence of many people doing a thing does not cleanse it, sanctify it, justify it, or reduce its guilt. In fact, the command suggests the opposite. The crowd becomes a multiplier of wickedness because it gives sin the protection of mass participation.

That verse also reveals something about personal duty. The man of God is expected to think, judge, discern, and stand, even when the majority runs the other way. He is not permitted to hand over his conscience to the group. He is not allowed to excuse himself by saying, "Well, everybody was doing it." That excuse may work in a schoolyard, but it does not work at the judgment seat of Christ, and it will not work at the Great White Throne. The Lord addresses the individual. "Thou shalt not follow." Not your pastor, not your church, not your nation, not your party, not your family, not your generation. You. The command falls on the solitary conscience, because every man will answer to God for the direction of his own feet.

And that is exactly why this verse is hated by carnal religion and worldly culture alike. It places moral responsibility back where men do not want it - on the individual before God. Crowds love to dissolve accountability. They allow a man to feel anonymous. He can hide his rebellion inside a movement, his cowardice inside a consensus, and his corruption inside a trend. But the Lord pulls him right out of the herd and shines the light directly on him. "Thou shalt not follow." That means if the whole town goes bad, you are still required to stand. If your entire denomination sells out, you are still required to stand. If the whole internet decides darkness is light and bitter is sweet, you are still required to stand. Truth is not determined by attendance.

## **2. Why Men Feel Stronger in a Crowd**

There is something in fallen flesh that loves borrowed courage. A weak man who would never commit certain sins by himself will do them in a group because the group furnishes him with emotional cover. One coward starts the chant, another joins, another laughs, another approves, and before long you have an entire mob bold in wickedness. That is because the multitude gives a man the illusion of safety. He thinks that because he is surrounded by others, his guilt is somehow diluted. He thinks the crowd will absorb the blame. He thinks moral responsibility gets spread so thin across the group that nobody really owns it. But the Lord does not grade evil on a curve.

You see this all through Scripture. When Israel made the golden calf, the sin was easier because it was collective. When Korah rebelled, he took a company with him because rebellion feels more respectable when it has supporters. When Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel, he built momentum through numbers. When the chief priests stirred up the people against Jesus Christ, the crowd became an instrument of hell because individuals who might have hesitated in private found confidence in public outrage. A multitude can become a machine that manufactures boldness for cowards. Men who would blush alone can roar together.

That same principle is alive and well today in every area of life. A man may not have enough boldness to challenge the Book by himself, but let him find a hundred scoffers and he grows a spine overnight. A woman may not have enough hardness to celebrate some abomination alone, but let her stand in a mob applauding it and she feels righteous in her rebellion. A church may not have enough nerve to abandon truth while one godly old man is standing against them, but once enough compromisers whisper together, they can vote out the truth and call it progress. That is the deceit of the multitude. It lends courage to folly and makes wickedness feel brave.

## **3. The Crowd Confuses Size With Truth**

One of the deadliest assumptions in human history is the belief that if enough people believe something, it must be right. That is one of the central lies under modern democracy, modern education, modern media, modern academia, modern church growth obsession, and modern social pressure. Men look at numbers and think they are looking at proof. They see a multitude and assume they are seeing wisdom. But the Bible tears that notion to pieces. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate... because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). There you have it. The road to destruction is broad, and the traffic on it is heavy. The road to life is narrow, and the company on it is small.

That truth should have cured Christians forever of the foolish notion that majority opinion is a safe guide. Noah was outnumbered by the whole world. Caleb and Joshua were outnumbered by ten spies and an entire nation of murmuring cowards. Gideon's army was cut down so that the Lord could show that victory is not in the size of the group. Elijah looked around and thought he was by himself, while the religious establishment was on the side of Baal. Micaiah stood against four hundred prophets. Jeremiah stood against priests, princes, and people. Paul repeatedly found himself opposed by religious majorities. The Book is full of examples where the man nearest God is standing farthest from the crowd.

Yet carnal people never seem to learn that lesson. They still say things like, "How can all these scholars be wrong?" very easily. The same way all those builders were wrong in Noah's day. "How can the whole denomination be wrong?" the same way Israel was wrong when it followed Baal. "How can this many churches be wrong?" the same way the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 went wrong while still existing as organized bodies. A crowd can be sincerely wrong, loudly wrong, traditionally wrong, academically wrong, religiously wrong, and democratically wrong at the same time. Truth is not established by head count. It is established by the words of God.

#### **4. The Multitude Is Easily Stirred**

Another thing the Bible shows over and over is that crowds are unstable. A multitude is easily moved, easily manipulated, easily inflamed, easily frightened, easily seduced, and easily turned. That is why a man who anchors his convictions in public opinion will live on a seesaw. The multitude that shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matthew 21:9) did not prove its loyalty by its enthusiasm. Crowds can be enthusiastic about the right man on Sunday and bloodthirsty against Him on Friday. They are not rooted in conviction. They are moved by atmosphere, personalities, slogans, fears, and momentum.

Look at the scenes around the crucifixion. Pilate knew Christ was innocent. Yet under pressure from the multitude, he let the mob push him into condemning the only sinless

man who ever lived. The people cried, "Crucify him, crucify him" (Luke 23:21). That crowd was not right because it was large. It was damned because it was united in evil. Public agreement did not sanctify the crime. It made the guilt more awful. The same principle appears in Acts, where multitudes are stirred up against the apostles, and in the Old Testament where whole assemblies are turned by fear or envy or flattery. A crowd has a pulse but not always a conscience.

That should make a Christian very suspicious of mass hysteria, emotional surges, and public moral fashions. Whenever you see multitudes whipped into a frenzy - whether political, social, religious, or cultural - you ought to remember Exodus 23:2. The devil loves mass excitement because it drowns out careful judgment. It creates a feeling of inevitability. It makes resistance look unreasonable. It pressures the hesitant to join or be isolated. Once a crowd is moving, many people stop asking whether the direction is right and start worrying only about whether they will be left behind. That is exactly how multitudes become conveyor belts to judgment.

### **5. Following the Crowd Relieves Personal Responsibility**

One reason people follow a multitude is because it gives them an excuse not to think. Thinking is hard work, discernment is lonely work, moral courage is costly work, and standing against a crowd can be painful work. It is much easier to let the group do the thinking, the approving, the deciding, and the justifying. Then a man can drift along and tell himself he is only being reasonable. He can dress up cowardice as humility and call compromise wisdom. The multitude becomes a shelter where he can lay down the burden of conviction and take up the pillow of convenience.

But the Lord will not permit that excuse. In Ezekiel 14, when men came before the prophet with idols in their hearts, the Lord dealt with them individually. In Romans 14, every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Not of the group. Not of the mood of the age. Not of the trends in our profession. Not of what our friends thought. Of himself. That truth strips away the safety blanket of collective rebellion. A man may have ten thousand companions in his sin, but when he stands before God he stands alone. The multitude that helped him feel safe on earth will not answer for him there.

This is why peer pressure is so spiritually poisonous. It is not merely that other people tempt you to do wrong. It is that their presence offers you a psychological bribe. It tells you that you do not have to carry the full weight of your own decision. It whispers that you can blend in, that you can go with the flow, that you can let others set the standard, that you can dodge the pain of being different. But the Book will not let you hide that way. The Bible keeps dragging you back into the light as an individual. "Choose you this day whom ye will

serve" (Joshua 24:15). "If the LORD be God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2). The issue is always personal before it is public.

## **6. Scripture Honors the Man Who Stands Alone**

One of the glories of the Bible is that it consistently honors men who stand against the tide. Not men who are merely difficult, not cranks who fight everything, not bitter contrarians who oppose for the sake of opposing, but men who will hold the line when the crowd goes bad. Noah stood while the world mocked. Caleb and Joshua stood while the congregation murmured. Phinehas stood when compromise spread. Elijah stood before Ahab and the prophets of Baal. Micaiah stood against four hundred religious mouthpieces. Daniel stood in Babylon. John the Baptist stood before a corrupt generation. Paul stood before religious and political powers alike. The Book keeps putting a halo, as it were, on holy singularity.

That is because standing with God has very often meant standing without majority support. The faithful man learns sooner or later that truth may cost him fellowship with the crowd. It may cost him applause, acceptance, promotion, comfort, security, and reputation. But if he fears God, he will discover that one man and God make a majority every time, whether the newspapers report it or not. The entire earthly system may line up against truth, but heaven does not revise its standards because men are numerous. The Lord has never looked down from glory and said, "Well, since so many believe a lie, I suppose I must adjust reality to fit the census."

That is a needed lesson now because many Christians are terrified of social isolation. They want to be accepted by the world, respected by scholars, liked by the crowd, approved by relatives, admired by peers, and still somehow thought faithful by the Lord. That arrangement almost never works. The man who determines to follow Christ in a wicked age will eventually find himself out of step with the multitude. And that is not a sign he is wrong. It may be the first sign he is finally getting right. The broad road is crowded. The narrow road is not. So do not measure your standing by how many clap for you. Measure it by whether the Book is on your side.

## **7. Conviction Must Be Stronger Than Convenience**

At bottom, following a multitude to do evil is a choice of convenience over conviction. A man sees the crowd going one way, sees the cost of resisting, and decides that fitting in is cheaper than standing firm. He may not even call it evil. He may call it prudence, balance, moderation, charity, open-mindedness, nuance, or maturity. But if the crowd is moving away from truth and he joins them because it is easier, he has sold out conviction for convenience. He has made peace with evil because the social price of righteousness seemed too high.

The Bible again and again calls God's people to the opposite spirit. "Be strong and of a good courage" (Joshua 1:9). "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13). "Having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13). Those are not crowd verses. Those are backbone verses. They assume pressure. They assume opposition. They assume the possibility of standing with a minority or even alone. Conviction is what keeps a man from drifting with the herd. It is what ties him to the Book when everyone else is untying themselves from it. It is what keeps him from bowing when the music plays.

And make no mistake about it, the choice comes in little ways before it comes in great ones. A man learns to follow the crowd in jokes before he follows them in doctrine. He follows them in silence before he follows them in speech. He follows them in social compromise before he follows them in outright rebellion. Once he gets used to adjusting his convictions for acceptance, the process becomes easier every time. So the command in Exodus 23:2 is not an isolated legal statement buried in the Pentateuch. It is a law for daily living. Do not let the group do your deciding. Do not let the multitude bully your conscience. Do not let the size of the company impress you more than the certainty of the truth.

## **Conclusion**

The lesson is clear enough for a child to understand, though many educated fools never grasp it. A crowd can be wrong. A majority can be wicked. A multitude can move in lockstep toward destruction. The size of a group does not prove the goodness of its cause. The noise of a movement does not prove the truth of its claims. The emotional force of public agreement does not turn evil into righteousness. God said, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2), and that settles the question for any man who still believes the Book. When the crowd leaves truth, you do not leave with them. When the multitude celebrates rebellion, you do not join the parade.

What makes this especially searching is that the pressure is not always dramatic. Sometimes the multitude is your family. Sometimes it is your church. Sometimes it is your nation. Sometimes it is your profession. Sometimes it is your friends. Sometimes it is the whole culture around you. Sometimes it is a digital mob on a screen. Sometimes it is a religious consensus that has been wrong for generations. But the issue never changes. If numbers pull you farther from the words of God, then the numbers are against you, no matter how impressive they appear. Better to stand with the Lord in a small and hated company than to drown in a sea of popular approval.

So ask yourself plainly: have you been impressed by size more than truth? Have you let public opinion soften your convictions? Have you mistaken agreement for righteousness?

Have you borrowed courage from a crowd when you should have feared God? The man who follows truth may have to stand alone for a while, but he stands with heaven. The man who follows a multitude to do evil may enjoy company on the march, but he will be alone when judgment falls. In the end, the herd does not save you. The crowd does not shield you. The majority does not justify you. The only safety is in standing where God stands, whether ten thousand agree with you or none at all.

### **3 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Wholly Followed the LORD**

#### **Introduction**

There are certain phrases in your Bible that shine like gold in a mud hole. They stand out because they are not the common testimony of the average believer, the average church member, the average preacher, or the average religious crowd. One of those phrases is found in connection with Caleb. The Lord said, "But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully" (Numbers 14:24). Again the record says, "for they have wholly followed the LORD" (Numbers 32:12). Again, "because he hath wholly followed the LORD" (Deuteronomy 1:36). Again, "I wholly followed the LORD my God" (Joshua 14:8). Again, "because he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel" (Joshua 14:14). The Holy Spirit did not say that once by accident. He said it over and over because He meant to mark that man out as an exception in a generation full of murmuring, compromise, fear, excuses, and unbelief.

That phrase ought to stop any honest reader in his tracks. It does not say Caleb occasionally followed the Lord when conditions were favorable. It does not say he followed the Lord when the majority agreed with him. It does not say he followed the Lord when the journey was easy, the giants were small, the opposition was weak, and the reward was immediate. It says he wholly followed the LORD. That is the difference between a whole heart and a divided heart, between settled loyalty and passing excitement, between conviction and convenience, between real faith and religious talk. A lot of God's people can say the right things when they are standing at the shore of the Red Sea watching miracles. Fewer can say the right things when the land ahead is full of giants and the crowd around them is full of cowardice.

This study matters because shallow Christianity is full of partial followers. There are multitudes who want enough of God to soothe the conscience, enough Bible to look respectable, enough religion to fit in with a church crowd, and enough spiritual language to talk like they know the Lord, but not enough surrender to be called whole hearted. They do

not want to wholly follow the Lord because wholly following the Lord means He gets the final word when fear argues, when flesh resists, when friends pull, when the crowd threatens, and when the road is uphill. Caleb stands in Scripture as a rebuke to half-hearted saints, split loyalties, and polished excuses. He shows that God notices not only whether a man names the Lord, but how fully he follows Him.

### **1. God Records the Degree of a Man's Following**

One of the first truths you have to learn from Caleb is that God pays attention to degree. Men are impressed with labels. The Lord is impressed with reality. Men hear a fellow talk about faith, ministry, conviction, calling, surrender, dedication, and service, and they may be fooled by the vocabulary. But the Lord weighs the heart. He does not merely ask whether you followed in some loose outward sense. He marks how far, how long, how truly, how steadily, and how wholly you followed. That is why the record does not merely say Caleb followed. It says he "hath followed me fully" (Numbers 14:24). It says he "wholly followed the LORD" (Deuteronomy 1:36). The Spirit of God put an adverb on the man's testimony because the degree mattered.

That ought to shake up a lot of easygoing church religion. Plenty of people imagine that as long as they are somewhere in the general neighborhood of obedience, God will treat all following as essentially equal. But your Bible does not speak that way. It distinguishes between following afar off and following close. It distinguishes between mixed loyalty and whole hearted loyalty. It distinguishes between talking and doing. Peter "followed him afar off" (Matthew 26:58), and those three words tell you a whole sermon. Caleb wholly followed, and those words tell you another sermon altogether. God notices distance. God notices degree. God notices the difference between a man who drags one foot behind his obedience and a man whose heart is all the way in.

That is why this study is so practical. It asks a question many religious people never ask themselves. Not merely, Do I claim to follow the Lord, but how much of me is actually behind Him. Is my mind behind Him, but not my will. Is my speech behind Him, but not my habits. Is my church attendance behind Him, but not my private life. Is my doctrine behind Him, but not my courage. Is my profession behind Him, but not my heart. Caleb's testimony shows that the Lord is not fooled by partial compliance dressed up as total surrender. He knows the difference between a split heart and a whole one.

### **2. Caleb Saw What Everyone Else Saw**

The striking thing about Caleb is that he was not operating with better external evidence than the rest of Israel. He saw the same Red Sea. He ate the same manna. He watched the same pillar of cloud and fire. He heard the same promises. He went into the same land as

the other spies. He looked at the same giants. He saw the same walled cities. He walked the same ground. Yet when the time came to report, Caleb and Joshua stood apart from the whole unbelieving crowd. That means the difference was not in the facts available to him. The difference was in what he did with those facts before God.

That is a crucial lesson because weak Christians are always pretending that their problem is lack of information. They want to make unbelief sound intellectual. They talk as if the reason they cannot obey is that conditions are unusually complex, the obstacles are unusually large, the times are unusually difficult, or the evidence is unusually unclear. Caleb destroys that excuse. He had all the same reasons the other spies had to tremble in the flesh. The giants were real. The cities were real. The danger was real. Yet Caleb said, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers 13:30). That was not because he was blind. It was because he believed God more than he believed appearances.

There is the dividing line between full hearted obedience and carnal religion. Carnal religion can praise God in the abstract, but when obedience becomes costly, it starts measuring the size of the giants instead of the greatness of the Lord. Caleb did not deny the obstacle. He denied its right to overrule the promise. The ten spies looked at the land through fear and made the promise bow to the problem. Caleb looked at the problem through faith and made the obstacle bow to the promise. That is what it means to wholly follow the Lord. You do not pretend the danger is not there. You simply refuse to let danger have the final voice.

### **3. Another Spirit With Him**

The Lord said of Caleb, "because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully" (Numbers 14:24). That statement tells you that whole hearted following is not just about outward decisions. It springs from something inward. Caleb had another spirit. He was cut different from the crowd around him. He was not animated by the same inward disposition as the majority. The congregation was driven by fear, complaint, nostalgia for Egypt, suspicion of God's goodness, and exaggeration of the enemy's strength. Caleb was governed by another spirit altogether. His inward frame leaned toward trusting God when the crowd leaned toward distrusting Him.

That does not mean Caleb was some kind of sinless superman floating six inches off the ground. It means his inward bent was different. He had a heart that settled the issue of God's faithfulness before the crisis arrived. He had already decided what kind of God the LORD was. That is half the battle in the Christian life. When trial comes, a man does not suddenly become something new. He reveals what has already been living in him. When the spies came back with their report, the crisis did not create unbelief in the ten. It

exposed unbelief already there. And the same crisis did not create faith in Caleb. It revealed a heart already anchored in the character of God.

That is why shallow saints collapse so easily. They have church habits without spiritual substance, language without inward roots, activity without settled conviction. Then when a real test hits, they panic because there was no another spirit in them. They were carried along by atmosphere, tradition, or public religion, but not by inward certainty about the Lord. Caleb teaches that a man wholly follows the Lord because something inside him has already chosen God's side before the pressure comes. His spirit has been claimed by the truth. That is why his feet do not run with the crowd when the fear starts spreading.

#### **4. Wholehearted Is Not Sinless, But It Is Settled**

Now somebody always wants to twist a message like this into sinless perfection, and that is because people love extremes that help them dodge conviction. If you say Caleb wholly followed the Lord, some fellow will say, "Well, nobody's perfect." Of course nobody is perfect in the absolute sense except Jesus Christ. That is not the issue. The issue is not whether Caleb ever had a human weakness. The issue is whether his loyalty was split. To wholly follow the Lord is not to claim spotless performance in every motion of life. It is to have a settled allegiance that does not keep defecting when pressure rises.

That distinction is vital. David sinned grievously, yet there were passages where the Lord still marked his heart as fundamentally after Him, because the bent of the man was toward God even when he fell. On the other hand, Saul could perform religious acts and still be exposed as fundamentally disobedient because his heart was never fully yielded. The Lord told Saul, "thou hast rejected the word of the LORD" (1 Samuel 15:23), and later the testimony of David is set against him, "who followed me with all his heart" (1 Kings 14:8). So the Bible is not confused about this matter. A man may stumble and still be God's man in heart direction, while another may appear outwardly religious and yet be rotten in core allegiance.

That is what Caleb represents. He was not some marble statue of flawless humanity. He was a man whose loyalty was settled. Fear did not own him. The crowd did not own him. Appearances did not own him. Delay did not own him. He had chosen his side. That is what many believers lack now. They have not settled the issue. They want enough flexibility to obey when it is easy and enough wiggle room to retreat when it is hard. Caleb leaves no room for that kind of slippery religion. Wholehearted obedience means the question of lordship has been settled before convenience gets a vote.

#### **5. The Crowd Drew Back, Caleb Pressed Forward**

When the ten spies brought up an evil report, the people lifted up their voice and cried, and the congregation wept that night (Numbers 14:1). What a miserable spectacle. A whole nation crying over the will of God because it looked difficult. They started talking about appointing a captain and returning to Egypt (Numbers 14:4). That is what fear does when it gets loose in a crowd. It always wants to run backward. It would rather go back to bondage with familiar leeks and onions than go forward in faith toward the promise of God. Unbelief is never merely cautious. It is rebellious. It treats God's goodness as suspicious and God's command as unreasonable.

Caleb stood in sharp contrast to that whole diseased multitude. The man had the courage to stand against a national panic. That is not small. Anybody can shout with a crowd. It takes a man with some backbone to stand when the whole camp is melting. Joshua and Caleb said, "If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us" (Numbers 14:8). They said, "Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land" (Numbers 14:9). There you have the issue in plain terms. The majority called it caution. Caleb called it rebellion. They called it realism. Caleb called it unbelief.

That is a needed word now because multitudes of Christians are dressing up unbelief in respectable language. They call compromise kindness, fear wisdom, silence balance, and retreat maturity. Caleb would tear the wrapping paper right off it. If God has spoken, then drawing back from obedience because the opposition is strong is not prudence. It is rebellion. If God has promised, then letting fear overrule faith is not realism. It is disobedience. The crowd always wants to baptize its cowardice with sweet language. Caleb exposes it and presses forward anyway.

## **6. Time Did Not Rot Caleb's Conviction**

One of the most remarkable things about Caleb is not just that he stood right in the moment of crisis, but that he stayed right over time. Lots of people can have a burst of courage for a day. Fewer can carry conviction for decades. Caleb had to wander in the wilderness for forty years because of the unbelief of others, yet the delay did not sour him, weaken him, or turn him into a murmuring cynic. When he finally came before Joshua, he said, "Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to espy out the land... and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart" (Joshua 14:7). Then he says, "And now, behold, I am this day fourscore and five years old" (Joshua 14:10). Forty five years later the man is still talking the same way.

That is extraordinary. A lesser man would have spent those years complaining that he got held back by the failures of others. A lesser man would have grown bitter, tired, cynical, or soft. A lesser man would have lowered his expectations and said, "Well, I was right once,

but life has changed, times have changed, I'm older now, and I suppose I should settle for less." Caleb did not talk like that. He said, "As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me" (Joshua 14:11). Then he says, "Now therefore give me this mountain" (Joshua 14:12). That is not the speech of a man whose faith has been rotted by delay.

This is where the test gets severe for believers. Many start out hot and end up lukewarm, not because God changed, but because time wore them down. Delay exposed that their loyalty was more emotional than settled. Caleb proves that whole hearted following can survive postponement. He shows that a man can wait decades and still want the mountain God promised him. He shows that the passing of years does not have to cool conviction. If anything, it ought to harden it. A saint who has truly wholly followed the Lord is not merely loud at the beginning. He is faithful at the end.

## **7. God Rewards the Wholehearted Follower**

The Lord did not overlook Caleb's spirit. He said, "him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it" (Numbers 14:24). Later Hebron became Caleb's inheritance "because that he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel" (Joshua 14:14). Notice the pattern. God saw the degree of the man's following, and God answered it with a marked inheritance. That does not mean Caleb earned salvation by works or bought God's favor by human merit. It means the Lord delights to honor faith that takes Him seriously. He rewards the man who puts more weight on God's word than on visible obstacles.

That principle runs throughout Scripture. The Lord notices the widow's mites. He notices Mary's choice. He notices Abraham's obedience. He notices those who tremble at His word. He notices the overcomer. He notices the servant who is faithful over a few things. He notices the saints who suffer with Christ. The idea that all levels of devotion are treated exactly alike in practical reward is not Bible doctrine. Salvation is by grace through faith, but reward, usefulness, intimacy, trust, and inheritance in service are all affected by the reality of a believer's response to the Lord. Caleb stands as proof that God honors the man who means business.

That ought to encourage every saint who feels outnumbered, delayed, or misunderstood. God does not miss whole hearted loyalty just because the crowd ignores it. The ten spies are remembered for their evil report, but Caleb's name is stitched forever into the record as the man who wholly followed the LORD. The wilderness generation died under judgment, but Caleb got the mountain. The murmurers vanished, but Caleb's testimony remained. There is a lesson there worth learning. When all is said and done, the issue is not whether the crowd appreciated your obedience. The issue is whether God did. And He most certainly does.

## **Conclusion**

Caleb stands in your Bible like a steel beam in a collapsing building. He shows what one man can be when the heart is wholly yielded to the Lord. He saw the same giants the others saw, heard the same evil report they helped spread, lived in the same wilderness they wandered in, endured the same delay they endured, and yet came out with a testimony the rest of them never had. Why. Because he had another spirit with him, and he wholly followed the LORD. That is the difference between a man governed by faith and a crowd governed by fear. It is the difference between a whole heart and a divided one.

This study ought to search every reader. Not whether you know the right slogans, not whether you can quote the right verses, not whether you have enough religion to blend in with the church crowd, but whether your loyalty is settled. Have you wholly followed the Lord, or only followed Him when it cost little. Do you still want the mountain, or have years of delay cooled your desire. Do you let the promise govern the obstacle, or the obstacle govern the promise. Are you one of those people who can talk a good line in a Bible study and then collapse when opposition appears. Or is there another spirit in you that refuses to defect because God has spoken.

At the end of the matter, God notices the degree of a man's following. He notices whether your obedience is split, hesitant, negotiated, delayed, partial, and conditional, or whether it is settled, full hearted, and unashamed. Caleb's testimony was not preserved to entertain you. It was preserved to rebuke weak religion and call God's people higher. The Lord is still worthy of more than a fragment. He is still worthy of more than your spare time, your public image, your convenient agreement, and your halfhearted attempts. He is worthy of a whole heart. So if this old saint from the wilderness era can still speak, this is what he says. Stop measuring the giants. Stop echoing the crowd. Stop using time as an excuse. Stop calling partial obedience faithfulness. And wholly follow the LORD.

## **4 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Following Other Gods**

### **Introduction**

One of the darkest trails running through the Old Testament is the trail of a people who had the true God, knew the true God, heard the true God, saw the mighty acts of the true God, and yet kept turning aside to follow other gods. That is one of the great tragedies of Scripture. It is not the tragedy of pagans in darkness groping after false lights they never had the truth to reject. It is the tragedy of a people who had the truth in front of them and

still went looking for lies. Israel did not commit spiritual fornication because they lacked revelation. They did it in the face of revelation. They did it after the Red Sea. They did it after Sinai. They did it after manna. They did it after prophets. They did it after warnings. They did it after chastening. They did it after deliverances. That is how perverse the human heart is when it gets restless under the government of God.

The Bible is very exact in the way it describes this fall. It repeatedly says they "followed other gods" (Judges 2:12), "followed Baal-peor" (Deuteronomy 4:3), and "followed Baalim" (1 Kings 18:18). That language matters. The Lord did not merely say they experimented with other gods, flirted with other gods, or studied comparative religion. He said they followed them. That means there was movement, direction, loyalty, attachment, imitation, and surrender involved. Idolatry in Scripture is not just bending the knee before a carved image. It is giving your confidence, your fear, your affection, your hope, your delight, and your obedience to something that is not the Lord God. It is letting something else lead your life, define your choices, and command your heart.

That is why this subject is not some dusty Old Testament matter for ancient idolaters only. The human heart has not changed. Men are still made to follow. They were built to move toward an object of worship. If they will not follow the Lord, they will not become independent, detached, objective, and free. They will become followers of a liar. They will follow money, lust, applause, superstition, pleasure, politics, celebrities, institutions, traditions, mystical experience, false religion, or themselves. The shape changes, but the disease remains. This essay will trace that tragic Old Testament pattern and show how spiritual adultery starts small and ends in chains. It begins with curiosity, moves to imitation, ripens into affection, and ends in bondage. That is the law of idolatry, and it is still working now.

## **1. Israel Had the Lord but Wanted the Nations**

The first thing you have to understand about Israel's idolatry is that it was not committed by people with no access to truth. The Lord had separated that nation for Himself. He brought them out of Egypt "with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm" (Deuteronomy 26:8). He said, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). Then immediately He commanded, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). That command was not given in a vacuum. It was given after redemption. In other words, the people who later followed false gods did so after knowing what the real God could do.

That is what makes their sin so revealing. The problem was not intellectual. The problem was moral and spiritual. They had a heart disease. They wanted to be like the nations

around them. The Lord warned them, "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them" (Deuteronomy 12:30). He told them not to ask, "How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise" (Deuteronomy 12:30). There is the first step right there. A people who already have the truth begin looking sideways at the heathen and asking how the heathen do religion. The Lord knew where that road led, and He cut it off before it started. But the flesh always resents separation and is fascinated by forbidden things.

That same problem repeats itself in every age. God's people get tired of being distinct. They get restless under plain truth. They get weary of the old paths. Then they start looking over the fence. They become interested in the world's music, the world's methods, the world's psychology, the world's entertainment, the world's power structures, and the world's religious innovations. It does not begin with a statue in the living room. It begins with admiration. It begins with a sideways glance. It begins with a taste for what God said to avoid. That is exactly how Israel started moving toward other gods.

## **2. Spiritual Adultery Begins With Curiosity**

Nobody wakes up one morning and drops into full-blown idolatry in a single jump. It begins with curiosity. The Lord warned Israel about that very thing. "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them" (Deuteronomy 12:30). Notice the word "snared." A snare works because the victim does not feel the danger at the beginning. The trap is hidden. It looks harmless. It looks interesting. It looks manageable. Curiosity is often the devil's front porch. He does not always open with a demand for total surrender. He opens with an invitation to take a look.

That is why the Lord forbade them to inquire after the gods of the nations. He knew that the flesh loves novelty. A carnal heart always imagines there is something intriguing in forbidden religion. It wants to know what the pagans do, what the idolaters believe, what the mystics practice, what the heathen rituals feel like. That kind of curiosity is not innocent. It is the beginning of disloyalty. A man does not get curious about alternatives when he is satisfied with the Lord. Curiosity in this matter often reveals that the heart is already becoming discontent with plain obedience.

And once curiosity is entertained, the soul starts drifting. Eve did not begin with fruit in her mouth. She began with conversation around the tree. Achan did not begin with hidden treasure in his tent. He began by seeing a goodly Babylonish garment. Israel did not begin with total abandonment to Baal. They began by looking, inquiring, comparing, and entertaining other ways. That is why Christians get into such trouble when they keep flirting mentally with false systems. They start reading, watching, sampling, and admiring what

God told them to judge. Curiosity is not as small as it looks. It is often the crack in the door before the thief walks in.

### **3. Imitation Follows Curiosity**

After curiosity comes imitation. That is the next stage in the decline. The Lord warned them not to be "snared by following them" (Deuteronomy 12:30). Following involves imitation. A man begins copying what he admires. Israel repeatedly got into trouble not only because they acknowledged false gods in theory, but because they adopted the religious habits of the nations around them. Judges 2:12 says they "followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them." There you have the progression. The gods were around them. They were observed. Then they were followed. Then they were bowed to.

Imitation is powerful because the flesh loves visible religion. The worship of the true God required faith, holiness, obedience, and reverence for the unseen Lord. Pagan systems offered spectacle, sensuality, images, shrines, rituals, and indulgence. That appeals to a carnal heart. The nations had things Israel could see, touch, copy, and dramatize. The flesh likes religion it can manage. It likes something impressive to the senses. It likes gods that can be carried, dressed, customized, and used. The Lord God of Israel would not be handled that way. So when Israel started copying the nations, what they were really saying was that they preferred religion that gratified the flesh.

This is still the pattern now. A church starts watching the world, then copying the world, then justifying the copy as a method for reaching the world. A believer starts admiring the habits of ungodly people, then borrowing them, then defending them. Imitation always follows admiration. That is why the Lord wanted separation. He was not trying to deprive Israel of joy. He was protecting them from infection. A people who keep staring at heathen practices long enough will eventually start reproducing them. The hands follow what the eyes are allowed to love.

### **4. Affection Gives Idolatry Its Power**

Once curiosity has opened the door and imitation has entered the room, affection takes hold. This is where idolatry gets dangerous in a deeper way. It is no longer mere observation or copying. The heart starts attaching itself to the false object. The people do not just practice something heathen. They begin to love it. That is why the Bible speaks of following other gods in terms that often overlap with adultery and whoredom. Hosea 2:7 says, "And she shall follow after her lovers." That is not accidental language. God is showing that false religion is not just doctrinal error. It is misplaced affection.

That is why men cling to idols with such stubbornness. An idol is not just a concept in the head. It becomes a love in the heart. A man will defend what he loves long after the evidence exposes it as false. Israel did not only practice idolatry because it was politically convenient or culturally fashionable. They were drawn to it because their affections got twisted. They liked the fertility rites, the sensual liberty, the visible ritual, the social acceptance, the fleshly excitement, and the illusion of control. A false god often gains power over a person because it permits some lust the true God forbids.

That exposes the lie that idolatry is merely primitive superstition. No, sir. Idolatry is wherever the heart gives first love to something other than God. Colossians 3:5 says covetousness is idolatry. Why. Because covetousness is affection fastened on gain as if gain were god. A man can make an idol out of pleasure, family, success, ministry, politics, romance, social approval, denomination, and even theological systems if those things receive the trust, delight, and loyalty that belong to God alone. The carved image in the Old Testament was only one visible expression of a much older disease. The real idol is whatever steals the heart's chief attachment from the Lord.

## **5. Bondage Is the End of False Following**

People think following other gods will enlarge them, free them, broaden them, enrich them, and make them interesting. That is one of the devil's favorite sales pitches. He tells men that submission to the true God is narrow, while rebellion is liberating. But every false god becomes a chain. Every idol eventually enslaves the one who worships it. Deuteronomy 4:3 says, "Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baal-peor: for all the men that followed Baal-peor, the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you." That is not liberation. That is judgment. The end of false following is not freedom. It is ruin.

You see the same thing in 2 Kings 17:15, where Israel "followed vanity, and became vain." There is one of the most revealing lines in all the Old Testament. They followed vanity, and the result was that they became like what they followed. That is always the law. A man takes on the shape of his worship. If he follows truth, he is shaped by truth. If he follows filth, he is stained by filth. If he follows vanity, he becomes vain. If he follows lies, he becomes deceptive. If he follows lust, he becomes enslaved to appetite. The idolater never remains master over his idol. He becomes servant to it.

That is why the worship of false gods in Scripture is regularly connected to moral corruption, social decay, cruelty, and judgment. The idol does not simply sit there and receive ceremony. It remakes the worshiper. Baal worship pulled Israel into fornication. Molech worship led to child sacrifice. The high places became centers of corruption. The gods of the heathen always came with moral baggage because behind every idol stood

devils. Paul says in the New Testament, "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God" (1 Corinthians 10:20). So the man who refuses to follow the Lord does not become independent. He comes under another master, and that master is a destroyer.

## **6. The Root Sin Is Distrust of the Lord**

At the bottom of all idolatry is a lie about God. No man follows another god unless he has first become dissatisfied with the true one. Somewhere in the heart he begins believing that the Lord is not enough, not good enough, not near enough, not fast enough, not pleasurable enough, not trustworthy enough, or not practical enough. That is why the first commandment stands at the head of the law. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Break that, and the whole structure of devotion collapses. Every idol announces that the worshiper has judged God to be insufficient.

That is exactly what happened in the wilderness and in the land. Instead of resting in the Lord's covenant faithfulness, Israel kept turning to visible substitutes. Instead of fearing the Lord, they feared the nations. Instead of delighting in His commandments, they coveted the customs of the heathen. Instead of trusting Him for fruitfulness, protection, victory, and blessing, they ran after gods the nations claimed would provide those things. In other words, the issue was never just images and altars. The issue was trust. Who do you believe can satisfy, protect, prosper, and define you. The answer to that question reveals your god.

This is why idolatry is so common even among professing Christians. Men say they believe in the true God, but when pressure comes they reveal what they really trust. If they trust money, they will compromise for it. If they trust public approval, they will bend for it. If they trust pleasure, they will disobey to keep it. If they trust tradition, they will hold it over Scripture. If they trust emotional experience, they will chase feelings above truth. The mouth may say "Lord, Lord," but the life follows another power. That is what makes idolatry such a searching subject. It asks not what creed you recite, but what object your heart actually relies on.

## **7. Only the Lord Deserves Whole Following**

The great antidote to following other gods is not mere denunciation of idols in the abstract. The answer is a fresh sight of the true God. Elijah understood that when he said, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). That is one of the cleanest challenges in the whole Bible. Elijah did not flatter them with some middle way where they could keep the Lord for respectability and Baal for practical convenience. He drove the issue home. If the LORD is God, then He

deserves following. If He is not, then quit pretending. Idolatry thrives where the uniqueness and supremacy of God have grown dim in the heart.

That is why the Lord called for total loyalty. He did not merely ask for a corner of Israel's life. He demanded the first place because He alone is worthy of it. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). There is no room in that command for divided devotions. The true God will not sit in a pantheon. He will not share the throne with Baal, Mammon, Ashtaroth, self, or anything else. He is not one option among many. He is the Creator, Redeemer, Lawgiver, Judge, Shepherd, and King. To follow another god after knowing Him is not broad-mindedness. It is treason.

And in that lies the great practical lesson. The man who sees the Lord rightly will not envy idols. The woman who knows the goodness of God will not keep peeking over the fence at the world's gods. When the soul is taken up with the Lord's holiness, mercy, power, faithfulness, and truth, the painted idols of the heathen lose their glamour. That is why revival in Scripture is always connected to putting away strange gods and returning to the Lord with the whole heart. The cure for false following is not just stronger willpower. It is renewed vision of who God is. When He is seen in His proper place, the rivals are exposed as cheap counterfeits.

## **Conclusion**

The Old Testament record of Israel following other gods is one long warning written in fire. It shows how a people can move from privilege to pollution, from revelation to rebellion, from worship to whoredom, and from covenant light to pagan darkness. It starts small. A little curiosity. A little admiration. A little imitation. A little tolerance. A little divided affection. Then before long the whole thing hardens into bondage. The person who thought he was only sampling an alternative way of life discovers he has become its servant. The nation that thought it could borrow the customs of the heathen without consequence ends up under the judgment of the God it provoked.

That is because man was made to follow. He is a worshiping creature by design. If he will not follow the Lord, he will not remain empty in some calm middle space. He will attach himself to a substitute. He will become a follower of a liar. The false god may be Baal or Mammon, Molech or self, Ashtaroth or pleasure, tradition or public approval. The title changes with the century, but the chains are the same. Whatever gets your trust, your fear, your delight, your loyalty, and your obedience in the place of God has become your idol, and that idol will not bless you. It will use you and ruin you.

So the question is plain and it is searching. What are you following. What do you really trust when pressure comes. What do you really fear losing. What do you really chase when nobody is making you play church. What gets your strongest affection, your quickest obedience, and your deepest expectation. If it is not the Lord, then you are already moving toward another god whether you have admitted it or not. The answer is not to become independent. There is no such thing. The answer is to come back to the true God, to put away every rival, and to say with Elijah's plain language, "if the LORD be God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

## **5 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Follow After Righteousness**

### **Introduction**

The Christian life is not a hammock. It is not a rocking chair on a front porch where a man leans back, folds his arms, quotes a few verses on grace, and waits for holiness to drift down on him like pollen in the springtime. The Christian life is a pursuit. It is a chase. It is a directed life. It is a heart set in motion by the Holy Ghost toward things that once bored it, rebuked it, and exposed it. That is why the Bible does not stop with telling the believer what to avoid. It goes further and tells him what to follow. It says, "Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (1 Timothy 6:11). It says, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace" (2 Timothy 2:22). It says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). It says, "Follow after charity" (1 Corinthians 14:1). That is not passive religion. That is a life under orders.

One of the surest marks of a shallow Christian is that he thinks grace means carelessness. He talks as though the grace of God relieves him of serious pursuit, serious discipline, serious watching, serious praying, serious obeying, and serious separation. He imagines that because salvation is by grace through faith, the believer's walk must therefore be casual, lazy, and automatic. But the same grace that saves a man also redirects a man. Grace does not make him careless. Grace makes him hungry. Grace does not make him indifferent to righteousness. Grace gives him a new appetite for it. Grace does not leave him sitting in the mud congratulating himself that he is eternally secure while his life stinks like a hog pen. Grace points his feet in a new direction and teaches him to chase what once he ignored.

So this essay turns the series from warning to pursuit. Up to this point we have seen the danger of following crowds, idols, and false gods. Now we come to the blessed and

necessary positive side of the matter. The Lord never intended the Christian life to be lived as one long negative, where a man sits around trying not to do bad things and calls that spirituality. Bible Christianity is not merely subtraction. It is direction. It is movement toward righteousness, peace, holiness, charity, faith, patience, and meekness. The question is not simply what you quit. The question is what you pursue. The heart always follows something, and what it follows reveals what it values. So when a believer follows after righteousness, he shows that grace has not left him aimless. It has set his compass.

### **1. The Christian Life Is a Pursuit**

The first truth to nail down is that the Christian life is not passive. Men love passivity because passivity removes urgency. It lets them feel spiritual without exertion, sound deep without obedience, and claim maturity without discipline. But your Bible ruins that fantasy. It tells the believer to "follow after" things. That phrase assumes movement. It assumes pursuit. It assumes that godliness is not found by drifting. You do not trip over righteousness in the dark like a loose brick in a sidewalk. You pursue it. You seek it. You order your steps toward it. You aim at it with purpose.

Look at the wording in 1 Timothy 6:11: "But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." There are two motions in that verse. There is fleeing, and there is following. There is turning from, and there is moving toward. Most Christians understand the first half better than the second, and many do not even understand that well. They think holiness is merely avoiding the ugly thing. But the Holy Ghost says the believer is not just to run from evil. He is to run toward righteousness. He is not merely to empty his hands of corruption. He is to fill his steps with pursuit.

That is because the heart cannot remain vacant. If a man simply tries to stop doing wrong without replacing that wrong direction with a holy pursuit, he will either fall back into the old trail or dress his emptiness in religious language and call it victory. The Christian life is not won by idling. It is won by directed obedience. Paul did not say he floated toward the prize. He said, "I press toward the mark" (Philippians 3:14). That is the language of pursuit. Men who are pressing are not sleeping. Men who are following after righteousness are not lounging. Men who mean business with God have a spiritual velocity about them.

### **2. Righteousness Must Be Chosen Over Lust**

The command in 2 Timothy 2:22 is one of the clearest practical verses in the New Testament: "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." There again you have the Bible pattern. Flee this. Follow that. God does not tell the believer merely to stand still and hope the

temptation wanders off. He commands him to break with one direction and take up another. Lust is a direction. Righteousness is a direction. One man follows appetite. Another follows obedience. The road you choose reveals the god you serve.

Now when the verse says "youthful lusts," do not make the mistake of limiting that to some teenager's hormonal problems. Youthful lusts include every hot-blooded, impatient, impulsive, self-centered craving that wants satisfaction now and obedience later. It includes sensual lust, of course, but it also includes pride, ambition, vanity, rashness, envy, love of display, craving for applause, and the stubborn need to have your own way. Those lusts do not disappear just because a fellow gets gray hair. Plenty of old goats are still full of youthful lusts. The word describes the nature of the desire, not just the age of the body.

So the command is plain. You do not negotiate with lust. You flee it. And you do not merely flee into a blank field. You follow righteousness. That means the believer has to learn holy replacement. When the flesh wants indulgence, the spirit must choose obedience. When the flesh wants immediate gratification, the heart must choose submission. When the flesh wants applause, the saint must choose humility. When the flesh wants the easy road, the inner man must choose what is right. That is not legalism. That is spiritual sanity. Grace has not given you permission to pet lust. Grace has given you power to turn and follow another trail.

### **3. What You Chase Reveals What You Treasure**

The Christian life is always exposing the real treasure of the heart. Men can say anything with their mouths. Their pursuit tells the truth. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). The heart follows the treasure. That means pursuit is a revelation. If a believer steadily follows after righteousness, that pursuit proves something. It proves that his heart has been reoriented. It proves that his treasure is no longer centered in filth, vanity, or self-will. It proves that grace has done more than forgive him. It has redirected him.

This is where a lot of cheap profession falls apart. A man may claim to love the Lord, and yet all his real energy is spent pursuing money, comfort, entertainment, status, recognition, fleshly satisfaction, or the approval of men. Then when somebody preaches on holiness, peace, faith, meekness, patience, and charity, he yawns like a bored alligator. Why. Because his treasure is somewhere else. He is following the wrong thing. You can tell what a soul prizes by watching what it chases when no one is making it pretend. The feet betray the heart.

That is why the call to follow after righteousness is so searching. It asks not just what you condemn, but what you desire. Not just what you avoid, but what you pursue. Not just what

you know, but what you love. If your treasure is in righteousness, then righteousness will not feel like a burden imposed from outside. It will become a trail the heart wants to take. That does not mean the flesh will stop fighting. It means the new man has a new direction. He may stumble on that road, but that is still the road he wants. That desire is one of the clearest evidences that grace has moved into the house.

#### **4. Peace, Charity, and Holiness Are Not Automatic**

A lot of Christians talk as though peace, charity, and holiness are automatic side effects of attending church and owning a Bible. The Holy Ghost does not talk that way. He says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). He says, "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Romans 14:19). He says, "Follow after charity" (1 Corinthians 14:1). Those words make it perfectly plain that peace and holiness and charity must be pursued. If they were automatic, the command would be unnecessary.

Peace has to be followed because the flesh loves strife. The old man enjoys irritation, pride, retaliation, sarcasm, party spirit, and being right in the ugliest possible way. Holiness has to be followed because the flesh loves contamination. Charity has to be followed because the flesh is selfish by nature. Left to itself, the human heart will not drift toward these things. It will drift the other way. So the believer must choose, pursue, guard, and cultivate them under the direction of the Holy Ghost and the authority of the Book.

This also corrects the idea that a Christian can be spiritually serious in doctrine while being careless in spirit. The New Testament will not allow that divorce. A man who claims to love truth but will not follow peace is defective. A man who boasts in grace but does not follow holiness is defective. A man who prides himself on knowledge but will not follow after charity is defective. Bible Christianity is not merely being right on paper. It is following the things that reflect the character of the God who saved you. The Lord is not glorified by a church full of doctrinally precise porcupines stabbing each other in the dark.

#### **5. Grace Redirects, It Does Not Relax**

One of the greatest lies in modern religion is that grace makes moral urgency unnecessary. Men say they believe in grace, but what they often mean is moral relaxation. They use grace the way a drunk uses a couch. They collapse into it. They turn it into an excuse for sloppiness, indulgence, prayerlessness, worldliness, and low-level living. But Titus 2:11-12 says, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly." Grace teaches. Grace trains. Grace redirects. Grace does not sedate.

That is exactly why the commands to follow after righteousness are addressed to saved people. The Holy Ghost is not telling a lost man to earn justification by moral effort. He is telling the justified man to walk in the direction consistent with the grace he has received. Grace gives him a new standing before God, and then grace opens a new road before his feet. A believer who treats grace as permission for carelessness has not understood grace. He has twisted it into a license the Bible never gave him. The grace that saves a harlot is the same grace that teaches her to stop living like one.

This is where the Christian life becomes deeply practical. Every day grace gives the believer a new direction to choose. Will he follow the old reflexes of the flesh, or the holy instincts of the new nature. Will he indulge bitterness, or follow peace. Will he indulge self, or follow charity. Will he indulge compromise, or follow holiness. Will he indulge impatience, or follow meekness. Grace does not remove those choices. It equips the believer to make them rightly. It does not make him careless. It gives him a new course.

## **6. Godliness Requires Hunger and Discernment**

You cannot follow after righteousness without hunger, and you cannot follow it well without discernment. Hunger matters because no man pursues what he does not want.

Discernment matters because not everything wearing a spiritual label is true righteousness. A lot of people chase external performance, religious image, self-righteous standards, or ceremonial respectability and call that holiness. But Bible righteousness is measured by truth, humility, obedience, faith, purity, love, and conformity to the Lord's mind. That is why the believer has to pursue righteousness with his Bible open, not with his vanity switched on.

Paul says, "Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (1 Timothy 6:11). Notice the company righteousness keeps. It is surrounded by godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness. That tells you this is not a cold, mechanical, Pharisaical thing. It is living righteousness, heart righteousness, practical righteousness, relational righteousness, spiritual righteousness. It is righteousness animated by faith and softened by meekness and governed by love. A man can be externally rigid and still miss the thing the Holy Ghost is commanding here. Righteousness is not a theater prop. It is a pursuit of what is right before God.

And that pursuit takes discernment because the world, the flesh, and the devil are experts at offering substitutes. The world offers tolerance instead of peace, sentimentality instead of charity, image instead of holiness, ambition instead of faithfulness, and self-assertion instead of meekness. Carnal religion offers legal display instead of godliness. Mysticism offers feelings instead of truth. Humanism offers niceness instead of holiness. So the

believer must be sharp enough to distinguish Bible righteousness from counterfeits. It is not enough to be intense. You must be rightly directed.

## **7. Following Righteousness Proves a New Direction**

At the end of the day, the believer who follows righteousness proves that something radical has happened inside him. He is not what he was. The compass has changed. The old path no longer satisfies him the way it once did. The things he used to chase with enthusiasm now leave a bad taste in his mouth. The things he once found restrictive now begin to look beautiful. That does not mean he no longer has a battle. It means the battle lines have changed. He now has an inward bent toward what is right. That new direction is one of the clearest evidences of life.

This is why Proverbs says, "He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour" (Proverbs 21:21). The man is not finding life because he has earned the new birth by his pursuit. He is manifesting the kind of trail that belongs to those in whom God has worked. The pursuit reveals the principle of life inside. Dead men do not hunger for righteousness. Dead men may perform religion, debate doctrine, imitate vocabulary, and keep appearances, but they do not inwardly prize holiness. When God saves a soul, He implants a new appetite. That appetite may be weak in some and strong in others, but it is there.

So the believer who follows after righteousness is giving evidence of grace, not replacing grace. He is showing that the grace of God has not left him aimless. It has turned him around. He may not run as fast as he ought, and he may trip more than he likes, but he is no longer at home on the old road. He has a new direction, a new hunger, a new grief over sin, a new respect for holiness, and a new desire to please the Lord. That is the mark of grace in motion. Grace that never alters direction is not Bible grace. It is a slogan in a lazy man's mouth.

## **Conclusion**

The Christian life is not a driftwood existence. It is not a believer floating through life on a current of vague religious emotion, hoping somehow to wind up on the right shore. The Bible commands pursuit. It commands movement. It commands following after righteousness, faith, charity, peace, holiness, patience, meekness, and godliness. That means the saint of God is to be intentional, hungry, watchful, discerning, and directed. He is to flee what feeds the flesh and follow what pleases the Lord. That is not bondage. That is liberty rightly used. It is the liberty of a soul set free from the tyranny of old desires and pointed toward a better master.

What you follow reveals what you treasure. If the heart chases filth, vanity, applause, lust, bitterness, or self-will, then the treasure is corrupt. If the heart follows after righteousness, then righteousness has become precious. The trail tells the truth. You can listen to a man's testimony for ten minutes and still not know him. Watch what he pursues for six months and the thing will become plain. The man who follows after righteousness is not advertising perfection. He is revealing direction. He is showing that grace has put him on a different road.

So this part of the series asks the question in a practical way. What are you pursuing. Not merely what are you against, but what are you after. Not merely what have you quit, but what have you taken up. Are you following peace. Are you following charity. Are you following holiness. Are you following righteousness. Or are you sitting still, calling laziness grace and deadness liberty. The Lord has given His people a better road than that. He has set before them a holy trail and told them to walk it. So get up from your spiritual idleness, quit waiting for holiness to fall out of the sky, and follow after righteousness.

## **6 of 20: What Do You Follow? - When Christ Said, Follow Me**

### **Introduction**

There are some words in the Bible that fall on the ear like thunder, and yet men have heard them so often that they no longer feel the weight of them. One of those sayings is the plain call of Jesus Christ: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19). That is not a suggestion from a philosopher. That is not advice from a rabbi. That is not the polished invitation of a religious lecturer trying to gather an audience. That is the command of God manifest in the flesh, standing in front of sinners and summoning them into a new life. When Jesus Christ says, "Follow me," He is not merely asking for agreement with His teachings. He is demanding a rearrangement of the whole center of life around Himself. The difference is enormous. Men are often willing to agree with a principle. They are much less willing to attach themselves to a Person who has the right to govern everything.

That is what makes the Gospel uses of "follow" so searching. In the Old Testament, men are commanded to follow the Lord, follow righteousness, follow what is just, and not follow idols or a multitude to do evil. But when the Son of God steps onto the stage of history, the word takes on a blazing personal force. He does not merely say, "Follow truth," although He is the truth. He does not merely say, "Follow righteousness," although He is righteous. He says, "Follow me" (Matthew 8:22). In other words, truth now stands before men in a body. Righteousness now walks in sandals. The will of God is no longer merely written on stone or

parchment. It is embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ. So to follow Him is to do more than adopt a moral code. It is to surrender to a living Master.

This is exactly where modern religion goes wrong. It wants Jesus as a subject to discuss, a doctrine to affirm, a comfort to enjoy, a cultural symbol to display, or a theological position to defend, but not as the absolute center of personal direction. Men want to admire Him from a distance. They want to quote Him, debate Him, paint Him, sing about Him, and maybe even weep over Him at the right conference, but when He says, "Follow me," they suddenly discover other plans. This essay is about that call. It is about the difference between admiring Jesus and attaching yourself to Him. It is about the moment when the old center of life is displaced and Christ becomes the axis. That is what happens when He says, "Follow me."

### **1. The Call Came From the Son of God Himself**

The first thing to understand is that when Jesus Christ said, "Follow me," He was making a claim no mere prophet, reformer, or teacher could honestly make unless he were God. In Matthew 4:19 He says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." In Matthew 8:22 He says, "Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead." In John 1:43 He findeth Philip, "and saith unto him, Follow me." No prophet in Scripture ever stood as the final object of total human allegiance in that absolute sense. Moses pointed beyond himself. Elijah pointed back to the Lord. John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). But Jesus Christ steps forward and says, in effect, I am the One around whom your life now turns.

That shows you immediately why the call is deeper than moral reform. If Christ were only one good teacher among many, following Him would be optional preference. But if He is who the Bible says He is, "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16), then "Follow me" becomes the most searching command a sinner can hear. The problem with men is not that they have too little spirituality floating around in general. Their problem is that they are out of line with the rightful King. So Christ does not invite men to merely improve themselves. He summons them to Himself. The center of the call is not a rule book. It is a person.

That is why every attempt to reduce Jesus to a mere moral example falls apart under the weight of His own words. A moral example might say, "Do as I do." A wise teacher might say, "Learn from my principles." But Christ says, "Follow me." That means He claims the right to direct where you go, what you value, what you leave, what you embrace, how you think, how you obey, and where your life is headed. That kind of personal claim is either blasphemous madness or absolute truth. Thank God, it is the latter. The One who said it

was the Word made flesh. So when Christ called men to follow Him, He was not collecting admirers. He was asserting divine authority.

## **2. Follow Me Meant Leaving the Old Center Behind**

One of the clearest things in the Gospel accounts is that "Follow me" always meant leaving something behind. It did not mean adding Jesus as a tasteful ornament to an already established life. It meant displacement. It meant that whatever had functioned as the old center would now be dethroned. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, the Bible says, "And they straightway left their nets, and followed him" (Matthew 4:20). When He called James and John, "they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him" (Matthew 4:22). That does not mean family affection is evil or work is evil. It means neither was allowed to remain the ruling center once Christ called.

That is where so many professing Christians betray themselves. They want to fit Jesus into the life they already planned. They want Him as an advisor, not a Lord. They want Him as an emergency contact, not a commander. They want Him as an emotional refuge, not the One who rearranges priorities. But in the Gospels, when Christ says, "Follow me," men are forced into decisions that expose what held first place before He came. Nets, boats, fathers, tables of money, reputations, routines, security, and social expectations all had to move aside when the Son of God entered with His claim.

The call is no less searching now just because modern religion has softened it with syrup and sentiment. Christ still displaces the old center. A man cannot truly follow Him while keeping self on the throne. He cannot follow Christ while his real master remains money, pleasure, family pride, personal ambition, tradition, or fear of man. Something has to move. When the Lord says, "Follow me," He is not offering Himself as one item in a balanced life. He is claiming the central place as of right. That is why the call is so offensive to the flesh. The flesh does not mind religion as an accessory. It hates Christ as King.

## **3. Matthew at the Receipt of Custom**

One of the richest examples in the Gospels is Matthew's call. "And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him" (Matthew 9:9). There sits a publican, a tax collector, a man tied to a system, a seat, a source of gain, a public identity. And with two words Christ uproots him. "Follow me." The wonder is not just that Christ called such a man. The wonder is that the man got up. A power went with the call.

Now do not miss the force of that scene. Matthew was not in a synagogue praying for ministry opportunities. He was at the receipt of custom. He was in the middle of ordinary, compromised, money-connected life when Christ came by. That is how the Lord often

works. He breaks into the common routines where men have settled into the old center and suddenly lays claim to them. Matthew did not respond by proposing a committee meeting, a transitional period, a five-year plan, or a cautious review of career options. "He arose, and followed him" (Matthew 9:9). That is the language of decisive attachment.

What made that possible. It was not merely human enthusiasm. Something about the person of Christ carried authority that cut deeper than the receipt of custom. Matthew recognized a greater claim than the one represented by his table, his money, and his station. That is what conversion does. It does not merely improve a man's ethics while he stays seated at the same inner customs table collecting tribute for self. It gets him up. It moves him from one lordship to another. Matthew becomes a picture of what happens when Christ's call reaches a sinner's heart. The old seat is no longer enough once the true Master speaks.

#### **4. Christ Did Not Call Men to Spectatorship**

Modern Christianity is loaded with spectators. It has men who can listen to sermons, analyze Greek words, compare denominations, argue prophecy charts, quote the right authors, and post pious things online, but they are still spectators. They stand around Jesus instead of following Him. They admire His miracles, nod at His sayings, and enjoy His blessings, but they never move out of the bleachers and onto the road. The Gospels make plain that Christ was not gathering spectators. He was calling followers. There is a world of difference between standing near enough to see Him and surrendering enough to go where He goes.

You see that difference in those who professed willingness but wanted terms. One said, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest" (Matthew 8:19), but the Lord answered in a way that exposed the cost: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). Another was told, "Follow me" (Matthew 8:22), but immediately wanted to settle a family matter first. In Luke 9:61 another said, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." The little phrase "let me first" is where a lot of discipleship goes to die.

Christ's call does not fit the spectator mentality because it demands actual movement. A spectator retains control. He can step in or out when he pleases. He can evaluate, compare, enjoy, and criticize without personal surrender. A follower gives up that luxury. A follower goes where the leader goes. A follower changes course because the leader changed course. A follower does not merely observe the life of Jesus from the safe shore. He gets in behind Him. That is why so many people like "Jesus studies" but not Jesus Himself. They can manage a study. They cannot manage a Lord.

## **5. Follow Me Was a Call to Attachment**

At the heart of the phrase is attachment. Christ does not say merely, "Agree with me," though agreement matters. He does not say merely, "Admire me," though admiration of His glory is right. He says, "Follow me." That is attachment language. It is personal. It is directional. It is relational. It means staying in connection with Him as the one who goes before. John 10 gives the same truth in shepherd language: "the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" (John 10:4). "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). A sheep does not merely respect the shepherd's theories. It moves behind his person.

That exposes one of the greatest defects in dead orthodoxy. A man may have correct doctrine about Christ and still have little real attachment to Him in daily life. He can win arguments about Jesus while barely walking with Jesus. He can define Christ rightly while not truly following Christ closely. The New Testament will not let you separate sound doctrine from living attachment forever. Right belief ought to produce real following. If it never does, something in the whole arrangement is diseased. Christ did not come merely to populate seminaries. He came to gather disciples to Himself.

This is why the Christian life cannot be reduced to external rule keeping. Rule keeping can happen with no heart attachment. A Pharisee can perform religion while his heart stays miles away from God. But when Christ says, "Follow me," He is claiming the affections, the will, the direction, the trust, and the attention of the disciple. He is saying, in effect, stay near Me, learn My voice, walk My way, and let My presence determine your course. That is more intimate and more searching than mere assent. The call is not only to think right thoughts about Christ. It is to be bound to His person.

## **6. The Call Carried Cost and Change**

Any preacher who turns "Follow me" into a slogan for easy religion has not listened to the Gospels. Christ's call always carried cost. He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). There is nothing soft in that. Self must be denied. The cross must be taken up. The road ahead is not one of self-expression but of surrendered obedience. A man cannot follow Christ while preserving his own sovereignty. The very structure of the call kills that illusion.

This is why some turn back from serious Christianity. They like the idea of forgiveness. They like heaven. They like comfort in affliction. They like belonging to a Christian circle. But when the call of Christ reaches the point where it threatens self-rule, self-image, self-protection, self-advancement, or self-indulgence, they start negotiating. The flesh would rather discuss Christ than die with Him. It would rather sing about the cross than take one

up. But the Lord never lowered the terms to make discipleship attractive to the carnal heart. He kept speaking with the same royal plainness. "Follow me."

And let nobody confuse that with salvation by works. Salvation is by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. But the Christ who saves also commands. The one who justifies also calls the justified into actual discipleship. Following Christ does not buy eternal life, but it most certainly marks the new direction of a life touched by saving grace. The same Savior who died for sinners is the Lord who says, "follow me." Any gospel presentation that encourages a man to claim the benefits of Christ while remaining untouched by the claims of Christ is crippled from the start.

## **7. The Call Still Stands and Still Divides**

The Gospels are not museum pieces. The call of Christ still stands. Men may not hear it from His lips by the Sea of Galilee, but they hear it through His word. The same Lord who said to Philip, "Follow me" (John 1:43), and to Peter after the resurrection, "Follow me" (John 21:19), still confronts men with His authority. And His call still divides. It separates admirers from disciples, religious talkers from obedient followers, spectators from attached sheep, and sentimental believers from those who have truly yielded the center of life to Him.

It divides families sometimes. It divides friends. It divides churches. It divides inner motives. It divides the soul from its cherished idols. A man cannot come seriously under the call of Christ without finding that certain things which once held central place must now yield. That is why the call is precious to true saints and offensive to the flesh. The saint hears freedom in it. The flesh hears threat. The saint hears the shepherd's voice. The flesh hears the loss of its throne. The saint hears a better road. The flesh hears the end of self-direction.

And the final issue is this: what has Christ's call actually done in you. Has it left you a polite religious observer who likes the idea of Jesus. Or has it moved you. Has it brought attachment. Has it shifted the center. Has it pulled you out from behind the old customs table. Has it made you leave nets, leave securities, leave self-rule, and get in behind the Son of God. The difference matters. At the judgment seat, Christ will not sort men out by who admired Him from a distance. He knows who followed.

## **Conclusion**

When Christ said, "Follow me," He was doing far more than inviting men to adopt a noble philosophy. He was asserting His divine right over human lives. He was calling sinners, workers, publicans, fishermen, and disciples out of old centers and into attachment to Himself. He was not gathering an audience for lectures. He was summoning followers for a

road. That road would involve learning, obedience, surrender, change, and in many cases suffering. But it would also involve the unspeakable privilege of walking behind the Lord of glory.

That is why the phrase cuts so deep. A principle can be admired without surrender. A person who claims lordship cannot. Christ does not let men hide forever in the fog of general spirituality. He comes straight at them with personal authority. "Follow me." Those words expose whatever holds first place. They expose whether a man wants Christ or merely Christ's benefits. They expose whether the heart is willing to detach from the old center and attach to the Savior. They expose the difference between distant admiration and living discipleship.

So the question for this part of the series is not whether you find Jesus impressive. The devils know He is impressive. The question is whether you have come under His call. Has the old center been displaced. Has attachment replaced mere agreement. Has admiration turned into following. Has the Son of God become the One around whom your direction now turns. When Christ said, "Follow me," He was not speaking to create a religious atmosphere. He was speaking to take rightful possession. And every man who hears Him must answer sooner or later.

## **7 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Straightway They Followed Him**

### **Introduction**

One of the striking things about the Gospel record is how often the Holy Spirit puts urgency into obedience. He does not merely tell you that Christ called men. He shows you how they responded. Again and again you read words like "straightway," "immediately," and "arose." Those are not accidental details. They are there because the Lord wants you to see something about the nature of true discipleship. When Jesus Christ speaks with divine authority, His call does not merely create admiration. It creates movement. Men get up. Men leave. Men follow. The power of the call is seen in the fact that it breaks other claims and demands a decision now, not after the flesh has had time to negotiate a better arrangement.

That is where the modern religious spirit falls on its face. Modern religion loves delay. It loves process, reflection, postponement, caution, careful reconsideration, and endless emotional circling around obedience without ever actually obeying. It wants to make spiritual hesitation sound deep. It wants to turn delay into wisdom and negotiation into

maturity. But the Gospels show a very different spirit when the Son of God calls men. Peter and Andrew did not schedule a retreat to discuss vocational transition. James and John did not appoint a committee to evaluate the long-term implications of discipleship. Matthew did not stay at the receipt of custom for six months while exploring the emotional meaning of Christ's invitation. The Book says they moved. "And they straightway left their nets, and followed him" (Matthew 4:20). "And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him" (Matthew 4:22). "And he arose, and followed him" (Matthew 9:9).

This study matters because delayed obedience is usually disobedience wearing a respectable coat. When a man knows what the Lord wants and still keeps stalling, the problem is seldom lack of information. The problem is competing loyalties. Something else still has enough pull to make him linger. Some net, table, fear, habit, relationship, plan, dream, or self-protective instinct is still sitting on the throne trying to negotiate with Jesus Christ. This essay is about that contrast. Some men followed straightway. Others hesitated, delayed, bargained, and asked for terms. The difference reveals the heart. The issue is not whether a man finds Christ impressive. The issue is whether he will move when Christ speaks.

### **1. The Holy Ghost Highlights Immediate Obedience**

The Gospel writers do not merely tell you that men followed Christ. They frequently show you how quickly they did it. "And they straightway left their nets, and followed him" (Matthew 4:20). "And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him" (Matthew 4:22). "And he arose, and followed him" (Matthew 9:9). Those adverbs and verbs are not filler. The Spirit of God is putting a spotlight on prompt obedience. He wants you to notice that when the Lord called, there was decisive response. The command did not bounce around in the air while those men took weeks to weigh the emotional cost of surrender. They moved under the force of Christ's authority.

That is important because modern people are trained to think every delay is thoughtful and every hesitation is careful wisdom. Sometimes it is nothing but unbelief buying time. Sometimes delay is simply the flesh trying to preserve its own little kingdom for a few more hours. The devil loves delay because delay gives competing claims time to make their case. If the heart does not move quickly under the word of God, old affections, old routines, old fears, and old excuses begin gathering strength. The longer a man toys with obedience, the more likely he is to talk himself out of it. That is why the Holy Ghost often honors immediate response.

This is not teaching impulsive foolishness apart from Scripture. It is teaching that once the will of God is clear, the right response is submission, not stalling. A man may need patience

when facts are unknown, but he has no right to delay what God has already made plain. The disciples in those early scenes were not moving on a hunch. They were moving under the command of the Son of God. And the mark of that command was not endless analysis. It was action. The Lord still deserves that kind of response from His people now.

## **2. Nets, Tables, and Boats Were Real Competitors**

One reason these Gospel scenes strike so hard is that the things left behind were real. They were not imaginary sacrifices. Nets meant livelihood. Boats meant business. The receipt of custom meant income and structure and a known place in society. Fathers meant relationships and inherited expectations. In other words, Christ's call hit men where life was already organized. He did not call them out of a vacuum. He called them out of routines, obligations, securities, and familiar centers. That is why the obedience is so powerful. It was not sentimental language. It cost something.

The Bible says Peter and Andrew "straightway left their nets" (Matthew 4:20). James and John "immediately left the ship and their father" (Matthew 4:22). Matthew "arose, and followed him" from the receipt of custom (Matthew 9:9). That means Christ's call proved stronger than the claims of trade, money, habit, family expectation, and ordinary structure. This is where the flesh protests. It says, Surely there can be a way to follow Christ without disturbing anything important. But in the Gospels, Christ's call regularly disturbs what men thought was settled. He enters life as Lord, not as an accessory.

That is why a lot of professing Christians never get very far with God. The Lord speaks, but the net still pulls. The boat still pulls. The old table still pulls. A relationship still pulls. Reputation still pulls. Comfort still pulls. The known routine still pulls. So they keep telling themselves they will obey later, when circumstances become cleaner and the cost becomes smaller. But that day seldom comes. Christ calls men where they are, not where they imagine they might someday become. And if His call is not strong enough to break those competing claims, then He is not yet functioning as Lord in that life.

## **3. Straightway Reveals the Power of Christ's Voice**

There is a reason men followed straightway. It was not because they were naturally heroic. It was because there was power in the voice that called them. When Jesus Christ said, "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), something of divine authority went with those words. The sheep follow the shepherd "for they know his voice" (John 10:4). That means the call carried recognition and command. It did not merely appeal to sentiment. It reached into the conscience and laid claim. Christ's voice has that quality. It is not one voice among many. It is the voice that has the right to overrule every lesser voice.

That is why the call of Christ is so unlike the manipulations of religious salesmen. A salesman tries to persuade by pressure, flattery, or emotion. Christ commands by rightful authority. When He speaks, a man is no longer dealing merely with a suggestion he can politely file away. He is confronted with the word of the One who made him, the One who will judge him, and the One who died for him. That is why true obedience often happens with a holy suddenness. Once the soul recognizes that Christ has spoken, every other claim starts looking secondary.

This is also why the Christian must keep his ear trained to the word of God. If he fills his life with the noise of the world, the chatter of the flesh, and the endless static of other voices, he will be slow to move when the Lord speaks. But if he lives in the Book, he develops a readiness toward God. The voice becomes recognizable. The authority becomes unmistakable. The command comes clear. Then when Christ says move, the heart does not need a committee. It knows the Shepherd's voice. Straightway obedience is not mechanical haste. It is the response of a heart conquered by rightful authority.

#### **4. Delay Gives the Flesh Time to Negotiate**

One of the great dangers in spiritual life is that delay invites negotiation. The moment God makes His will plain, the flesh begins drafting counteroffers. It says, Let me first. Let me wait. Let me think. Let me settle this. Let me explain. Let me make it easier. Let me keep one foot where it is while I test the waters of obedience. That is the language of a divided heart. The trouble is that if a man gives that process room to breathe, it usually gets stronger. Delay feeds resistance. It gives old loves time to plead their case.

You can see the opposite of prompt obedience in passages like Luke 9. One man says, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house" (Luke 9:61). Another says, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father" (Luke 9:59). The little phrase "let me first" tells the whole story. Christ may be interesting enough to follow someday, but something else still claims first place. That is the root problem in delay. It is not that the person hates Jesus outright. It is that Jesus is not yet first. Another loyalty still expects priority.

That is why delayed obedience is usually obedience denied. Not always, but usually. Once the soul starts bargaining with clear commands, it is already slipping. What begins as a short postponement often becomes a settled habit of spiritual procrastination. Men intend to obey later, repent later, forgive later, separate later, speak later, surrender later, get serious later, but later becomes never because the flesh is never done making excuses. The safest time to obey God is when He speaks. Every hour after that gives unbelief more room to set up furniture in the heart.

## **5. Christ's Call Breaks Competing Claims**

The force of Christ's call is seen in the fact that it does not merely coexist with rival claims. It breaks them. When He called the fishermen, the nets did not remain equal options. When He called Matthew, the receipt of custom did not remain the controlling center. When He called the disciples to Himself, old securities had to yield. That is one of the sure marks of genuine dealings with God. The word of Christ comes in with authority and begins displacing lesser masters. It does not politely ask self to slide over a few inches on the throne.

That is why the Gospel accounts keep showing division at the point of obedience. Boats or Christ. Nets or Christ. Table or Christ. Family expectations or Christ. Routine or Christ. The real issue is not whether those things are evil in themselves. The issue is whether they can be kept in their place once Christ speaks. If they cannot yield, then they have become idols. The call of Christ is like a hammer hitting the hidden gods of a man's life. Things he never realized were ruling him suddenly show their strength when obedience requires leaving them behind.

This is one reason conversions and surrenders that never alter anything are often suspect. If a man says Christ has spoken to him, but nothing shifts, nothing yields, nothing gets dethroned, nothing gets left, nothing gets reordered, and nothing gets obeyed, then what exactly happened. In Scripture, Christ's call produces realignment. That may look different in different cases, but there is movement. The Lord does not enter a life as decorative wallpaper. He enters as rightful sovereign. Straightway they followed Him because the competing claims were overruled by a greater one.

## **6. Hesitation Exposes a Divided Heart**

The men who hesitated in the Gospels are just as instructive as the men who obeyed straightway. They show what divided allegiance sounds like. It is often respectful in tone. It may even sound sincere. "Lord, I will follow thee" (Luke 9:61). But then comes the condition. "But let me first." That little clause reveals everything. The mouth says Lord. The will says second. That is a divided heart. It wants the credit of willingness without the cost of surrender. It wants Christ near enough to admire, but not near enough to disrupt the current arrangement.

The Lord does not stroke that divided spirit. He answers with plainness. "Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60). "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). That is not because Christ lacked compassion. It is because He would not feed spiritual self-deception. He knew that hesitation at the point of clear obedience is not a harmless

personality trait. It is a revelation of what still holds first place. A divided heart always wants a little more time because it has not truly decided who is Lord.

That is searching because many church people live in a chronic state of respectable hesitation. They do not openly reject Christ, but they never really move either. They are always almost ready, almost surrendered, almost obedient, almost serious, almost separated, almost prayerful, almost repentant. They keep themselves soothed with the language of intention while refusing the action of obedience. The Gospel pattern puts a knife in that kind of religion. Some followed straightway. Others said, Let me first. The difference was not opportunity. The difference was the state of the heart.

### **7. The Issue Is Movement When the Lord Speaks**

At the end of the matter, the issue is not whether a man can discuss discipleship intelligently. The issue is whether he moves when the Lord speaks. The devils know Christ is important. Lost scholars know the Gospels are influential. Religious hypocrites can debate discipleship for hours. But none of that equals following. The Gospels honor those who moved. "Straightway." "Immediately." "Arose." Those words are monuments to the principle that obedience is proved by action, not admiration. Christ never intended the call to remain theoretical.

This does not mean every act of obedience looks dramatic on the surface. Sometimes moving when the Lord speaks means leaving a literal occupation or relationship pattern. Sometimes it means confessing sin. Sometimes it means reconciling with someone. Sometimes it means separating from compromise. Sometimes it means speaking up when silence has become disobedience. Sometimes it means surrendering a private ambition the Lord has put His finger on. The outward form may vary, but the principle remains. When Christ's will becomes plain, true discipleship moves.

And this is where the essay has to land in the conscience. What has the Lord said to you that you are still delaying. What command have you wrapped in process language because you do not want to move. What net are you still mending while saying you admire the call of Christ. What table are you still sitting at while claiming interest in discipleship. What boat are you still holding because familiar security feels safer than actual obedience. The issue is not whether Jesus fascinates you. The issue is whether you will get up when He says follow.

### **Conclusion**

The Gospel pattern is plain enough for any honest reader to see. When Christ called some men, they followed straightway. They left nets, left ships, left tables, left routines, and left familiar securities. Others hesitated, delayed, negotiated, and asked for terms. That

contrast is not there by accident. The Holy Ghost put it in the record so that every generation could see the difference between admiration and obedience, between interest and surrender, between divided hearts and conquered hearts. The call of Christ reveals itself in movement.

That is why obedience delayed is usually obedience denied. Delay gives the flesh time to strengthen its excuses. Delay gives rival claims time to speak louder. Delay turns conviction into conversation and conversation into postponement. The safest moment to obey Christ is when He speaks. Straightway obedience is not fanaticism when the command is clear. It is sanity. It is the sane response of a creature to the voice of his rightful Lord. The longer a man lingers once Christ has made His will plain, the more likely he is to prove that something else still owns him.

So the question for this part of the series is painfully simple. When the Lord speaks, do you move. Not do you agree, not do you admire, not do you feel stirred for a little while, but do you move. Some men followed straightway because Christ's call broke the power of competing claims. Others delayed because their loyalties were still divided. The same Lord still speaks through His word. The same issue still stands. And the same old problem still dogs the human heart. The matter is not whether Jesus is interesting. The matter is whether He is Lord enough for you to get up and follow Him now.

## **8 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Take Up the Cross and Follow Me**

### **Introduction**

One of the most abused subjects in modern Christianity is discipleship. Not salvation, mind you, though that has been butchered badly enough by sacramentalists, legalists, Calvinists, and every other outfit that wants to cloud the grace of God. I mean discipleship. Men have taken the plain words of Jesus Christ about following Him and either shoved them into the plan of salvation where they do not belong, or watered them down until they amount to little more than religious companionship with a sentimental Jesus who never asks for anything painful. The Lord did not say, "Admire me from a safe distance." He did not say, "Wear a cross, sing a chorus, and think fond thoughts about heaven." He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). That is not soft religion. That is a death sentence on self-rule.

Now that verse must be handled rightly or a man will wreck both the gospel and the Christian life. Salvation is by grace through faith apart from works. "For by grace are ye

saved through faith... not of works" (Ephesians 2:8-9). A sinner is saved by trusting the finished blood atonement of Jesus Christ, not by carrying a cross, denying himself, cleaning up his life, or performing some heroic act of surrender. If a man has to take up his cross in order to get eternal life, then eternal life is wages, not gift. But that is not what the Lord is teaching in the discipleship passages. He is speaking to those who would come after Him in actual obedience. The cross is not the purchase price of eternal life. The cross is the path of yielded obedience for the one who belongs to Him.

That distinction has to be nailed down with spikes, because the devil is happy either way. He is happy if you make discipleship the gospel and teach people to trust their surrender instead of Christ's blood. He is just as happy if you make grace an excuse for carnal ease and teach saved people that following Jesus requires no actual dying to self. Both errors are poison. One corrupts the gospel. The other corrupts the walk. The truth is sharper than both. Christ saves freely, and then Christ commands those He saves. He gives eternal life as a gift, and then He calls the believer to a road where self is denied, the cross is embraced, and obedience costs something. This essay is about that road, and about the absolute folly of a man wanting the crown while refusing the cross.

### **1. Christ Joined Following to a Cross**

The first thing to see is the plain wording of the Lord Jesus Christ. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Mark records it, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Luke adds the daily element: "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). There is no honest way to read those verses and come away with the idea that following Christ is merely pleasant association. The Lord tied following to self-denial and cross-bearing. He joined discipleship to death.

Now in our soft age, people talk about a "cross" as though it were any inconvenience that annoys them. Somebody has a difficult neighbor, and that is their cross. Somebody has a headache, and that is their cross. Somebody has a schedule conflict, and that is their cross. That is not Bible language. In the first century, a cross was not a decorative inconvenience. It was an instrument of execution. To take up a cross meant the end of self-determination. It meant public shame, yieldedness, and the death of the man carrying it. Christ deliberately used the harshest image possible to show that following Him was not a hobby for the flesh.

That alone ought to expose the silliness of much modern religion. A great many churchgoers want a Jesus who improves self-esteem, enhances family values, and adds a little spiritual fragrance to their ambitions, but they do not want a Master who tells them to

die. They want a Christ who blesses self, not a Christ who crucifies it. Yet the Lord did not leave room for that fantasy. If a man will come after Him, there is a cross in the road. Not as the basis of justification before God, but as the mark of yielded obedience to God. The Master did not hide the cost. He put it right in the invitation.

## **2. Salvation Is Free, But Following Costs**

This must be said clearly because confusion on this point has wrecked multitudes. Eternal life is the free gift of God. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). The sinner is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28). The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. The work that saves is Christ's work, not ours. When the Philippian jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" the answer was not, "Take up your cross." The answer was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:30-31). That settles the salvation side of the matter.

But once a man is saved, the New Testament does not leave him lying on the doorstep of grace with no call to obedience. The same Savior who gives life freely also says, "follow me" (John 21:19). The same Lord who died for the sinner says that the disciple must deny himself and take up the cross. That is not a contradiction. It is the proper order. Salvation first, then discipleship. New birth first, then the walk. Gift first, then yieldedness. A child gets born into the family by grace, and then the Father teaches that child to walk in the family way.

The failure to distinguish those two truths has produced two disasters. One crowd says, Since salvation is free, discipleship must also be costless, so they reduce the Christian life to perpetual carnality covered with the language of grace. Another crowd says, Since Christ speaks of denying self and cross-bearing, that must be part of how a sinner gets saved, so they turn the gospel into self-commitment and inward surrender instead of faith in the finished work of Christ. Both crowds are wrong. Salvation costs the sinner nothing because it cost the Savior everything. Following Christ costs the believer dearly because self does not come off the throne without a fight.

## **3. Self-Denial Is the Death of Self-Rule**

The Lord did not merely say, "Take up a cross." He said first, "let him deny himself" (Matthew 16:24). That is where the battle starts. Self is the old tyrant. Self wants to reign, decide, protect, indulge, justify, and direct. Self is at the center of fallen human life. Lost men may dress self up in nice language and religious clothes, but self is still the god of the old nature. Even after conversion, the flesh still pulls in that direction. That is why discipleship must begin with self-denial. Not self-improvement. Not self-expression. Not self-esteem. Self-denial.

Now self-denial in the Bible is not the same thing as occasional self-restraint for a religious mood. A man may deny himself dessert and still be full of self. He may deny himself a few earthly pleasures for Lent and still worship self morning, noon, and night. Self-denial in discipleship means self loses the right to rule. The believer stops treating his own desires, preferences, fears, and plans as final authority. He says no to self when Christ says yes, and yes to Christ when self says no. That is a much bloodier business than giving up chocolate for a week.

This is why so much soft religion cannot produce actual disciples. It never gets below the level of self-management. It teaches men how to decorate self, soothe self, improve self, and market self in a Christian context. Jesus Christ teaches the denial of self. He does not offer self a makeover. He condemns self-rule. A man who wants to follow Christ while remaining captain of his own soul has not understood the issue. The central conflict in discipleship is who sits on the throne. The cross is where self's right to rule is rejected in practice.

#### **4. The Cross Is for the Living Disciple, Not the Dead Sinner**

It must be emphasized again that cross-bearing is not something a dead sinner performs in order to get life. Dead men do not carry crosses. The dead sinner needs regeneration, forgiveness, and justification through the blood of Christ. He does not need a moral project. But once a man has life in Jesus Christ, the cross becomes the practical path of yieldedness. Luke says, "take up his cross daily" (Luke 9:23). That is the language of a walk, not the language of initial justification. It is the day-by-day business of following Christ in a world and a body that resist His lordship.

This helps explain why many believers are genuinely saved and yet miserable in their walk. They have eternal life, but they are resisting discipleship. They belong to Christ, but they are clutching self-rule with both hands. They want heaven, but they do not want a cross. They want the benefits of redemption, but not the practical death of self-will. That divided condition produces frustration, chastening, and barrenness. The problem is not that they are unsaved because they have not carried enough crosses. The problem is that they are saved and still refusing the road their Lord appointed for a disciple.

Paul speaks in this same direction when he says, "I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20), and "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24). He is not describing sinners purchasing salvation through pain. He is describing the practical position and walk of those united to Christ. The cross reaches into the believer's daily life and says, your old autonomy is not the master here anymore. The man who belongs to Christ must learn to live like one who has already died with his Lord.

## **5. Modern Soft Religion Hates This Doctrine**

It should not surprise anybody that the religion of our age hates this subject. The religion of our age is built on self. It is tailored to the consumer. It promises comfort, affirmation, relevance, success, therapy, platform growth, emotional uplift, and personal fulfillment. It will let a man have Jesus as long as Jesus functions like a life coach for the ambitions he already had. But the moment Jesus Christ is preached as the One who says, deny yourself and take up your cross, the room gets tense. That is because the flesh has no objection to a Savior who helps it. It hates a Lord who nails it down.

So churches fill up with people who know all about blessing and almost nothing about brokenness. They know all about favor and almost nothing about obedience. They know all about victory language and almost nothing about the death of self-rule. They want to reign, but they do not want to suffer. They want the bright side of Romans 8 without the groaning side, the triumphant side of Philippians without the sacrificial side, the inheritance without the fellowship of His sufferings. But the New Testament will not let you cut the Christian life into those flattering pieces. It says, "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:17).

That is why carnal Christianity is such a contradiction in terms. It tries to keep Christ and self on the throne together. It wants enough Jesus to avoid hell, enough religion to gain respectability, and enough flesh to keep life comfortable. It wants sermons on destiny, not death; on dreams, not denial; on crowns, not crosses. But the Lord they claim to follow went to Calvary. He did not climb onto a stage to build His brand. And the disciple is not above his Master. A religion that never wounds pride, never disturbs self-rule, and never calls the believer to die to himself is not New Testament Christianity. It is baptized self-love.

## **6. The Crown Belongs to Those on the Cross Road**

There is a crown in the Christian life, thank God. There is reward, glory, inheritance, and joy. There is resurrection triumph, there is reigning with Christ, there is the "Well done" from the Master's lips. But the New Testament order is plain. The crown lies at the end of a road marked by the cross. Paul says, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12). Peter says the elders who are faithful shall receive "a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4), but the path there runs through service and suffering, not through self-indulgence.

A man who wants the crown while refusing the cross has misunderstood the Master. He has invented a Christ who is useful to ambition instead of hostile to it. He wants to reign, but not to yield. He wants reward, but not obedience. He wants the end without the path. That is exactly what the flesh always wants. It wants harvest without plowing, victory

without battle, fruit without pruning, resurrection without crucifixion. But God's order never changes. Even the Lord Jesus Christ endured the cross before the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). Shall the servant demand a softer road than the Son?

That does not mean every believer bears the exact same outward burden. God assigns different providences, different forms of suffering, different fields of obedience. But the principle is universal. There is no discipleship without self-denial, and there is no self-denial without a cross. The believer who embraces that road may look foolish to the world and even to half the church crowd, but he is the sane one. He understands that glory in the Bible is connected to yieldedness, not self-preservation. He knows that the way up is down, the way to live is to die, and the way to reign is to suffer with Christ.

## **7. Following Christ Means Walking the Daily Road of Death**

Luke's wording is especially searching: "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Daily. That one word kills a great many sentimental fantasies about discipleship. The cross is not merely a dramatic crisis moment in a man's testimony. It is a daily road. It is the repeated choice to submit self to Christ. It is the ongoing refusal to let the flesh have final say. It is the daily death of self-rule in attitudes, words, priorities, desires, relationships, and plans. The cross is not something you admire on the wall. It is something you bear on the road.

That is why discipleship cannot be sustained by emotion alone. A man may get stirred at a conference, weep at an altar, and make big declarations about full surrender, but if that surrender does not become daily obedience, it is little more than a passing religious fever. The test comes on Monday morning, Tuesday afternoon, and late Saturday night. Will you deny self when no one is watching. Will you choose Christ's will over your own convenience. Will you forgive when pride wants revenge. Will you obey when flesh wants ease. Will you speak when fear wants silence. That is daily cross-bearing.

And this is where the road becomes practical for every believer. The cross may show up in resisting lust, refusing bitterness, embracing obscurity, enduring reproach, giving up a cherished ambition, confessing sin, standing alone, serving without applause, or accepting the will of God when it overturns personal plans. It is not always dramatic before men, but it is always dramatic before the flesh because the flesh hates to lose. Every day the disciple must answer again who is Lord. Daily cross-bearing is simply daily enthroning of Christ over self.

## **Conclusion**

The Lord Jesus Christ did not call men into a soft, decorative religion built around their comfort. He said, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew

16:24). Those words tear the mask off modern easy-believism when easy-believism is twisted into easy-discipleship. They show that following Christ is not convenient companionship. It is the yielding of self-rule to the One who bought you. It is the road of obedience walked by those who belong to Him. The cross is not how a sinner earns eternal life, but it is certainly part of how a disciple walks after receiving eternal life.

That distinction must never be blurred. Salvation is free because Christ paid it all. The sinner comes by faith to a crucified and risen Savior and receives everlasting life as a gift. But the Savior who saves also commands. He does not save a man to leave him on the throne of his own little kingdom. He saves him to bring him under gracious lordship. And that lordship is not theoretical. It reaches into the habits, plans, ambitions, desires, and daily decisions of life. It says no to self and yes to Christ.

So the question in this part of the series is brutally plain. Do you want the crown without the cross. Do you want a Savior but not a Lord. Do you want eternal benefits while clinging to self-rule. Then you have misunderstood the Master you claim to follow. Christ's road still has a cross on it. The disciple still has to deny himself. The flesh still has to die daily. And the saint who learns that road will find that what looks like loss to the world is the very path of life, power, joy, and eventual glory in the will of God.

## **9 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Peter Followed Afar Off**

### **Introduction**

There are few lines in the Gospels more searching for a saved man than this one: "But Peter followed him afar off" (Matthew 26:58). Mark says the same thing, "And Peter followed him afar off" (Mark 14:54). Luke says it again, "And Peter followed afar off" (Luke 22:54). The Holy Ghost put that statement in the record three times because there is a sermon in every word of it. Peter did not quit the Lord outright. He did not run all the way back to Galilee at that moment. He did not join the Pharisees or enlist under Caesar. He still followed. But he followed afar off. And that distance became the breeding ground for fear, confusion, compromise, and denial. That is how backsliding often works. It usually does not begin with open blasphemy. It begins with distance.

That is what makes this study so practical. There are multitudes of believers who would never say they have forsaken Christ, and in one sense they have not. They still attend, still listen, still talk, still claim the right things, still move in the general direction of the Lord's people. But they are far enough off that they have lost the warmth of His presence, the

courage of His nearness, the clarity of His words, and the power that belongs to walking close. They are in the most dangerous of all positions because they are near enough to think they are safe, but far enough to fall hard. They are still following in a loose sense, but they are not following closely enough to stand in the hour of pressure.

Peter is the perfect case study because he loved the Lord. This is not Judas. This is not Caiaphas. This is not a devout hypocrite who never knew Christ. This is Peter, the man who said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). This is Peter, who stepped out on the water. This is Peter, who drew the sword. This is Peter, who could say with all sincerity, however ignorant of his own weakness, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matthew 26:35). Yet in his darkest hour he followed afar off. That means this message is not for the openly damned only. It is for the disciple who still loves the Lord but has grown distant enough to become unstable. That is exactly the kind of soul that needs warning.

### **1. He Still Followed, But Distance Changed Everything**

The first thing to notice is that Peter did follow. The verse does not say he turned his back and walked the other way at once. It says he followed afar off (Matthew 26:58). That is what makes the passage so subtle and so dangerous. Peter still had enough attachment to stay in the general orbit of the Lord's movements. He still cared. He still wanted to see "the end" (Matthew 26:58). That is often the condition of a backslidden believer. He has not become an atheist. He has not gone full Judas. He is not openly cursing Christ in public squares. He still has enough connection to remain in view of the things of God.

But distance changes everything. A man can be in the right general direction and still be out of place. A soldier may be in the same war, but if he is too far from his captain in the hour of battle, he is exposed. A sheep may be somewhere in the field, but if it is far enough from the shepherd, the wolves smell opportunity. A disciple may still speak the language of following while living far enough away from his Lord that the spiritual strength of nearness is gone. Peter's problem was not outright desertion at first. It was distance. The dangerous thing about distance is that it feels less sinful than departure, but it can lead to the same collapse.

That is why so many believers deceive themselves. They think because they still move in a generally Christian direction, still listen to preaching now and then, still quote a few verses, still claim the Lord in some fashion, that all must be well. But the issue is not only whether you are still somewhere on the road. The issue is how close you are to the Master on that road. Peter followed, but not close enough. And the whole tragedy that unfolded afterward shows that nearness matters more than many saints realize.

## **2. Distance Usually Begins Before the Crisis**

Peter did not become spiritually distant in the courtyard only. The courtyard exposed a distance already growing. Men do not generally deny the Lord in one instant without prior weakening. The seeds are sown earlier. The Lord had already warned Peter. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). Peter had already boasted beyond his strength. He had already trusted his own loyalty too much. He had already contradicted the Lord's forecast of his denial with fleshly confidence. That kind of self-trust is one of the first signs that a disciple is drifting.

Then came Gethsemane. What did the Lord tell Peter and the others there. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matthew 26:41). But Peter slept. There is another stage in the decline. Before he followed afar off externally, he failed to watch and pray internally. That is always the order. Prayerlessness weakens the soul long before public failure shows up. A believer who stops watching and praying is already creating distance, whether he feels it yet or not. The spirit may indeed be willing, but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41), and when watchfulness dies, weakness gets room to act.

That is how backsliding commonly works. It starts with neglected communion, neglected prayer, neglected self-judgment, neglected trembling at the word of God. Then when the hour of testing comes, the man who thought he was strong discovers he has been running on fumes. Peter's crisis in the high priest's courtyard was not an isolated event floating in midair. It was the fruit of prior spiritual carelessness. Distance from Christ in the hour of pressure is often the result of smaller distances tolerated beforehand.

## **3. Distance Breeds Fear**

Once Peter followed afar off, fear had room to grow. When a man walks close to the Lord, the fear of God tends to crowd out the fear of man. But when he gets distant, the voices of men begin sounding larger than they are. Peter had shown boldness earlier. He drew a sword in the garden (John 18:10). But fleshly boldness is not the same thing as spiritual courage. Flesh can be loud for a moment. Spiritual courage is sustained by nearness to Christ. Once Peter got farther off, he became vulnerable to the pressure of servants, maidens, bystanders, and public suspicion.

The text says he sat "with the servants, to see the end" (Matthew 26:58). Mark says he "sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire" (Mark 14:54). There he is, now no longer in bold movement near his Lord, but sitting among the enemy crowd trying to stay unnoticed. That is what fear does. It makes a disciple seek concealment rather than confession. It makes him study survival instead of faithfulness. It makes him more concerned with avoiding personal cost than with standing for the truth. When Christ is far

enough away in the practical sense, the threatening faces of men start appearing far bigger than they really are.

This is one reason so many Christians go quiet in bad times. They may still love the Lord in some inward sense, but distance has fed fear. They are far enough from Christ in communion that social pressure now looms larger than obedience. A small servant girl can intimidate a disciple once distance has done its work. The issue is not the size of the opponent. The issue is the condition of the follower. Peter did not collapse because the accusations were so intellectually devastating. He collapsed because distance had weakened him into fearing man.

#### **4. Distance Leads to Warming at the Wrong Fire**

One of the saddest details in the story is that Peter "sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire" (Mark 14:54). That line will preach for a month. When a disciple gets too far from the warmth of Christ's presence, he starts looking for warmth somewhere else. That is exactly what Peter did. The Lord was inside being smitten, mocked, and examined, while Peter outside sought comfort in enemy company around enemy fire. He had lost the warmth of nearness, so he borrowed warmth from the wrong source.

That is what distant believers always do. If they are not drawing life, warmth, steadiness, and satisfaction from communion with the Lord, they will find a substitute. They will warm themselves at the fire of worldly acceptance, carnal friendships, fleshly entertainment, political excitement, material success, social applause, or religious performance. Something will supply the heat. Man was not made to live cold. If he is not close enough to Christ to stay warmed there, he will drift toward another flame. The trouble is, the wrong fire may warm the body while hardening the soul.

And notice the company Peter kept at that fire. He did not warm himself among praying saints. He sat with the servants of the high priest's crowd. Distance from Christ changes a man's companionships. He grows comfortable in circles that once would have troubled him. He learns to sit where he used to stand against. He begins taking comfort in environments that are not friendly to his Lord. He does not necessarily set out to betray Christ, but by seeking comfort among Christ's enemies he is already placing himself where denial becomes easier. Wrong fire and wrong company are close relatives.

#### **5. Distance Confuses Identity**

As Peter remained in that distant place, people began identifying him with Christ, and that created his crisis. "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee" (Matthew 26:69). Another said, "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth" (Matthew 26:71). Later they said, "Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee" (Matthew 26:73). Peter was in an

awkward condition. He was far enough from Christ to be weak, but close enough to Christ to be recognized. That is a miserable place to be. He wanted the safety of distance without fully severing the marks of attachment, and the tension blew up in his face.

That happens to compromised believers all the time. They drift enough to lose spiritual power, but not enough to erase the signs that they belong to Christ. The world still sees traces. The speech still leaks. The conscience still stings. The old identity keeps surfacing. That can be a blessed mercy if it leads to repentance, but if the heart is bent on preserving itself, the pressure of that half-and-half condition often produces denial. The man cannot bear the cost of openly owning Christ in that moment, so he starts verbally distancing himself from the One he has already followed afar off in practice.

Peter's problem was not merely that the crowd accused him falsely. They accused him truly. He was with Jesus. His speech did betray him. He did belong to that company. But distance had so weakened him that instead of gladly owning the connection, he tried to hide it. That is what distance does to identity. When a believer walks close to Christ, he is glad to be known as His. When he grows distant, that same identity starts to feel dangerous in the wrong crowd. Then confession becomes difficult, and compromise becomes tempting.

## **6. Distance Ends in Denial**

The story reaches its terrible climax when Peter denies the Lord three times. First with simple denial, then with an oath, then with cursing and swearing (Matthew 26:70, 72, 74). That descent did not begin the moment the words came out of his mouth. It began when he followed afar off. The denial was the ripe fruit. The distance was the root. A disciple does not usually wake up one morning and leap into public collapse without prior inward retreat. Peter's mouth eventually said what his feet had been suggesting for some time by their distance.

That is why this passage is so practical. It warns the believer not merely against gross outward fall, but against the smaller distance that makes gross outward fall possible. Men like to think denial is something only cowards in extreme persecution do. But there are many forms of denial. A man can deny Christ by silence when speech is required. He can deny Christ by cowardly association. He can deny Christ by hiding his identity. He can deny Christ by softening truth to save face. He can deny Christ by protecting himself when confession would cost him. The root is often the same: he has been following afar off.

And there is a dreadful progression to the thing. Distance weakens courage. Wrong company shifts comfort. Fear grows. Identity becomes awkward. Then the mouth starts covering what the life has already been tolerating. Peter's oaths and curses did not come

from nowhere. The farther a believer gets from practical communion with the Lord, the uglier he is capable of becoming under pressure. That is not to say he loses salvation. It is to say he can fall lower than he imagined because distance has stripped him of the steadiness he once took for granted.

## **7. The Lord Still Looked on Peter**

Thank God the story does not end with Peter's denial. Luke says, "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter" (Luke 22:61). What a line. No sermon can improve it. The Lord looked on Peter, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, and "went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). That look did not damn Peter. It broke him. It was not the look of a stranger. It was the look of the Master he had denied. And that look restored memory. Distance had clouded his mind, but the Lord's look brought back the words Peter had neglected. That is often how restoration begins. Christ brings His word back to the conscience with piercing force.

That means there is hope for the believer who has been following afar off. The answer is not to pretend the distance is harmless. It is not. It can end in ugly things. But the answer is also not despair if the Lord has awakened the conscience. Peter's bitter weeping shows that grace had not left him. The same Lord who foretold the denial had also said, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:32). Peter's faith was shaken terribly, but it did not finally fail. The Lord's intercession held him. Later, the risen Christ would restore him openly and say again, "Follow me" (John 21:19).

That is a comfort and a warning both. It is comfort because a true saint may fall far and yet be restored by the grace of God. It is warning because the road to that fall can begin with something as seemingly small as distance. The believer who is no longer close enough to the Lord to be warned there is in bad shape, even if he has not yet hit the ground publicly. Peter's recovery does not excuse his distance. It magnifies the mercy of the Lord who would not let distance have the final word.

## **Conclusion**

Peter followed afar off, and that little phrase opens up the anatomy of compromised discipleship. He did not utterly abandon the Lord at first. He still followed. But he followed at a distance, and that distance led to fear, wrong company, wrong comfort, confusion about identity, and eventual denial. That is how practical backsliding so often works. It does not usually announce itself with a trumpet blast. It begins with a drift, a cooling, a neglected prayer life, a little self-confidence, a little distance, a little comfort in the wrong place, and then under pressure the collapse comes.

This makes the message painfully relevant. There are many believers who have not openly forsaken Christ, but they are no longer close enough to stand. They are living in that dangerous in-between place where they still move in Christian circles and still claim Christian truths, but they have lost the warmth, courage, clarity, and power that come from nearness to the Lord. They are following in a technical sense, but afar off. And that is not a safe condition. It is the kind of condition where a servant girl can shake a disciple and a courtyard can expose years of neglected inward life.

So the question is not merely whether you still say you follow Jesus. The question is how close you are. Are you near enough to be strengthened by His presence, or only near enough to keep up appearances while your soul grows cold. Are you warming at His fire, or at the enemy's. Are you watching and praying, or sleeping and boasting. Are you glad to be known as one of His, or are you starting to resent the cost of identification. Peter's bitter night stands in Scripture to warn every believer that distance matters. A man can still be following and yet be in grave danger if he is following afar off.

## **10 of 20: What Do You Follow? - My Sheep Hear My Voice**

### **Introduction**

One of the greatest tests of real Christianity is not excitement, not appearance, not religious vocabulary, not church culture, not tears, not charisma, not gifted speech, not crowds, not programs, and not spiritual theatre. One of the greatest tests of real Christianity is this: can the soul recognize the voice of the Shepherd. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" (John 10:4). Then He said, "And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:5). Later He said it again with unmistakable plainness: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). That is not poetic decoration. That is spiritual law. It is one of the most important laws in the Christian life. Hearing and following are joined together. Discernment and discipleship are inseparable. You do not safely follow Christ by accident. You follow Him because you know His voice.

That cuts straight across the grain of the age we live in. This is an age drunk on noise. Loud men gather crowds. Slick men move audiences. Entertaining men hold attention. Emotional men stir feeling. Trendy men create brands. Clever men build platforms. And a great many religious people are so spiritually undiscerning that they will follow almost any voice if it is polished enough, loud enough, funny enough, dramatic enough, mystical enough, or popular enough. They are not following because they know the Shepherd. They

are following because they like movement. They like atmosphere. They like a herd. They like to be where the energy is. That is why false teachers have such easy prey. A sheep knows the Shepherd's voice. A goat, a wolf, or a religious spectator can be jerked around by any sound that scratches the flesh.

So this essay must press the issue where Scripture presses it. True following is not rooted in charisma, novelty, style, drama, or public excitement. It is rooted in recognition. The sheep know His voice. That means spiritual safety is found in the words of Christ rightly heard, rightly believed, and rightly recognized. This chapter will deal with hearing and following, with strangers and false teachers, with the difference between the genuine sheep and the religious hanger-on, and with the fact that many people in church circles are not really following Christ at all. They are simply moving with the herd whenever somebody blows hard enough on the whistle. The issue is not whether a voice is loud. The issue is whether it is His.

### **1. The Shepherd Goes Before the Sheep**

The first thing the Lord says in John 10 is that the shepherd "goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" (John 10:4). That tells you something fundamental about the Christian life. Christ does not drive His sheep the way a rancher drives cattle from behind. He goes before them. He leads. He sets the direction. He marks the path. He is not an accessory attached to a life already arranged around self. He is out front. The sheep are behind Him, not the other way around. They do not ask Him to endorse the trail they already chose. They follow where He leads.

That alone is enough to expose a great deal of counterfeit religion. There are multitudes of people who want Jesus nearby, but not in front. They want Him in the passenger seat, not holding the reins. They want Him blessing their ambitions, sanctifying their plans, comforting their emotions, and helping them achieve what they already intended to do. But the picture in John 10 is not of sheep bringing the shepherd along for support. It is of the shepherd going before, and the sheep adjusting themselves to His movement. That is real discipleship. Christ leads. The believer follows.

Now that means following Christ is a matter of yielded direction, not merely correct profession. A man can say all the right things about the Good Shepherd and still resist His leadership in actual life. He can have a devotional picture of Jesus on the wall while living with self at the front of every real decision. But the sheep in John 10 do not merely admire the shepherd's existence. They move behind Him. They let His direction determine theirs. That is one of the first marks of reality. The Lord is not trailing behind His people asking where they would like to go. He goes before, and they follow.

## **2. Hearing Comes Before Following**

The Lord ties the two things together in order. "The sheep follow him: for they know his voice" (John 10:4). Then again, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). First hearing, then following. First recognition, then direction. That means spiritual following is impossible without spiritual hearing. A man cannot safely walk after Christ if he cannot distinguish Christ's voice from all the counterfeits competing for his attention. That makes discernment absolutely necessary to discipleship. It is not a side issue for theological hobbyists. It is part of following the Shepherd.

This is one reason the Bible puts such weight on doctrine. Doctrine is not dead wood. Doctrine is the map of the Shepherd's voice. Christ's sheep are not safe because they are naturally intelligent. They are safe because they are taught to hear. The words of God become familiar. The sound of truth becomes recognizable. The soul learns the accent of Scripture. Then when error speaks, even if the error is dressed in smooth language and religious polish, there is something wrong in the sound. The sheep may not always be able at first to write a ten-page refutation, but they know something is off because they have learned the Shepherd's voice.

That is why carelessness with Scripture produces instability in following. If a man does not know the Book, he is vulnerable to every passing religious salesman. He has no ear. He is driven by impressions, not truth. He responds to force, not voice. So the Christian life cannot be reduced to vague spirituality. Hearing is specific. Christ speaks through His words. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). The sheep do not follow because they enjoy a mystical haze. They follow because the Shepherd's words have taught them what His voice sounds like.

## **3. A Stranger Will They Not Follow**

One of the strongest statements in the whole chapter is this: "And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:5). That verse is a direct blow against the idea that all religious voices are basically alike and that spiritual maturity means being equally open to all of them. No, sir. Christ says there is a category called "stranger," and the sheep do not follow him. More than that, they flee from him. They do not say, Let us keep an open mind for a decade while he poisons us. They do not say, Let us sit under him for entertainment and sort it out later. They flee.

That tells you the sheep have more than positive recognition. They also have negative discernment. They not only know the Shepherd's voice. They know that another voice is not His. That is crucial. A believer must learn both sides of spiritual hearing. He must know what truth sounds like and what counterfeit sounds like. He must know the Shepherd's

words and also recognize when a voice carries another spirit, another emphasis, another authority, another gospel, another Christ. Paul warned about "another Jesus" and "another gospel" in 2 Corinthians 11:4 and Galatians 1:6-9. The sheep cannot afford to be gullible.

That is one of the clearest distinctions between a genuine sheep and a religious spectator. The spectator can be fascinated by almost anything. He samples teachers the way a carnal man samples restaurants. He likes novelty. He likes flavor. He likes strong personalities. He likes whatever feels fresh or impressive. But the sheep are not wandering connoisseurs of religious sound. They are attached to the Shepherd. So when a strange voice comes in, they are not flattered by the variety. They are alarmed by it. The stranger does not become a new option. He becomes a danger sign.

#### **4. Religious Spectators Follow Noise**

There is a vast difference between a sheep and a spectator. The spectator may attend religious events, read religious books, quote religious phrases, and even defend certain religious truths, but at heart he is not governed by the Shepherd's voice. He is governed by stimulation. He follows what moves him. If a preacher is dramatic enough, he follows. If a movement is exciting enough, he follows. If a teacher is clever enough, he follows. If a crowd is large enough, he follows. If a new angle sounds deep enough, he follows. He has never developed spiritual hearing, so he lives on religious noise.

That kind of person is extremely dangerous to himself and often troublesome to others. Because he is unstable, he becomes a carrier of instability. One month he is all in on one movement, the next month he is intoxicated with some new teacher, and the month after that he is quoting some half-baked theory because it scratched his appetite for novelty. He is tossed to and fro because his soul is not anchored in the sound of the Shepherd's words. Paul described that kind of spiritual childishness when he warned against being "carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14). That is exactly what happens when hearing is replaced by hype.

And churches are full of such people. They do not ask, Is this the Shepherd's voice. They ask, Is this interesting. Is this powerful. Is this growing. Is this emotionally intense. Is this trending. Is this different. Is this making waves. That is the mentality of a spectator and not of a sheep. Sheep are not thrill seekers. Sheep are followers of the Shepherd. Their safety lies not in being impressed, but in being able to identify. The herd mentality of modern religion is one of the great evidences that many are not following Christ at all. They are simply running toward the loudest sound.

#### **5. Charisma Is Not the Shepherd's Voice**

One of the great confusions in religious life is the assumption that charisma proves authority. It does not. A man may be magnetic and still be wrong. He may be persuasive and still be a wolf. He may be humorous, fluent, emotional, attractive, intelligent, and energetic, and still be leading people away from the truth. The devil has never had a shortage of gifted spokesmen. False prophets in Scripture were often influential. Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel with charm. The false prophets in Ahab's day did not lack confidence. The antichrist himself will come with power and deception. Charisma proves nothing except that the flesh is easily impressed.

That is why the sheep are not instructed to follow force of personality. They are instructed by implication to follow recognized voice. The issue is not whether the speaker is engaging. The issue is whether the sound is Christ's. Does it agree with His words. Does it line up with the Book. Does it magnify truth or manipulate feeling. Does it feed sheep or entertain goats. Does it point men toward obedience, holiness, sound doctrine, and the true Christ, or does it flatter self, stimulate carnality, and build dependence on the speaker himself. Charisma cannot answer those questions. Only truth can.

This is a desperately needed lesson now because much of the visible church world has become star struck. Men are followed because they are compelling on camera. They know pacing, branding, mood, timing, humor, tears, and stagecraft. They know how to sound urgent without saying much, deep without being clear, compassionate without being holy, bold without being biblical. And undiscerning people swallow it because they mistake polish for the Shepherd's voice. But the sheep are safer than that when they are walking rightly. They know that Christ's voice is not established by style. It is established by truth.

## **6. The Shepherd's Voice Is Heard Through His Words**

Now the question comes: how do the sheep recognize His voice now. The answer is not by chasing inward impressions detached from Scripture. The answer is through His words. Christ is not giving His people a mystical free-for-all where every private feeling can be baptized as the Shepherd's voice. He has spoken. He has given His words. He said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). He said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). The Shepherd's voice is identified through the written revelation God has preserved.

That means discernment is not guesswork. It is not intuition floating in the dark. It is trained recognition produced by exposure to the Book. The more a believer reads, studies, hears, memorizes, and obeys Scripture, the more the sound of Christ's voice becomes familiar. The doctrine, the spirit, the priorities, the warnings, the emphases, the holy tone of the Book sink into him. Then when error comes dressed in religious costume, it grates. The

sheep may not have all the labels, but they know that the stranger is not speaking like their Shepherd.

This also means that any teacher who downplays the Book, clouds the Book, replaces the Book, or makes himself the final interpreter of the Book is already dangerous. The sheep are not to be trained into dependence on personalities. They are to be trained into recognition of the Shepherd through the Scriptures. A true under-shepherd helps the flock hear Christ better. A false shepherd makes the flock hear himself instead. One points past himself to the Lord's words. The other builds attachment to his own voice. That is a critical distinction in every age.

## **7. True Following Requires Doctrinal Discernment**

There are people who treat discernment as if it were somehow opposed to following Christ. They talk as though caring about doctrine is a distraction from devotion. The opposite is true. True following requires doctrinal discernment because Christ's sheep follow Him by knowing His voice. And His voice is doctrinal. It is verbal. It says definite things. It teaches truth and condemns lies. It draws lines. It defines reality. It does not mumble inspirational fog. So a believer who despises doctrinal clarity in the name of spiritual warmth is cutting the very nerve that helps him follow the Lord safely.

This is why false teaching is such a deadly thing. It is not merely wrong information floating around harmlessly. It is a competing voice. It seeks to redirect allegiance. It seeks to alter the sound by which the sheep travel. That is why the New Testament is full of warnings about false teachers, false apostles, false prophets, seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils. The danger is not academic only. It is practical. If the flock starts trusting the wrong voice, they start following the wrong direction. Error is never content to remain a theory. It wants feet.

So the difference between a genuine sheep and a religious spectator becomes plain here. The sheep are not perfect in knowledge, but they are teachable toward Christ's words. They can be corrected by Scripture. They grow in recognition. They become steadier with time because the Shepherd's voice gets clearer, not dimmer. The spectator, by contrast, remains vulnerable to the next trend because he has never rooted himself in truth. He likes religion but not the discipline of hearing. He likes movement but not discernment. He likes voices, but not necessarily the Shepherd's. And the tragedy is that such a man may sit in church for years and still not know the difference.

## **Conclusion**

The Lord Jesus Christ drew the line with perfect clarity. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). That means real following is not blind herd

behavior. It is not emotional drift. It is not social imitation. It is not religious excitement. It is hearing-based following. It is recognition-based discipleship. The sheep know the Shepherd's voice, and because they know His voice, they follow Him. That is their safety. That is their identity. That is their distinction from the rest of the religious world.

That also means true spiritual safety is not found in being around noise, crowds, gifted men, moving music, dramatic meetings, mystical language, or popular ministries. It is found in recognizing Christ's voice through His words. The sheep are safe not because the world has become less deceptive, but because the Shepherd's voice is more authoritative than the lies competing against it. A stranger will they not follow. They may be simple in the eyes of the world, but they are not helpless, because the Lord has given them a way to identify what is His and what is not.

So the question in this part of the series is simple and sharp. What voice moves you. What sound do you trust. What kind of preaching, teaching, and influence do you instinctively follow. Are you drawn by truth, or by force. By Scripture, or by style. By the Shepherd, or by noise. A genuine sheep learns the Shepherd's voice and grows safer in that sound. A religious spectator runs with the herd whenever a stranger shouts loudly enough. The difference is not minor. It is the difference between safe following and spiritual ruin.

## **11 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Followeth After Vanity**

### **Introduction**

There are some trails in life that look harmless at first, some that look exciting, some that look profitable, some that look cultured, some that look rewarding, and some that even look spiritual, but the Holy Ghost puts one word over them and strips the paint right off: vanity. That word is one of the great exposing words in Scripture. It means emptiness, hollowness, vapor, breath, show without substance, motion without weight, promise without fulfillment. It is what looks big in the distance and disappears when you get close enough to touch it. And one of the sobering things in your Bible is that men do not just occasionally brush up against vanity. They follow after it. They chase it. They shape their lives around it. They wake up early for it, spend money on it, strain their emotions over it, wound their consciences for it, and build whole careers, reputations, and ministries on things that are empty in the sight of God.

The tragedy is that vanity is not always ugly on first sight. If it were, fewer men would run after it. Vanity often comes dressed in attractive clothes. It can wear the smile of success,

the perfume of pleasure, the language of wisdom, the manners of culture, the applause of society, and the respectability of religion. It may look like prosperity, ambition, romance, influence, popularity, relevance, political power, or sophisticated spirituality. That is why it is so dangerous. Men imagine vanity means only something crude, obvious, and low. But in the Scriptures, vanity is often the thing a fool mistakes for treasure because it shines enough to keep him running. He thinks he is chasing something solid, and all the while he is following smoke.

That is why this study matters. The Bible repeatedly warns about following strong drink, following after rewards, following vain persons, following vanity, and following the sort of empty pursuits that promise more than they can ever deliver. Isaiah rebukes those that "follow strong drink" (Isaiah 5:11). Proverbs warns against the man that "followeth after vain persons" (Proverbs 28:19). Isaiah says the princes "followeth after rewards" (Isaiah 1:23). And 2 Kings 17:15 says of Israel, "they followed vanity, and became vain." There is the law in plain English. A soul takes on the shape of what it pursues. What you chase changes you. So if a man follows vanity long enough, he does not merely possess emptiness. He becomes empty. This essay is about those false trails, those attractive illusions, and the dreadful transformation that takes place when a man lives for what will not last.

### **1. Vanity Is More Than Worthlessness - It Is Emptiness Pretending to Be Treasure**

The first thing to understand is that vanity in Scripture is not always presented as something obviously filthy or repulsive. Vanity is often emptiness posing as value. It is a shell painted to look like gold. It is a mirage that suggests water to a thirsty soul. Ecclesiastes uses the word again and again to show how human effort, accomplishment, pleasure, labor, and worldly gain become vapor when divorced from God. But even before you get to Ecclesiastes, the Bible already teaches the same principle in practical form. Men follow things that look rewarding and prove empty. They run hard for what cannot bear the weight of eternity.

That is exactly why vanity is so dangerous. If it were plainly useless from the outset, most men would not bother with it. But vanity knows how to advertise. It knows how to flatter. It knows how to sparkle under sunlight. A man follows money because money appears solid. He follows applause because applause feels real in the moment. He follows pleasure because pleasure promises immediate satisfaction. He follows worldly ambition because worldly ambition paints a picture of significance. He follows shallow religion because shallow religion gives him a feeling of spirituality without the wound of repentance. Vanity has many costumes, but under all of them is the same thing: emptiness.

This means a Christian must learn to evaluate not merely what shines now, but what lasts. A thing may be profitable in the world's eyes and still be vanity. A thing may gain likes, votes, followers, promotions, and headlines and still be vanity. A thing may be socially approved, emotionally satisfying, and outwardly polished and still be vanity. If it has no real substance before God, it is vanity no matter how many fools praise it. The devil is quite content to keep a man from gross scandal if he can just get him to build his life on impressive emptiness.

## **2. To Follow Vanity Is to Walk a Fool's Trail**

The Bible does not just condemn vanity as an abstract concept. It speaks of men actually following it. That is where the warning gets practical. In 2 Kings 17:15, Israel "followed vanity, and became vain." That is one of the most penetrating diagnoses in all the Old Testament. Those people did not merely stumble into emptiness. They pursued it. They walked after it. They let it set the direction of their lives. And because they followed it, they were reshaped by it. The object pursued stamped its own emptiness onto the pursuer.

That is the fool's trail. A fool does not merely think a vain thought now and then. He gives himself to a vain direction. He orders his life by things that cannot stand in judgment. He may work hard, suffer much, and appear successful, but if the thing he follows is empty before God, then all his energy is being poured into vapor. That is why worldly people can be so intense and yet so hollow. They are not lazy. Many of them are highly motivated. But intensity proves nothing if the direction is wrong. A man can run fast toward a cliff.

And this is where many believers get tricked. They assume vanity is only a danger for obvious worldlings. It is not. A Christian can follow vanity in ministry, in reputation, in social standing, in church politics, in intellectual pride, in public visibility, in the desire to be admired as spiritual, or in the hunger to be seen as important. Vanity does not mind going to church as long as it can stay vanity. It can sing hymns, quote verses, and wear a tie. It just wants the soul chasing what looks impressive instead of what pleases God.

## **3. Strong Drink, Pleasure, and Sensual Pursuit Are Vanity's Coarse Face**

One of the Bible's blunt warnings is found in Isaiah 5:11: "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink." There you have vanity in one of its more obvious forms. A man starts his day by chasing intoxication. His appetite is driving the schedule. His hope is in a bottle. He thinks he is pursuing relief, freedom, laughter, escape, or stimulation, but the Lord puts one word over the whole business: woe. The trail looks festive at the entrance, but judgment sits at the end of it.

This shows you something important. Vanity is often tied to immediate pleasure. Men follow what gives a quick spark, a quick thrill, a quick numbing, a quick excitement, a quick gratification. Strong drink is one example, but the principle reaches further. The same

pattern applies to sensual indulgence, sexual uncleanness, entertainment addiction, appetite worship, and every other pleasure-path where a man lives to keep the flesh stirred up. Vanity promises him aliveness, but leaves him emptier every time. He drinks for joy and winds up with woe. He indulges for satisfaction and winds up enslaved.

And notice the energy in Isaiah 5:11. They rise up early to follow it. That means vanity can make a man diligent. The flesh can be highly disciplined in the pursuit of its own destruction. That is worth remembering. Not every hardworking person is wise. Not every motivated person is righteous. A man may be industrious in the service of vanity. He may be prompt, consistent, strategic, and committed in his pursuit of something empty. So when you see zeal, do not assume virtue. Ask what the zeal is chasing.

#### **4. Rewards, Greed, and Applause Are Vanity's Respectable Face**

Vanity does not always come with a bottle in its hand. Sometimes it comes dressed like success. Isaiah 1:23 says, "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards." That is vanity in respectable clothing. The men are not lounging in a gutter. They are functioning as princes. They are public figures, men of standing, men in office. But the Lord says they follow after rewards. Their trail is governed by gain. Their decisions are bent by what they can get from it.

That kind of vanity is especially dangerous because it is socially praised. The world claps for ambition. It admires men who know how to get ahead. It calls greed by more polished names like influence, leverage, achievement, and advancement. But if the real governing motive is reward, then the soul is on a vain trail no matter how impressive the office looks. A man can gain the whole world and lose his own soul, and a Christian can lose the savor of his life trying to gain the approval of men. Reward-chasing has ruined many a preacher, many a churchman, many a politician, and many a businessman.

Applause works the same way. It is one of vanity's sweetest poisons. A man begins by wanting to serve, but if he is not careful, he learns the taste of being admired and starts following the feeling of being noticed. Then he no longer measures his work by truth, faithfulness, or the Lord's approval. He measures it by reaction. He follows rewards. He follows approval. He follows recognition. And once that hook gets in him, he can be led almost anywhere. Vanity does not care whether the reward is money, fame, influence, or admiration. It just wants the heart set on something empty enough to keep it from God.

#### **5. Vain Persons Produce Vain Paths**

Proverbs 12:11 says, "but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding." Proverbs 28:19 repeats the same principle. There is not only such a thing as following vanity in the abstract. There is also such a thing as following vain people. That means emptiness can

become embodied in personalities, circles, and influences. A vain person is not merely shallow in harmless ways. He is a carrier of emptiness. He lives on surfaces. He magnifies appearances. He is drawn to show, image, noise, and passing excitement. And the man who follows such a person is declared by Scripture to be "void of understanding."

That ought to be enough to sober anybody in an age full of influencers, celebrity personalities, platform-builders, trendsetters, and charismatic religious talkers. Who you follow matters because people carry trails in themselves. They embody pursuits. A vain man pulls others into a vain orbit. He may be witty, attractive, impressive, successful, trendy, stylish, connected, or even religious, but if he is vain, the trail he leaves behind him leads nowhere worth going. To follow such a person is to volunteer for hollowness.

This is one reason why spiritual discernment in companions and teachers is so important. You cannot safely walk behind people who are hollow and expect to remain full. You cannot spend your life imitating shallow men and then be surprised when your own life becomes shallow. The soul absorbs what it follows. If you run with vain people, you will begin valuing what they value, laughing at what they laugh at, fearing what they fear, and chasing what they chase. Scripture is right. That path is void of understanding. It may be busy, loud, and socially approved, but it is empty all the same.

## **6. Spiritual Shallowness Is Also Vanity**

A lot of people think vanity only applies to worldly pleasure or secular ambition, but your Bible shows that emptiness can take a religious form as well. Israel "followed vanity, and became vain" (2 Kings 17:15) in the context of departing from the Lord and moving into false worship. That means vanity can be wrapped in religion. It can wear altars, rituals, priestly language, sacred symbols, and spiritual claims. It can look devout while remaining empty. In fact, some of the most dangerous vanity in the world is religious vanity because it fools people into thinking emptiness is substance.

This is why the Lord Jesus had such hard words for the Pharisees. They were polished tombs. They had religion in abundance, but they lacked truth, humility, mercy, and life. Their religion was vanity because it was all display and no substance before God. The same thing can happen now. Men can build ministries on image instead of truth. Churches can major on production instead of holiness. Believers can live for the appearance of spirituality without the brokenness, obedience, and inward reality that belong to real godliness. That is vanity with a hymnal in its hand.

And do not miss how attractive that kind of vanity can be. It often feels safer than outright worldliness because it wears Christian dress. But if the heart is pursuing spiritual show, religious clout, theological image, public admiration, or visible reputation instead of Christ

Himself, then it is still vanity. It is just vanity in a church suit. The Lord weighs that thing exactly right. What men may call successful, He may call empty. What men may applaud as influential, He may judge as vain. The issue is never merely whether it looks religious. The issue is whether it has substance before God.

## **7. A Soul Becomes Like What It Pursues**

The most terrifying principle in this whole study is the line in 2 Kings 17:15: "they followed vanity, and became vain." There is the law in one sentence. A soul is shaped by its pursuit. It takes on the form of what it chases. If a man follows truth, he becomes steadier. If he follows holiness, he becomes cleaner. If he follows Christ, he becomes more Christlike. But if he follows vanity, he becomes vain. That means emptiness is not merely something outside him at the end of the trail. It starts working its way into him as he walks.

You can see this in all sorts of lives. Men who chase applause become theatrical. Men who chase money become calculating. Men who chase pleasure become shallow. Men who chase trends become unstable. Men who chase worldly influence become compromised. Men who chase empty religion become artificial. The soul bends toward its treasure. It begins to reflect the object of pursuit. That is why some people who once had weight, seriousness, depth, and spiritual tenderness become so hollow over time. They did not merely make one bad choice. They spent years following emptiness until emptiness got stamped onto their character.

That truth ought to make a man fear vain pursuits more than he fears losing worldly advantages. Vanity does not merely waste time. It reshapes the inner man. It hollows him out. It makes him lighter where he ought to be weighty, flimsier where he ought to be firm, more superficial where he ought to be deep. Then even if he still speaks religious words, there is little gravitas left. He has become what he chased. That is why the trail matters so much. It is not just about what you get at the end. It is about what you are becoming on the way.

## **Conclusion**

The Bible's warnings about following vanity are not old-fashioned exaggerations. They are plain descriptions of one of the most common disasters in human life. Men chase what glitters, what flatters, what rewards, what intoxicates, what excites, what entertains, what elevates them in the eyes of others, and what gives the flesh quick satisfaction, and all the while they are walking a trail marked emptiness. Vanity may smile, sparkle, and reward for a little while, but it cannot feed the soul. It cannot steady the heart. It cannot survive death. It cannot stand judgment. It is a mist pretending to be a mountain.

That is why the issue is not merely whether a thing is attractive, profitable, or approved. The issue is whether it has substance before God. Strong drink can be followed. Rewards can be followed. Vain persons can be followed. Religious image can be followed. Applause can be followed. Empty ambition can be followed. And in every case the same law works. The soul takes on the shape of the thing it pursues. To follow vanity is to become vain. That is one of the bitterest sentences a man can live out.

So the question for this chapter is plain enough to wound if you let it. What are you really chasing. What has your heart getting up early. What are you following when no one is forcing you. What reward has your eye. What person has your imitation. What pleasure has your pursuit. What empty thing have you begun calling success. The Lord has given you the warning in black and white so that you do not waste your life on a vapor. Do not follow vanity. It cannot fill you, and if you keep chasing it, it will hollow you out until you look like the very emptiness you spent your life trying to catch.

## **12 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Followers of God, Followers of Men**

### **Introduction**

One of the places where people get themselves into a mess doctrinally and practically is in the matter of following men. Some take verses like "Be ye followers of me" (1 Corinthians 4:16) and twist them into a system of personality worship, preacher worship, church bossism, blind submission, and cult-like loyalty to a leader. Others see that danger and swing to the opposite extreme, acting as though any human example is automatically suspicious and every call to imitation is somehow beneath true spirituality. Both extremes miss the Book. The New Testament does command believers to be followers of godly examples, but it never gives any man the right to replace Christ, override Scripture, or become the final object of unquestioning devotion. The issue is not whether men can be followed at all. The issue is on what grounds they may be followed.

That is why the Holy Spirit uses the word "followers" in ways that require spiritual balance. Paul says, "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me" (1 Corinthians 4:16). Then he says, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). He tells the Philippians, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (Philippians 3:17). Yet in the same New Testament he says, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Ephesians 5:1). So the pattern is plain. Men can be followed, but only in a derivative sense. God is the ultimate object. Christ is the final pattern. Sound men are followed only insofar as they are visibly walking in line with Him.

This is a needed study because our age is diseased on both sides. Some Christians are allergic to authority, example, and real spiritual leadership because they have seen abuse and do not know how to distinguish abuse from Bible order. Others are addicted to celebrity preachers, strong personalities, conference stars, movement leaders, and church dynasties, and they follow men in ways that are frankly idolatrous. One crowd refuses all examples. The other crowd bows to examples as though they were lords. Scripture corrects both errors. The right question is never merely, Who do you admire. The right question is, Who are you following, why are you following them, and where are they taking you.

### **1. God Alone Is the Ultimate Object of Following**

The first thing to settle is that God alone has absolute right over the conscience. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Ephesians 5:1). There is no higher standard than that. Men may instruct, preach, warn, model, and guide, but they never take God's place. The believer's final loyalty is not to a denomination, not to a movement, not to a ministry brand, not to a church personality, not to a famous preacher, and not to a theological tribe. His final loyalty is to God through His word. If a human example lines up with that, the example is useful. If it departs from that, the example becomes dangerous.

This is why the Bible never allows a true servant of God to function as a replacement for the Lord. Even Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, did not say, Follow me because I am me. He said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). That little qualifying phrase destroys every cult, every pope, every guru, every domineering shepherd, and every religious empire-builder who wants total loyalty to himself. Paul did not ask men to shut off discernment and surrender their souls to his personality. He put himself under a higher standard. Follow me as I follow Christ. The moment the line to Christ is broken, the obligation to follow the man is gone.

That matters greatly because men are always tempted to settle for visible authority they can touch instead of invisible authority they must submit to by faith. Israel wanted a king like the nations. The flesh likes a human center it can rally around. It is easier for many people to attach themselves to a man than to tremble at the words of God. But Scripture keeps putting the believer's eyes back on the Lord. God is the final object. Christ is the final Master. Men may serve as pointers, patterns, and helpers, but they are never the throne.

### **2. Paul Commanded Imitation, Not Hero Worship**

When Paul says, "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me" (1 Corinthians 4:16), and again, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1), he is not inviting a personality cult. He is teaching imitation of a godly pattern. Paul lived before those churches in such a way that they could watch his doctrine, conduct, priorities,

sacrifice, endurance, and obedience and learn from it. That is not arrogance. That is biblical leadership. A man cannot lead spiritually if there is nothing in his life worth imitating. Paul knew his walk was visible, and he called the saints to learn from it.

But imitation is not idolization. That distinction must be kept clean. To imitate Paul in his submission to Christ is biblical. To elevate Paul as though he were beyond correction by Scripture would be wicked. The apostle himself would never allow it. In fact, he rebuked party spirit in Corinth where people were saying, "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas" (1 Corinthians 1:12). Paul asked, "Was Paul crucified for you?" (1 Corinthians 1:13). That question should be burned into the forehead of every religious personality cult on earth. No preacher was crucified for you. No conference speaker shed his blood for you. No ministry founder rose from the dead for you. So no man gets the devotion that belongs to Christ.

This means the right use of a man's example is specific, limited, and doctrinally governed. You may imitate a preacher's fidelity to Scripture, his prayer life, his courage, his diligence, his plainness, his faithfulness under suffering, or his holy priorities. But you never hand him your conscience as if he were your sinless mediator. You follow him in the measure that his example reflects Christ. That is Bible order. Anything beyond that turns healthy imitation into unhealthy dependence.

### **3. God Gives Human Examples for the Church**

One reason this subject must be handled carefully is that the New Testament plainly teaches the usefulness of godly human examples. Philippians 3:17 says, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample." Hebrews 13:7 says, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." Those verses make it impossible for a believer to say, I need no examples, no leaders, no patterns, no visible models of godliness. That sounds humble to some, but it is not Bible humility. It is often pride wearing independence like a halo.

God made the Christian life visible as well as doctrinal. He gave preaching, teaching, pastors, elders, apostles in the foundational era, faithful saints, older women teaching younger women, older men setting examples, and mature believers whose conversation and faith could be observed. Why. Because human beings learn by hearing and by seeing. A young saint often needs to watch what patience looks like in a mature believer. He needs to observe what holy courage looks like in a preacher who stands under pressure. He needs to see what charity, meekness, doctrinal firmness, and endurance look like in flesh and blood. That is one of the ways God helps His people grow.

So the anti-example crowd is wrong. It is not spiritual maturity to despise all human patterns. It is not noble to say, I only follow God, and therefore I will not learn from any faithful believer the Lord has placed before me. That usually means the person either has a secret pride problem or is just looking for an excuse to stay unteachable. God gave examples because He intended them to help. The issue is not whether there should be examples. The issue is whether those examples are being received biblically instead of idolatrously.

#### **4. The Danger of Idolizing Preachers**

Now we have to say the other side with equal force. The church world is loaded with people who do not merely learn from men. They idolize them. They talk like them, think like them, excuse them, defend them blindly, and build their spiritual identity around them. They quote them more than Scripture. They are more grieved by criticism of the leader than by disobedience to Christ. Their emotional security is tied to a man. That is not discipleship. That is fleshly attachment dressed up as loyalty. Paul would have rebuked it in five minutes flat.

The Corinthians had already shown how quickly men can become party-centered instead of Christ-centered. One says, I am of Paul. Another, I am of Apollos. Another, I am of Cephas (1 Corinthians 1:12). Paul does not flatter that spirit. He cuts it to pieces. He says ministers are just servants "by whom ye believed" (1 Corinthians 3:5). One plants, another waters, "but God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6). Then he says, "let no man glory in men" (1 Corinthians 3:21). That ought to settle the matter for anyone who still believes the Book. A preacher may be useful. He is never to become an object of glorying.

And yet this sin keeps reproducing itself. Some idolize scholars. Some idolize revivalists. Some idolize system-builders. Some idolize internet personalities. Some idolize strong church leaders because they like outsourcing discernment to someone with certainty in his tone. But every time a man becomes the emotional or doctrinal center in place of Christ, the soul is already in danger. Godly men are meant to point beyond themselves. The moment they become the center of gravity, something has gone crooked. The preacher is a signpost, not the destination.

#### **5. Blind Submission Is Not Biblical Following**

A related danger is blind submission. Some people imagine that because God has established leadership, the duty of the believer is to obey human leaders without question, without discernment, and without testing by Scripture. That is simply not Bible doctrine. The Bereans were "more noble" because they "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). They did that in response to Paul's own preaching. If Paul's

hearers were commended for testing apostolic preaching by Scripture, then no modern preacher has any right to demand unquestioning surrender.

This means biblical following always includes discernment. Hebrews 13:7 does not say follow a man's ego, temper, preferences, every opinion, and every quirk. It says, "whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." In other words, examine the pattern. Look at the faith. Look at the doctrine. Look at the life. Look at the outcome. That is the exact opposite of blind submission. It is thoughtful, scriptural, spiritually aware imitation based on observable godliness and truth. God never told His people to switch off their minds and climb into somebody else's shadow.

Blind submission is especially dangerous because it creates environments where abuse thrives. A proud or manipulative leader loves to be followed by people who will not test, question, compare, or judge by the Book. That sort of atmosphere breeds corruption quickly. A biblical leader should want his people grounded enough in Scripture that they can identify when something is wrong. The safest flock is not the one most dazzled by the shepherd's personality. It is the one most anchored in the Shepherd's words.

## **6. Following Men Is Lawful Only in the Measure They Reflect Christ**

The key phrase remains 1 Corinthians 11:1: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." There is the line and there is the limit. The line is Christ. The limit is Christ. The permission to follow a man extends only as far as that man is walking in line with the Lord. The instant he begins leading contrary to the Book, the obligation to follow him ends. That is not rebellion. That is faithfulness. Loyalty to Christ sometimes requires refusal of men, even influential men, even useful men, even previously faithful men, if they begin to deviate from truth.

You see this principle in Galatians 2, where Paul withstood Peter to the face because Peter was not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel (Galatians 2:11-14). Imagine that. Peter was an apostle. Yet he was corrected publicly when his conduct compromised gospel truth. That single scene explodes the whole notion of untouchable leaders. If Peter could be rebuked when he drifted, then no pastor, teacher, or church figure today should expect immunity from scriptural evaluation. Men are not followed because of office alone. They are followed as they reflect Christ.

This is why admiration must always be secondary to direction. It is not enough to ask, Is this man gifted. Is he bold. Is he impressive. Is he learned. Is he successful. The real question is, Where is he headed, and does his trail align with Christ. A man may have strengths worth learning from and still possess weaknesses that should not be copied. So a wise believer learns specifically. He follows faith, doctrine, courage, holiness, charity,

endurance, and obedience where they are present. He does not swallow the whole man as though every trait came stamped with divine approval.

## **7. The End of a Man's Conversation Matters**

Hebrews 13:7 gives a remarkably practical safeguard: "whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." That means you do not merely judge a man by how loudly he starts, but by how he ends, by the trajectory of his life, by the fruit of his doctrine, by the outcome of his walk. Anyone can sound impressive for a while. Flashy men often make big noise early. But Scripture says consider the end. Watch the outcome. Watch what the teaching produces. Watch what the pattern does over time. Where does that road lead.

That is a desperately needed safeguard because religious culture often rewards immediacy and spectacle. People are quick to follow a man who is forceful, original, confrontational, stylish, successful, or emotionally moving. But Bible following is slower, wiser, and more observant. It asks what his faith looks like after years of battle. It asks what his doctrine produces in churches. It asks whether his conversation leads to holiness or vanity, to Christlikeness or personality-dependence, to humility or self-exaltation. The end matters. The path must be judged not only by noise at the entrance, but by destination.

This is one reason older saints can be such a gift to the church when they have walked long and well. The end of their conversation tells a story. Their faith has endured. Their path has shown fruit. They are not merely dramatic starters. They are stable finishers. Such lives are worth marking. Such faith is worth following. Not because the persons are flawless, but because over time their road has shown a real Christward direction. The church needs more of that sober evaluation and less of the star-struck rush to follow whoever is loudest this month.

## **Conclusion**

The New Testament gives a balanced and healthy doctrine of following. Believers are to be followers of God (Ephesians 5:1). Christ is the ultimate object, the final authority, the perfect pattern, and the rightful center of all allegiance. At the same time, believers are not forbidden from learning through godly human examples. Paul could say, "Be ye followers of me" (1 Corinthians 4:16), and again, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1), because his life visibly reflected the One he served. That kind of following is biblical, useful, and necessary in the right measure.

But the balance must be guarded hard. Despising all examples is pride and often spiritual immaturity. Idolizing examples is idolatry and often spiritual laziness. Blind submission is not faithfulness. Personality worship is not discipleship. A godly leader is a help, not a savior. A faithful preacher is a guide, not a king. A strong example may be worth imitating,

but no man is worth glorying in. The line is always Christ. The limit is always Christ. The measure is always Scripture.

So the searching question is not simply, Who do you admire. It is, Who are you following, and where are they headed. Are they taking you nearer to the Lord, deeper into the Book, steadier in doctrine, holier in walk, and more dependent on Christ. Or are they taking you into their own orbit, their own brand, their own image, and their own kingdom. Follow men where they reflect Christ. Refuse them where they do not. Follow God as dear children. And never let the servant become more precious to you than the Master he was supposed to represent.

### **13 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Follow Peace, Charity, and Holiness**

#### **Introduction**

One of the marks of a carnal Christian is that he lives almost entirely by reaction. He reacts to insults, reacts to controversies, reacts to offenses, reacts to personalities, reacts to trends, reacts to whatever gust of irritation or excitement blows through his little world that day. He is pushed along by moods, fleshly impulses, party spirit, personal grievances, and the general noise of the age. The New Testament does not describe the Christian life that way. It does not present the believer as a leaf in a storm, carried about by every emotional current and every social irritation. It presents him as a man under orders, a man with direction, a man commanded to pursue certain things on purpose. Among those things are peace, charity, holiness, and the things that edify.

That is why the Holy Ghost gives direct commands like these: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). "Follow after charity" (1 Corinthians 14:1). "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Romans 14:19). "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace" (2 Timothy 2:22). Those are not optional suggestions for naturally gentle personalities. They are commands to the blood-bought people of God. That means the Christian life is not merely about what a man avoids. It is also about what he pursues. A mature saint is not known only by what he rejects, but by what he follows.

Now because this generation is so twisted, almost every one of those words has been corrupted. Peace is treated like compromise. Charity is treated like spineless sentimentality. Holiness is treated like pharisaical legalism or external performance. But

the Bible definitions stand. Peace is not surrender to error. Charity is not weakness in the face of sin. Holiness is not theatrical rule-keeping meant to impress people. These are worthy pursuits because they reflect the character of the God we claim to follow. The believer is called to pursue what makes for spiritual health in himself and in others. In an age of noise, ego, and contention, that makes this study badly needed.

### **1. The Christian Life Is Meant to Be Directed, Not Reactionary**

The first truth to grasp is that the Christian life is not supposed to be a constant reflex action of the flesh. A believer is not meant to spend his days merely swatting at whatever offense, temptation, or irritation comes by. He is not called to live in perpetual reaction mode, where every emotional provocation determines his next move. The Holy Ghost commands pursuit. That means direction. That means intention. That means the saint is to have a God-given course set before him, not merely a list of things that upset him. Romans 14:19 says, "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." That is directional Christianity.

That verse alone corrects a lot of sick church culture. Some people can tell you what they are against all day long, but they have little understanding of what they are actually supposed to build. They know how to object, criticize, expose, and condemn, but they have never learned to follow after what produces peace and edification. They are all demolition and no construction. There is a place for exposing error, certainly. But the same Bible that commands rebuke also commands pursuit of what strengthens the saints. A believer who knows only how to fight but not how to edify is unbalanced.

This means spiritual maturity includes governed pursuit. A mature Christian asks not only, What must I reject, but also, What am I supposed to be building in my own life and in the lives of others. What kind of speech makes for peace. What kind of conduct helps edify. What kind of response strengthens rather than inflames. That does not mean soft compromise. It means the man is no longer driven by the random sparks of the flesh. He is walking with a scriptural aim. The Christian life is meant to have a holy trajectory.

### **2. Peace Is Not Compromise**

When Scripture says, "Follow peace with all men" (Hebrews 12:14), some people immediately panic as though peace must mean surrendering truth, lowering standards, and smiling at error. That is because people in a decadent age often confuse peace with appeasement. But Bible peace is not purchased by betraying the truth. The same Paul who said, "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace" (Romans 14:19), also withstood Peter to the face in Galatians 2 and pronounced an anathema on perverters of the gospel in Galatians 1. So whatever peace is, it is not doctrinal treason.

Bible peace is ordered harmony under truth. It is not the absence of all friction at any cost. It is not the kind of false calm that comes when everyone agrees to stop talking about uncomfortable parts of the Book. It is not a ceasefire with devils. Peace in Scripture is related to rightness. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable" (James 3:17). Notice the order. First pure, then peaceable. That means purity is not sacrificed to obtain peace. Real peace stands on truth. False peace demands silence about truth.

So when the believer is told to follow peace, he is being told to pursue a spirit, conduct, and pattern of life that does not generate needless strife, needless offense, needless heat, needless wounds, and needless division among the saints. He is to refuse the itch for quarrel. He is to avoid becoming a walking spark plug for contention. He is to speak truth in the right spirit. He is to be a peacemaker where peace can stand without compromise. That is not weakness. It is maturity under control of the Holy Ghost.

### **3. Charity Is Not Sentimental Weakness**

The New Testament says, "Follow after charity" (1 Corinthians 14:1), and 2 Timothy 2:22 says to "follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace." Now in a syrupy religious age, many have turned charity into emotional softness that has no backbone, no moral clarity, and no ability to confront sin. But Bible charity is not a puddle. Charity "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). That settles it. Charity does not celebrate evil to avoid making people uncomfortable. Charity is not tolerance of corruption. Charity is love governed by truth.

At the same time, charity is not bitterness dressed up as orthodoxy. A man can be doctrinally right and charitably bankrupt. He can know the truth and wield it like a club because his spirit is full of self, pride, irritation, and fleshly delight in winning. That is not charity. Charity "suffereth long, and is kind" (1 Corinthians 13:4). Charity "seeketh not her own" (1 Corinthians 13:5). Charity does not mean the death of conviction. It means conviction carried in a spirit that still reflects Christ. It means the believer is not merely right in position, but right in temper.

That is why charity must be followed after. It does not happen automatically. The flesh is selfish by nature. It uses people, resents inconvenience, keeps score, and protects its own little kingdom. A man must pursue charity on purpose. He must choose patience when self wants irritation. He must choose kindness when flesh wants sharpness. He must choose truth-loving love instead of sentimental corruption or hard orthodoxy without tenderness. Charity is a worthy pursuit because the God we follow is not only holy and true, but also rich in mercy and longsuffering.

### **4. Holiness Is Not Legalistic Performance**

Hebrews 12:14 says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." There is no getting around that verse. Holiness is to be pursued. It is not optional. It is not an embarrassing relic from a stricter age. It is not a theological hobby for unusually serious believers. It is part of the Christian path. But because the flesh always corrupts what it touches, many people imagine holiness must mean legalistic performance, outward rule-keeping, dress-up religion, or public image management. That is not Bible holiness.

Bible holiness begins with separation unto God. It is the practical outworking of belonging to Him. It has inward and outward aspects because the whole man belongs to the Lord. It is not mere externals, but neither is it a vapor with no visible effect. Holiness changes speech, habits, loves, friendships, entertainments, reactions, dress, priorities, and conduct, not because the Christian is trying to act holy for applause, but because he actually belongs to a holy God. "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). The motive is not performance for men. It is likeness to God.

That is why holiness must be followed after. It takes intention. The believer must pursue separation from defilement and conformity to what pleases the Lord. He cannot drift into holiness any more than he can drift into doctrinal soundness. The world, flesh, and devil all pull the other direction. So the saint must actively seek purity in thought, life, associations, appetites, and conduct. That does not make him a legalist. It makes him obedient. Holiness is not an attempt to purchase the Lord's love. It is the fruit of belonging to Him.

### **5. The Things That Edify Must Be Pursued**

Romans 14:19 adds another dimension: "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." That verse is a church-age gold mine. It teaches that the believer is not merely to live for private spiritual maintenance. He is to pursue things that build up other saints. The word "edify" means to build. That means the Christian life is constructive. It asks, What strengthens others. What helps their faith. What clears rather than clouds. What steadies rather than stirs confusion. What encourages holiness, truth, courage, and love in the brethren.

This is a much-needed corrective because many believers live as though their personal preferences are the final law of church behavior. If it pleases them, they do it. If it irritates them, they attack. If it benefits them, they celebrate. But Romans 14 pushes the eye outward. What makes for peace. What edifies. What helps. What strengthens. That does not mean the believer becomes a man-pleaser. It means he learns to think in terms of spiritual effect. His liberty is not used as a hammer. His knowledge is not used as a weapon. He considers the health of the body.

A saint who follows after what edifies is a blessing in any church. His words help. His attitude helps. His consistency helps. His sobriety helps. His charity helps. His refusal to stir needless trouble helps. His truthfulness helps. His willingness to bear burdens helps. He is not merely a critic in the pew. He is a builder. And that is exactly the kind of life the Holy Ghost commends. In a destructive age, Christians ought to be known not only for what they tear down, but also for what they build up.

## **6. These Pursuits Reflect the Character of God**

The reason peace, charity, and holiness are so central is that they reflect the God the believer claims to follow. We are told, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Ephesians 5:1). Well then, what is God like. He is holy. He is righteous. He is true. He is patient. He is merciful. He is the God of peace. He is love. So when a believer follows after peace, charity, and holiness, he is not merely adopting a list of virtues detached from theology. He is pursuing a life that reflects the nature of his Father.

This gives those commands a much deeper weight. Peace is not merely a useful social strategy. Charity is not merely nice behavior. Holiness is not merely moral discipline. They are family likeness. They belong to the life of those who know God. That is why their opposites are so grievous. Bitterness, selfishness, impurity, needless strife, cruelty, and spiritual shallowness misrepresent the God whose name we bear. A believer may claim to follow Christ, but if his life is governed by the flesh, that profession becomes blurred and contradicted.

And this is why these pursuits are never a waste. The world may laugh at holiness, mock charity, and exploit peaceable men. But the Lord values what reflects Himself. The believer is not asked to chase these things because they are fashionable. He is called to follow them because they belong to the kingdom of God. When a saint walks in peace, love, and holiness under truth, he is showing something of the character of the One who saved him. In a crooked and perverse nation, that is no small testimony.

## **7. Mature Christians Are Known by What They Pursue**

It is easy to build an identity around rejection. Many believers know how to define themselves by what they oppose. There is some place for that. The Bible does call for separation from error, compromise, and evil. But that alone does not prove maturity. A man may reject a hundred bad things and still be fleshly, bitter, chaotic, and unedifying. The real question is not only, What does he refuse, but what does he pursue. The mature Christian follows after peace, holiness, charity, and the things that edify. His life has positive spiritual direction.

That makes this matter especially searching. You can sometimes tell more about a believer from his pursuits than from his protests. A man may loudly denounce falsehood and still never build peace. He may condemn compromise and still be uncharitable. He may talk separation and still be personally unclean. He may claim to stand for truth and still leave wreckage behind him everywhere he goes because he never learned to follow the things that make for edification. That is immaturity, whatever banner he waves over it.

But the saint who is growing shows another pattern. He becomes more governed, more constructive, more peaceable without compromise, more charitable without sentimentality, more holy without showmanship, more useful to the body, more careful with his speech, more conscious of spiritual effect. He still rejects what must be rejected, but he is not merely a negative force. He is a builder. He is pursuing what strengthens the people of God. That is one of the clearest marks that the Holy Ghost is forming Christ in a life.

## **Conclusion**

The New Testament does not leave the believer to a random, flesh-driven life. It commands him to pursue. He is to follow peace with all men and holiness (Hebrews 12:14). He is to follow after charity (1 Corinthians 14:1). He is to follow the things that make for peace and edification (Romans 14:19). He is to follow righteousness, faith, charity, and peace (2 Timothy 2:22). That means the Christian life is meant to be directional, purposeful, and constructive. It is not a life of chaos. It is not a life of impulsive reaction. It is a life under holy pursuit.

And those pursuits must be understood rightly. Peace is not compromise with evil. Charity is not spineless sentimentalism. Holiness is not legalistic performance for human applause. They are scriptural realities rooted in the character of God. They are to be followed because they reflect the One we claim to know. A believer who pursues them is not becoming weak. He is becoming stable. He is not becoming shallow. He is becoming useful. He is not becoming compromised. He is becoming Christlike.

So the question for this chapter is plain. What are you pursuing in your actual daily walk. Are you following after peace, or feeding contention. Are you following after charity, or protecting self. Are you following after holiness, or playing games with defilement. Are you following the things that edify, or merely using your tongue and energy to tear down. Mature Christians are known not only by what they reject, but by what they pursue. And in a loud, agitated, self-driven age, a believer who follows peace, charity, and holiness will shine like a steady light in a storm.

## **14 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Follow Not That Which Is Evil**

### **Introduction**

There are some commands in Scripture that come at a man like a knife, short, direct, and without any room for polite evasion. One of them is found in 3 John 11: "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." There is no fog on that verse. No academic haze. No therapeutic padding. No modern ambiguity. The Holy Ghost puts the issue in plain language. Do not follow evil. That means evil is not merely a thing to avoid in the abstract, like some cloud floating in the moral atmosphere. Evil has a trail. Evil has movement. Evil has examples. Evil has influence. Evil has a recruiting power. Evil does not merely exist. It gets followed.

That is one of the devil's great methods. He knows that compromise spreads by imitation long before it spreads by formal doctrine. A person watches. Then he tolerates. Then he excuses. Then he copies. Then he defends. Then he becomes an example to somebody else, and the infection keeps moving. Wickedness has an evangelism of its own. Bad examples preach. Corrupt patterns teach. A worldly spirit reproduces itself through admiration and repeated exposure. That is why the Bible does not only tell a saint to avoid becoming evil himself. It warns him not to walk behind evil, not to trail after it, not to take his cues from it, not to let it set the pace of his life.

This makes the study painfully practical because many believers imagine they are safe as long as they themselves have not yet done the outward thing. But the verse reaches deeper than that. It asks, what are you following. Who are you walking behind. What spirit has become normal to you. What voice have you gotten used to hearing. What example are you allowing to shape your steps. A man may say, I have not committed the act. But if he has been steadily following what is evil, he is already being molded by it. So this chapter is about moral separation, not merely from evil as a category, but from evil as a trail. It is about the sobering fact that what a man steadily walks behind will eventually teach his feet where to go.

### **1. Evil Is More Than an Act - It Is a Path**

When the Spirit of God says, "follow not that which is evil" (3 John 11), He is telling you something crucial about the nature of evil. Evil is not only an event. It is a path. It is not merely one wrong deed flashing in a moment. It is a direction men can trail after. That means evil is often cumulative. It develops atmosphere. It gathers habits. It forms patterns. It creates a recognizable way of life. A man may begin by flirting with one little act, but if he

keeps following the thing, it becomes a road. Then the road starts shaping him more than he realizes.

That is why the Bible often describes wickedness in directional terms. Men "follow their pernicious ways" (2 Peter 2:2). They "follow after mischief" (Psalm 119:150). They "follow strong drink" (Isaiah 5:11). They "followed vanity, and became vain" (2 Kings 17:15). Those expressions show that sin is not merely a random accident in a moral universe. It becomes a trail with momentum. Men begin walking behind it, and once they are in motion, the steps start coming easier. The path gets worn. The conscience gets quieter. The thing that once shocked them becomes familiar.

This is why moral separation cannot be reduced to avoiding the final scandal while enjoying the early stages of the road. If evil is a path, then safety requires getting off the path early, not merely hoping to stop before the cliff. A believer who lingers on the trail of evil because he has not yet done the worst thing is already playing the fool. He is standing in the stream and acting surprised that the current is pulling. The Spirit says, do not follow it. Do not take one more step behind it. Do not let it become your normal direction.

## **2. Evil Sets Examples and Recruits Followers**

One of the most sobering things in life is that evil teaches. It teaches by example. It teaches by repetition. It teaches by visibility. It teaches by making wrong look normal through constant exposure. That is why the command in 3 John 11 is not merely personal behavior management. It is a warning about influence. Evil has example-setting power. A man sees somebody cheat and prosper, compromise and stay popular, flirt with sin and still look fine, cut corners and still get applause, and something in the flesh says, maybe that road is not as dangerous as I thought. That is the recruiting power of evil.

Scripture is full of this principle. Jeroboam became the man "which made Israel to sin" because his example set a pattern for a nation. Ahab's wickedness was not isolated; it created a culture of corruption. The false teachers of 2 Peter 2 do not merely destroy themselves. "Many shall follow their pernicious ways" (2 Peter 2:2). That word "many" ought to make you sit up straight. Evil is social. It attracts copycats. It gives permission. It lowers resistance. Once a bad trail is visibly marked out by others, weaker souls are tempted to think the path must be survivable.

That is one reason why a believer must examine not only what he is doing, but who he is learning from. If the example in front of him is crooked, the trail will be crooked. A bad example may not need to preach a sermon. His life is already preaching one. His compromises are a lesson. His looseness is a lesson. His bitterness is a lesson. His vanity is a lesson. His rebellion is a lesson. If you keep walking behind him, sooner or later that

lesson gets into your gait. Evil recruits through example more often than many saints realize.

### **3. Compromise Spreads by Imitation**

Most widespread compromise does not begin with a church voting on an official statement saying, We now intend to depart from God. It spreads by imitation. Somebody relaxes. Somebody softens. Somebody tolerates what used to be resisted. Somebody adopts a worldly spirit and still remains accepted. Somebody introduces a little mixture, and because judgment does not fall instantly, others start relaxing too. Then what once would have been unthinkable becomes discussable. What was discussable becomes acceptable. What was acceptable becomes normal. That is how compromise spreads.

This is why the Bible is so careful about examples. Children imitate parents. Younger believers imitate older ones. Congregations imitate leadership. Churches imitate trends. Friends imitate one another. Social groups share a tone and begin adjusting each other without even speaking directly about it. The old paths are often not abandoned by dramatic public revolt. They are eroded by repeated imitation of small departures. That is why a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (Galatians 5:9). It spreads through quiet contact.

And this is where many Christians show how naive they are. They think if they personally do not feel rebellious, they are safe while sitting under bad examples and soaking in compromised patterns. But repeated exposure dulls resistance. A man begins by saying, I do not approve. Then after enough exposure, he says, Well, it is not my place to judge. Then after more exposure, he says, Everybody has their own way of doing things. Then before long he is doing the very thing he used to wince at. The command is therefore plain: follow not that which is evil. Cut the imitation chain before the rot gets in.

### **4. Evil Desensitizes the Soul**

One of the most dangerous effects of following evil is desensitization. The soul is not made of steel. It adapts to what it repeatedly walks behind. A thing that once struck the conscience like a hammer can become background noise if a believer keeps trailing after it without decisive separation. This is part of the deceitfulness of sin. It not only tempts. It numbs. It does not merely present itself. It familiarizes itself. Then the man who once trembled starts shrugging. He does not have to deny the truth in his creed. He just stops feeling its force in his conscience.

You can see that principle all through Scripture. Lot pitched toward Sodom before he sat in the gate of Sodom. The man did not wake up one morning fully settled in the place. He edged closer. He adapted. He got used to the sights and sounds. Samson did not collapse at one stroke. He kept crossing lines until the boundaries that should have governed him no

longer held him. Israel did not become gross idolaters overnight. They followed after the heathen until what should have horrified them became normal religion. Repetition deadens.

That is exactly why influences matter so much. If you keep feeding on corrupt entertainment, loose companions, vain talkers, sensual voices, bitter examples, worldly spirits, or doctrinally weak leadership, you are not remaining untouched by it. You are being taught. Your soul is learning a new normal. The command in 3 John is not overly strict. It is merciful. God is warning you that the thing you keep walking behind is shaping your nerves. If you do not break from evil, you will eventually stop being startled by it, and when that happens, you are much closer to falling than you think.

### **5. Moral Separation Includes Separation From Influences**

A lot of believers understand moral separation only in terms of the final deed. Do not commit adultery. Do not get drunk. Do not lie. Do not steal. That is true as far as it goes. But 3 John 11 reaches into the realm of influence. "Follow not that which is evil." That means separation includes stepping away from examples, companions, teachings, spirits, and patterns that carry evil in their trail. A man may flatter himself that he is morally clean while he lives on corrupt influences. The verse says he is still in danger because he is following the wrong thing.

That makes separation more searching than many people like. It means you have to ask, What kind of talk am I getting used to. What kind of humor shapes me. What kind of people do I admire. What kind of leadership do I trust. What kind of online voices do I consume. What kind of emotional tone dominates my social world. Is the trail in front of me leading me toward Christlikeness, truth, purity, and sobriety, or toward vanity, looseness, irritation, pride, flesh, and confusion. A believer may keep his hands clean for a while and still be poisoning his heart through the influences he follows.

This is why separation is not pharisaical when done biblically. It is not about building a smug little bunker and congratulating yourself on being stricter than others. It is about understanding that influences teach. Trails shape feet. Repeated exposure leaves marks. So a wise saint practices separation not only from obvious evil acts, but from evil influences that tend to form him into something he should not become. He is not being paranoid. He is being sober. He knows what he steadily walks behind will eventually affect how he walks.

### **6. Good Must Be Chosen, Not Just Evil Rejected**

The verse does not stop with the negative. "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good" (3 John 11). That is essential. If a man only thinks in terms of rejecting evil,

he may wind up empty, stiff, suspicious, and reactionary without ever becoming fruitful. The Christian life is not built on negation alone. It is directional. The answer to evil is not merely stopping one set of footsteps. It is taking up another set. Once a man turns from the evil trail, he must deliberately walk after what is good.

This keeps separation from becoming merely brittle. A believer is not called to spend his whole life glaring at corruption and defining himself by disgust. He is called to pursue what is good. That means he must find godly examples, sound doctrine, holy habits, truthful speech, pure affections, useful labors, edifying relationships, and Christlike patterns and actively walk behind them. The soul cannot remain in a vacuum. The Lord knows that. So He tells us not only what to flee, but what to follow. Good must become a chosen direction.

That is one reason why people who only major on exposing evil without cultivating good often become warped. They may be right in many of their criticisms, but because they do not positively follow what is good, they become bitter, harsh, sterile, suspicious, and unfruitful. The Bible way is different. Reject evil. Follow good. Separate from corruption. Attach yourself to righteousness. Refuse bad examples. Seek out godly ones. That is healthy Christianity. It is not merely anti-evil. It is pro-good under the authority of the Lord.

## **7. What a Man Walks Behind Shapes His Step**

At the end of the matter, this whole study comes down to one solemn fact: what a man steadily walks behind will eventually shape his step. He may think he is just observing. He may think he is only listening. He may think he is strong enough to stay unaffected. But if he keeps following a trail, the rhythm of that trail gets into him. That is true for good and for evil. Walk behind godly patterns long enough, and they leave marks of steadiness, humility, and truth. Walk behind evil long enough, and it leaves marks of looseness, vanity, compromise, and hardness.

This is why parents ought to tremble over what their children are following. This is why young believers ought to be careful who they admire. This is why churches ought to test leaders. This is why saints ought to guard their influences with sobriety. The feet do not remain neutral forever. They begin to match the trail. The speech begins to take on the accent of what is followed. The reactions begin to mirror the spirit of the examples in front. The conscience begins to accommodate the pace. Before long the man is not merely observing evil. He is walking in its style.

So the pastoral warning is simple and sharp. Examine your influences. Examine your examples. Examine your admired voices. Examine your chosen company. Examine not only your visible conduct, but the trail your soul has been getting used to. If the thing in front of you is evil, do not keep telling yourself you can trail it safely. The Holy Ghost says no. Follow

not that which is evil. Get off the path. Change your company. Reject the pattern. Find the good trail and take it before the evil one shapes you into something you never intended to become.

## **Conclusion**

The command in 3 John 11 is mercifully plain: "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." That verse exposes evil not merely as a deed to avoid, but as a trail to refuse. Evil has influence. Evil sets examples. Evil recruits followers. Evil normalizes itself through repetition and exposure. Evil has a way of making compromise look survivable and corruption look ordinary. A man who keeps walking behind it may not fall all at once, but he is being taught by it whether he admits it or not.

That is why moral separation must include influence separation. The believer must not only avoid doing evil in the final outward sense. He must also break from the examples, companions, voices, and patterns that carry evil in their trail. What he steadily walks behind will shape his step. What he repeatedly hears will train his ear. What he keeps admiring will begin to mold his affections. That is true in every area of life, and the Christian ignores it to his own hurt.

So ask yourself honestly, not just what have I done, but what have I been following. What kind of spirit has been schooling me. What examples have been setting my pace. What voices have I gotten used to hearing. What trail am I actually on. The Lord's command is not hard to understand. Do not follow evil. Follow good. And if you find that your feet have already been tracking behind the wrong thing, then stop arguing with the warning and get off the path while there is still light enough to see where to turn.

## **15 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Their Pernicious Ways**

### **Introduction**

One of the most frightening lines in the New Testament is not merely that false teachers exist, but that "many shall follow their pernicious ways" (2 Peter 2:2). Not a few. Not a tiny fringe. Not some barely visible cluster on the edge of the field. Many. That ought to sober any man with enough sense left to fear God. The Holy Ghost is not warning you about a handful of obvious crackpots standing on a street corner wearing signs. He is warning you about religious corruption with mass appeal. He is warning you that destruction often travels under a religious banner, with a Bible in its hand, a smile on its face, and a crowd at

its back. That is the great danger. Error does not need to look satanic when it can look spiritual.

The flesh has this childish idea that false teaching will always announce itself with a pitchfork and a sulfur smell. But the Bible says otherwise. False teachers are successful because they do not come looking like villains in a dime-store comic book. They come with freedom, novelty, personality, education, secret knowledge, healing claims, prosperity promises, mystical experiences, therapeutic language, intellectual pride, or sensual license. They know how to flatter. They know how to create dependence. They know how to scratch what people already itch to hear. They do not usually gather followers by open persecution. They gather them through seduction. They tell people what they want to hear badly enough that the victims start calling the seducer a liberator.

That is why this chapter must hit hard. There is a madness in the human heart that keeps assuming numbers prove truth. Men see a crowd and imagine they are seeing safety. They see followers and imagine they are seeing validity. They see growth and imagine they are seeing God's blessing. But 2 Peter 2:2 destroys that lie in one blow. Many shall follow their pernicious ways. That means traffic proves nothing except that a road is crowded. The broad road still has the heaviest traffic, and the way to destruction is still popular. This study is about false teachers, apostasy, and the chilling fact that corrupt doctrine can spread faster by flattery than truth spreads by faithfulness.

### **1. Pernicious Ways Travel Under a Religious Banner**

The first thing to understand is that Peter is not describing open paganism alone. He is talking about false teachers among the people. He says, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you" (2 Peter 2:1). Mark that word "among." They are not always outside. They are among. They arise in religious settings. They use the language of faith. They often work from inside the visible circle of God's people. Their danger is not only that they are wrong. It is that they are wrong in places where people expect truth.

Then Peter says they "privily shall bring in damnable heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). That is how this thing works. Privily. Secretly. Craftily. Quietly. Corruption is slipped in under cover, not always blasted over a trumpet at first. The heresy comes wearing familiar language. It comes through subtle shifts, altered emphases, soft corruptions, and flattering distortions. The teacher does not usually begin by saying, I am here to damn your soul. He begins by sounding thoughtful, compassionate, balanced, liberated, scholarly, or fresh. He smuggles poison in through a respected gate.

That is why a religious banner can be more dangerous than an openly pagan one. Most believers know enough to be wary when a drunkard tells them how to live. They are less wary when a smiling Bible teacher, a popular preacher, a charismatic conference speaker, or a best-selling author starts speaking smooth things. The danger is not that evil hides its evil entirely. The danger is that it mixes enough truth-shaped language with its lies that unstable souls lower their guard. Pernicious ways do not require a satanic costume. A church suit will do nicely.

## **2. False Teachers Gather Many, Not Few**

Peter does not leave room for the flattering assumption that broad influence equals divine approval. He says, "And many shall follow their pernicious ways" (2 Peter 2:2). That one line ought to cure a saint forever of measuring truth by popularity. Many follow. Many are drawn. Many are persuaded. Many are impressed. Many are swept along. That means sheer numbers are a worthless gauge of truth. A road may be crowded because it appeals to fallen nature, not because God is on it. The devil has always been able to gather a multitude when he tells men what they would prefer to believe.

You see the same principle all through Scripture. The false prophets in Ahab's day outnumbered Micaiah four hundred to one. The crowd in Noah's day had the whole world on its side and was still wrong. The broad road in Matthew 7 has "many" on it, while the narrow way has "few" that find it (Matthew 7:13-14). So when Peter says many shall follow pernicious ways, he is not giving an anomaly. He is stating a recurring law. Error with fleshly appeal gathers crowds faster than truth that demands repentance.

That means a Christian must learn to resist the pressure of visible momentum. A movement may be expanding, a teacher may be trending, a ministry may be exploding, a conference may be packed, a channel may be growing, and none of that proves one blessed thing about whether the doctrine is sound. Crowds gather for corruption all the time. Hell will be heavily populated, and nobody with a Bible should therefore conclude hell is right. Many follow pernicious ways because many prefer lies that flatter them to truth that judges them.

## **3. False Teachers Sell Freedom While Producing Bondage**

One of the devil's slickest sales pitches is freedom. Peter later says of these false teachers, "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption" (2 Peter 2:19). There you have the fraud laid bare. They promise liberty. They market release, expansion, enlightenment, new horizons, breaking old restraints, getting beyond narrowness, overcoming old limits. But the men making the promise are themselves

enslaved. That is always the way with false freedom. It offers liberty from God's restraints and hands the victim over to another master.

This is one reason pernicious ways are so attractive. Fallen man resents limits. He does not like to be told no. He does not like hard lines, narrow gates, old paths, holy boundaries, or plain commandments. So when a false teacher comes saying, You have misunderstood Christianity, it is broader than you thought, freer than you thought, softer than you thought, more affirming than you thought, less restrictive than you feared, the flesh sighs with relief. The old man thinks he has found a gospel roomy enough for his lusts. He calls it liberty because it frees him from conviction.

But the liberty is a fraud. It always is. Men think they are escaping old strictness, and they wind up chained to sensuality, vanity, compromise, pride, or doctrinal delusion. The restraint they rejected was from God. The liberty they embraced was from corruption. A man who walks away from holy boundaries does not become neutral. He comes under another power. So false teachers can build large followings by advertising freedom while quietly leading people deeper into slavery. That is why their ways are pernicious. They kill while smiling.

#### **4. Novelty, Secret Knowledge, and Intellectual Pride Attract the Flesh**

Another reason many follow corrupt doctrine is that it flatters the mind. False teaching often comes dressed as fresh insight, deeper revelation, secret knowledge, scholarly superiority, or a key that ordinary Christians supposedly missed for centuries. That kind of thing intoxicates proud people. They love to feel they have gotten beyond the simple old truth known by the faithful saints who walked before them. They like being in on what others do not know. They enjoy the sensation of being advanced, awakened, or unusually enlightened.

Paul warns about this in various ways when he speaks of "science falsely so called" (1 Timothy 6:20), and when he warns about men "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). Peter himself says unstable souls are enticed. False teachers know how to bait pride. They tell people they are not merely believers now. They are insiders. They have the code. They have the key. They have seen through what lesser minds missed. That is a powerful seduction because the flesh would often rather feel clever than be holy.

That is why corrupt doctrine often spreads among religious intellectuals as easily as among sensual worldlings. One man is seduced through lust. Another through pride. One wants license. Another wants superiority. But both are being led by the same devil. The false teacher is glad to offer whichever bait fits the appetite. If a man will not bite on sensual

liberty, perhaps he will bite on intellectual vanity. If he will not be lured by pleasure, perhaps he will be lured by sophistication. Pernicious ways have more than one hook.

## **5. Personality Often Works Better Than Persecution**

The devil has learned that in many settings charm does more damage than open attack. A smiling deceiver can lead people farther from truth than a snarling persecutor because the church expects the persecutor to be an enemy. The deceiver gets invited in. He gets a platform. He gets trust. He gets sympathy. He gets introduced as a blessing. False teachers often rise not because they are obviously frightening, but because they are attractive. They have personality. They have style. They know how to read people. They know when to sound broken, when to sound bold, when to sound compassionate, and when to sound scholarly.

This is why so many are carried away. They do not follow the doctrine first. They follow the man. Then because they are emotionally attached to the personality, they begin excusing the doctrine. The face gains loyalty before the content is weighed. Once that emotional bond is formed, correction becomes very difficult because the victim no longer hears the issues cleanly. Everything now feels personal. The teacher may be refuted from ten directions, but the follower says, I know his heart. That is one of the strongest chains false religion forges.

Spiritual flattery works especially well in such situations. False teachers know how to make followers feel seen, affirmed, special, chosen, mature, awake, or spiritually elite. They stroke the ego while poisoning the mind. Open persecution would drive some believers to the truth, but flattery lulls them to sleep in error. So the church must learn that wolves do not always growl. Many of them grin. And the grin can be more deadly than the growl because it lowers the sheep's defenses before the bite comes.

## **6. Sensual License and Covetousness Fuel Apostasy**

Peter's description of false teachers is earthy and ugly because false doctrine is often connected to moral corruption. He speaks of them "through the lust of the flesh, through much wantonness" (2 Peter 2:18). He says they have "eyes full of adultery" (2 Peter 2:14). He says "through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you" (2 Peter 2:3). There it is. Lust and greed. Two of the strongest engines in religious corruption. A man wants either indulgence or gain, and false teaching provides a cloak for both.

That is why so many strange doctrines wind up relaxing moral boundaries or exploiting people's wallets. The heart behind the teaching is not clean, and the teaching eventually reflects the appetites driving it. If a man is ruled by lust, he will gravitate toward a doctrine roomy enough to excuse lust. If he is ruled by greed, he will bend religion into a

marketplace. Many follow because many have those same appetites. The teacher and the crowd fit each other. One wants to sell corruption. The other wants to buy it.

This is a harsh truth, but it must be said. A great deal of apostasy spreads not because people are confused only, but because people are hungry for a lie that will justify what they already wanted. They "heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:3). The itching ear finds the tongue that knows how to scratch it. So the popularity of false teaching is not proof that the teachers are skillful alone. It is also proof that the audience is willing. Pernicious ways draw many because many secretly prefer a religion that will let them keep their idols.

## **7. The Broad Road Is Still Crowded**

The final warning is this: do not ever measure truth by how many people are walking in it. That mistake will ruin you. The Lord Jesus Christ said the broad way leadeth to destruction, "and many there be which go in thereat" (Matthew 7:13). Peter says many follow pernicious ways (2 Peter 2:2). The pattern is consistent. Wide roads collect traffic. Flesh-friendly doctrine gathers numbers. Soft preaching fills rooms. Comfortable lies draw crowds. If your spiritual instincts are trained by crowd size, you will be vulnerable to almost every large-scale deception the devil sends through the visible church.

This is one reason God's people must grow content with being outnumbered when the Book is clear. Noah was outnumbered. Micaiah was outnumbered. Elijah was outnumbered. Jeremiah was outnumbered. Paul was outnumbered. Truth often looks lonely in the earth because it does not flatter the flesh. That does not mean every small group is right simply because it is small. It means bigness proves nothing. The deciding factor is not traffic. It is truth. The sheep must be taught to recognize the Shepherd's voice even when the herd is stampeding the other way.

So when you see many following a pernicious way, do not let the sight of the crowd shake your confidence in Scripture. Let it confirm Scripture. The Book told you this would happen. Corrupt doctrine under a religious banner will attract many. That is not a sign the Bible failed. It is a sign the Bible told the truth beforehand. The duty of the believer is not to count heads. It is to stay on the right road even if that road is less crowded and less celebrated than the one with the lights, the smoke, the promises, and the roaring applause.

## **Conclusion**

The warning in 2 Peter 2 is one of the most necessary warnings in the New Testament because it tells the truth about religious deception without softening it. False teachers arise among the people. They secretly bring in destructive error. They promise liberty while serving corruption. They mix lust, greed, flattery, and false doctrine into a poisonous brew,

and many follow their pernicious ways. That means apostasy is not always fringe madness. Sometimes it is mainstream religion with broad appeal and smooth presentation.

The believer must therefore learn to distrust the easy arguments of popularity. Many follow is not proof of truth. Many follow is sometimes proof of seduction. Error is not measured by how many walk in it. If that were the measure, the broad road would be holy. But it is not holy. It is crowded. The issue is not traffic. It is destination. The issue is not size. It is soundness. The issue is not whether the teacher is popular, polished, freeing, exciting, intelligent, or prosperous. The issue is whether he is true.

So let this chapter leave a mark where it ought to. Examine the voices you hear. Examine the teachers you trust. Examine the reasons people are attracted to them. Ask whether the appeal is truth, or flattery. Holiness, or license. Christ, or personality. Scripture, or novelty. The broad road still has the heaviest traffic, and many still follow pernicious ways. But the sheep of Christ are not called to count the crowd. They are called to hear the Shepherd and refuse the smiling road to destruction, no matter how many fellow travelers are on it.

## **16 of 20: What Do You Follow? - The Things That Follow Believers**

### **Introduction**

Up to this point in the series, we have been looking mostly at what men follow. We have traced the roads they choose, the voices they obey, the examples they imitate, the gods they chase, the truths they embrace, and the lies they run after. But now the study turns a corner, and it turns a rich one. The Bible does not only speak about what a man follows. It also speaks about what follows him. That is one of the profound things about life in Scripture. A man is not only a traveler on a path. He is also a trail-maker. He leaves something behind him. He carries consequences in his wake. His road produces a shadow, and that shadow says something about the road he has been on.

That is why this subject is so searching. A man may spend all his energy asking, What am I pursuing, and that is a good question. But another question presses right behind it. What is pursuing me. What is trailing after me. What kind of wake is my life leaving. Scripture says, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Psalm 23:6). It says of the dead in the Lord, "their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13). It says, "these signs shall follow them that believe" (Mark 16:17). And it also says, "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after" (1 Timothy 5:24). There is the whole doctrine in seed form. Some things follow a man in blessing. Some

things follow him in testimony. Some things follow him in evidence. Some things follow him in judgment.

That means life leaves a trail whether a man thinks about it or not. No one lives in a vacuum. No one walks through this world without consequences, impressions, effects, fruits, and remnants moving behind him. Some leave behind peace, help, strength, usefulness, truth, and the savor of Christ. Others leave confusion, debt, compromise, brokenness, scandal, corruption, and sins that keep marching after them long after they imagined the thing was over. This chapter is a hinge point in the series because it shows that every path produces a wake. What follows a man says something about what he has been following all along. You can learn much about a road by looking at what trails behind the traveler.

### **1. Life Always Leaves a Wake**

One of the great illusions of human nature is that a man can live to himself and leave nothing behind but memories in his own head. The Bible crushes that illusion. Scripture presents life as something with moral momentum. It does not stop where a man stops. It does not vanish when he changes the subject. It does not disappear because he quits thinking about it. A man's words, works, habits, sins, and acts of obedience travel farther than he imagines. He is not merely passing through the world. He is marking it as he goes. And what follows him often reveals more than what he claims about himself.

This is why the biblical language of "follow" becomes so powerful in this part of the study. It tells you that consequences are not always immediate, but they are often mobile. They move. They come after. They linger. They remain in view. A man's life is not a set of isolated snapshots. It is a line, a trail, a movement, and the things in that movement often continue behind him. Goodness and mercy follow. Works follow. Sins follow. Signs follow. A believer is not just making isolated choices. He is laying down tracks that something else will travel on.

That should produce sobriety in every saint. You may walk away from a conversation, a decision, a season, a habit, a compromise, a labor, or an obedience, but that does not mean the thing is finished. It may be following you. It may still be speaking after you have gone silent. It may still be bearing witness after you have moved on. It may still be preparing either blessing or trouble in your wake. The Christian must learn that his life is trail-making life. Something is following him now.

### **2. Goodness and Mercy Follow the Shepherded Saint**

Psalm 23:6 is one of the sweetest verses in all the Book: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Notice the direction. David does not say he will chase

goodness and mercy as though he must outrun a curse and try to catch grace before it vanishes. He says goodness and mercy shall follow him. That means the man who is under the shepherding care of the Lord leaves one trail and is accompanied by another. While he walks under the Shepherd's leading, goodness and mercy stay on his track. They are not random accidents. They are covenantal companions.

That does not mean the saint never suffers. Psalm 23 includes dark valleys, enemies, and hostile surroundings. But even there goodness and mercy follow him. The Lord's shepherding care produces a wake of divine kindness and faithful compassion. The believer may not always recognize it in the moment, but later he can look back and see that goodness was there and mercy was there. The Shepherd had been behind him as well as before him. That is one of the most comforting truths in Scripture. The child of God does not just walk under present grace. He is followed by it.

And there is another layer to it. If goodness and mercy follow the saint, then the saint's life ought also to leave behind something touched by that same goodness and mercy. A man who is constantly under the Shepherd's care should begin carrying a shepherded spirit into the lives of others. He ought not leave brutality, cruelty, selfishness, and coldness in his trail if goodness and mercy are following him. This verse is not only comfort. It is also quiet rebuke. If the Lord's goodness and mercy are behind you, they ought to be showing up in what your life leaves behind.

### **3. Signs Follow in a Particular Context**

Mark 16:17 says, "And these signs shall follow them that believe." Now that verse has been abused by every sign-chasing religious circus that ever rented a tent and bought a microphone, so it needs to be handled carefully and rightly. The context is apostolic and transitional. The signs there are related to the confirmation of the message in the early preaching of the kingdom and apostolic witness. Verse 20 says, "the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20). The signs were not the gospel itself. They were confirmatory in that setting.

But even within that context, the wording is instructive for this study. The signs followed. The believers in that passage were not told to obsess over chasing signs. The signs followed the believing and the preached word in that context. That is an important distinction. Men get into a ditch when they reverse the order and begin chasing manifestations instead of following the Lord. Scripture presents the signs as trailing the divine work, not replacing it. The signs were attendants, not masters. They followed the truth being confirmed.

That gives a needed principle even beyond the immediate context. God-ordained evidences follow God-ordained truth. The believer is not called to build life on chasing

phenomena. He is called to trust the Lord and His word. Then what God appoints as evidence in its proper place follows. Carnal religion flips that around. It follows signs, follows wonders, follows sensations, follows emotional spectacle, and winds up off the road. The Book says the signs followed in that context. That is a very different thing from men running after every religious sparkler they see in the dark.

#### **4. Works Follow the Dead in the Lord**

Revelation 14:13 says, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth... that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." There is a depth in that verse that ought to slow a man down. Death does not erase all that a saint has done for the Lord. The body rests. The labor ceases. The saint enters blessedness. But the works follow. That means what was done in the Lord has continuity beyond the grave. It is not lost. It is not wasted. It is not buried in oblivion. It trails after the saint into the reckoning and remembrance of God.

That should encourage every faithful believer who has served in obscurity, prayed in secret, borne burdens no one praised, given quietly, suffered silently, endured with little applause, and labored where few noticed. The world may forget, churches may forget, families may forget, and history books may never mention the thing, but the works follow. God does not drop the trail. He sees it. He records it. He carries it forward. A believer's life in Christ is not a vapor in the sense of uselessness. What is done for the Lord has a following quality. It stays in view with God.

And that also makes life more serious. If works follow, then the present matters. The believer is not drifting through a meaningless patch of time until heaven arrives. His obedience now lays down a trail that follows after him. His service, sacrifice, witness, truthfulness, and labor all matter. They are not the cause of his salvation, but they are not nothing. The world says only what can be seen now is real. The Book says works follow beyond the seen realm. A saint should live with that kind of eternal gravity.

#### **5. Sins Follow After to Judgment**

Now the other side of the matter comes like a hammer. 1 Timothy 5:24 says, "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after." There is the dark side of the doctrine. Not everything erupts immediately. Some sins go before a man. They are obvious, public, visible, and already exposing him. Other sins follow after. They are not immediately seen. They trail behind. They move in delayed consequence. They catch up. The man may imagine the matter is buried, but the Book says it can still be following.

That verse should cure a lot of foolishness. Many people think because judgment or exposure is not immediate, there is no danger. They mistake delay for safety. They assume time has erased the thing. But time does not erase what God still sees. Some sins are like noisy heralds running out front. Others are like trackers coming behind. In either case, they are headed toward judgment. The form differs, but the issue does not. Sin has legs. It has memory. It has consequence. It follows.

This is why a believer must not play games with hidden compromise. He may tell himself nobody knows, nothing has happened yet, I have moved on, it is behind me. Scripture says some sins follow after. That means what is "behind" him may actually be behind him in the sense of trailing him, not in the sense of being gone. The only safe answer to sin is confession, cleansing, forsaking, and the mercy of God through Jesus Christ. Playing for time is not repentance. Hiding is not victory. Some sins follow after, and they do not get tired.

## **6. What Follows a Man Reveals What Led Him**

Here is one of the richest truths in this entire chapter: what follows a man often tells you what has been leading him. If goodness and mercy follow him, that says something about the Shepherd before him. If works follow him, that says something about the life of labor and obedience he lived. If sins follow after, that says something about the compromises, lusts, and hidden trails he tolerated. In other words, the wake interprets the path. What is trailing a man often reveals what has been governing his steps all along.

That is why this chapter serves as such a hinge in the series. We have been asking, What do you follow. Now we ask, What follows you. But the two questions are not really separate. They belong together. If a man follows Christ, sooner or later certain things begin following him: evidences of grace, the Shepherd's goodness, works of faith, traces of mercy, fruit of obedience. If a man follows vanity, lust, corruption, compromise, and self-will, then other things begin following him: emptiness, wounds, scandal, bitterness, delayed consequences, exposed sins, broken trust. The wake is connected to the path.

This means a Christian must learn to read his own trail honestly. What sort of thing tends to follow in the wake of your life. Do people get helped, steadied, and strengthened, or are they left confused and wounded. Does your labor leave behind something that will follow you with joy, or are there sins still dragging at your heels. Are goodness and mercy visible, or are you leaving smoke, wreckage, and debts behind you. The answer to those questions says a lot about what has been leading you.

## **7. The Christian Should Live Wake-Conscious**

Most people live only front-conscious. They think about what they want next, what they feel now, what they are chasing today, what is ahead of them, what they hope to gain. Very few live wake-conscious. Very few ask, What is trailing behind me because of the way I am walking. But this study teaches that the believer should. He should be sober enough to understand that every season lays down something in his wake. Every road produces followers of some kind. Every path creates aftereffects. That should govern the way he lives.

A wake-conscious Christian will pray differently. He will labor differently. He will repent faster. He will choose influences more carefully. He will think harder before following some path just because it looks attractive in the moment. He will realize that roads do not end where feelings change. He will know that what he does now may still be following him long after the present excitement or temptation has faded. That kind of sobriety is not fear in the wrong sense. It is wisdom. It is living with a sense of moral continuity before God.

And positively, it will also encourage him to be faithful in small things. Why. Because works follow. Goodness and mercy follow. The Lord does not waste obedience. A cup of cold water given in His name is not lost. A hidden prayer is not lost. A quiet labor is not lost. A faithful witness is not lost. The saint who lives wake-conscious begins to understand that both the comforts and the warnings of Scripture are true. What follows a man matters. Therefore how he walks matters.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter turns the word study in a beautiful and sobering direction. Scripture does not only speak of what men follow. It also speaks of what follows them. Goodness and mercy follow the shepherded saint (Psalm 23:6). Signs followed in a particular context as God confirmed His word (Mark 16:17, 20). Works follow the dead in the Lord (Revelation 14:13). Sins follow after to judgment (1 Timothy 5:24). That means life is never merely forward motion. It is trail-making motion. Every path leaves a wake.

That should comfort the believer and warn him at the same time. It comforts him because the Lord's goodness and mercy are not imaginary. They are abiding companions. His labor in the Lord is not wasted. His works are not thrown into some cosmic trash heap. But it warns him because sin is not easily dismissed, hidden compromise is not harmless, and consequences are not always immediate. Some things follow after. Some things keep walking behind a man until God's time for reckoning arrives.

So the question at this hinge-point in the series is unforgettable if you let it sink in. What follows you. What kind of wake is your life leaving. What would someone see if they looked not only at where you are headed, but at what is traveling behind you because of the road

you have chosen. The answer to that question says more than many people want to admit. Because what follows a man says something about what he has been following all along.

## **17 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Followed Every Good Work**

### **Introduction**

One of the great problems in modern Christianity is that good works are either abused or ignored. On one side you have religious legalists who turn works into a ladder to heaven, as if a sinner could climb into the favor of God by sweat, ritual, morality, and church activity. On the other side you have careless professing believers who hear salvation by grace and then treat good works like an optional hobby, a little spiritual garnish to sprinkle over life if time permits. Both crowds are wrong, and both are out of line with the New Testament. The Bible is crystal clear that salvation is not by works. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). But the same Bible is just as clear that the saved man is created unto good works. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). That means works do not save the saint, but they most certainly ought to mark the saint.

That is why 1 Timothy 5:10 is such a striking verse. Speaking of a godly woman, the Spirit says she must be "well reported of for good works," and then ends that verse with the phrase, "if she have diligently followed every good work" (1 Timothy 5:10). Those words ought to stop a man cold. They do not describe good works as random eruptions of niceness that happen whenever a believer stumbles into an opportunity by accident. They describe a direction. A pursuit. A pattern. A habit of heart. She did not merely do a few nice things once in a while. She diligently followed every good work. That means good works had become a trail she consciously pursued. Her life was not interrupted by service occasionally. Her life had a bent toward service.

That is the burden of this chapter. Real Christian service is intentional, habitual, and rooted in a transformed heart. It is not dead formalism, where a man goes through mechanical motions to impress others or ease his conscience. And it is not lazy passivity, where a man imagines that good intentions count for actual obedience. The Holy Ghost shows us a life that diligently followed every good work. That should press every reader with a searching question: are good works occasional interruptions in your life, or are they a direction you actually follow with seriousness? Do you merely approve of service in theory, or do your feet regularly move in that path?

## **1. Good Works Are Not the Root of Salvation, But They Are the Fruit of It**

The first thing that must be nailed down hard is the gospel. A sinner is not justified by good works. If he were, then Christ died in vain, grace would not be grace, and boasting would not be excluded. The Bible says, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28). "For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works" (Ephesians 2:8-9). That settles the matter. The man who trusts his service, charity, decency, church attendance, sacrifice, or usefulness to save him is building on sand and heading toward hell with a hymnbook in his hand.

But once that is settled, the pendulum must not swing into carnality. The same passage in Ephesians that says salvation is not of works goes on to say, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). There is the balance. Good works are not the root of salvation, but they are the fruit of salvation. They are not the purchase price of eternal life, but they are the expected outgrowth of spiritual life. A living tree ought to bear something. A new creature in Christ ought to move in some new directions. A man saved by grace should not become careless about service. Grace is not a tranquilizer. It is a life-giver.

That makes 1 Timothy 5:10 so powerful. The woman described there is not being praised because her works earned her salvation. She is being marked as a woman whose life bore evidence of practical godliness. Her service testified to the reality of a transformed life. The same Lord who saves by grace also produces fruit in those He saves. So when Scripture praises one who "diligently followed every good work," it is not smuggling works into the gospel. It is showing you what gospel fruit looks like in daily life.

## **2. Good Works Must Be Followed, Not Merely Admired**

The wording in 1 Timothy 5:10 is deliberate. It does not merely say she appreciated good works, affirmed good works, talked about good works, or liked sermons about good works. It says she "diligently followed every good work." That means there was movement. She went after them. She did not sit back in passive admiration while others served. She did not satisfy herself with occasional emotional stirrings about helping people. She followed the trail of what was good and useful. Service had become a pursuit.

That is exactly where many church people fail. They love the idea of good works in the abstract. They are quick to say amen when somebody preaches on serving others, helping saints, caring for widows, showing hospitality, relieving the afflicted, washing the saints' feet in the practical spirit of humble service. But when the opportunity comes near enough to inconvenience them, suddenly all that admiration evaporates. They love the concept of

service as long as somebody else is doing the serving. They admire good works like spectators admire athletes. They cheer from the stands but never get on the field.

The Holy Ghost is describing something far stronger than that. To follow good works means a man develops a service-instinct under the government of Christ. He begins asking where he can be useful. He notices burdens. He sees needs. He looks for ways to help. He moves toward opportunities rather than around them. That does not mean he becomes a self-righteous activist trying to save the world by his own energy. It means his renewed heart inclines him toward service. Good works are no longer occasional intrusions. They are part of the road he walks.

### **3. Diligence Shows the Difference Between Serious Service and Casual Religion**

The word "diligently" in 1 Timothy 5:10 is not there for decoration. It exposes the difference between serious service and casual religion. Plenty of people will do a good thing when it is easy, visible, appreciated, and fits neatly into their schedule. Far fewer will diligently follow every good work. Diligence means effort, seriousness, constancy, attention, and follow-through. It means the person is not lazy in well doing. It means service is not left to moods. It means doing good is not reserved for the rare day when the weather in the soul happens to feel cooperative.

This is one reason the New Testament keeps pressing believers to "be not weary in well doing" (Galatians 6:9). Doing good is not hard merely because devils oppose it. It is hard because the flesh is lazy, selfish, and easily distracted. The flesh will talk all day about service and avoid lifting a finger. It will applaud sacrifice in others while guarding its own comfort like a dragon sitting on a pile of coins. That is why diligence matters. Diligence says good works are important enough to be pursued even when the flesh would rather sit, scroll, complain, or preserve itself.

You can tell when a believer has understood this because he begins to treat opportunities to do good with gravity. He does not float through life half-awake. He becomes attentive. He knows that lives are burdened, saints are needy, lost men are dying, churches require labor, and real service seldom happens by accident. So he learns to be diligent. He does not merely mean well. He follows through well. In an age full of casual religion, diligence is one of the clearest marks that service has become a real pursuit rather than a verbal ornament.

### **4. Christian Service Is Rooted in a Transformed Heart**

Now if this subject is not handled carefully, somebody will turn it into raw activism or mechanical religious duty. That would miss the heart of the thing. Real Christian service flows from a transformed heart. It is not mere motion. It is not an empty flurry of church activity. It is not the kind of thing a Pharisee does to be seen of men. The woman of 1

Timothy 5:10 was not praised for putting on a performance. Her works were the visible expression of a life touched by grace. The verse lists hospitality, humility, care for the afflicted, and practical ministry to the saints. Those are not glamorous stage acts. They are the works of a heart made tender by God.

That is important because dead formalism can imitate some outward forms of service for a while. A man can hand out something, organize something, host something, or work at something from pride, habit, or the desire for praise. But diligent pursuit of every good work in the biblical sense comes from deeper springs. It comes from charity. It comes from humility. It comes from compassion. It comes from a sense that Christ has loved me, helped me, borne with me, and therefore I ought to be a channel of that same grace to others. Service detached from inward renewal becomes religious machinery.

This is why the Christian must guard his motives while still not using motive-complexity as an excuse to do nothing. Some people become so paralyzed by introspection that they end up serving no one because they are forever examining whether every atom of motivation is perfect. That is another trick of the flesh. The answer is not paralysis. It is walking close enough to Christ that the heart is kept soft, then moving in obedience. A transformed heart will not serve flawlessly, but it will serve sincerely. And sincerity joined with diligence produces a life that actually helps people.

### **5. Good Works Are Often Hidden, Humble, and Uncelebrated**

The works named in 1 Timothy 5:10 are not flashy. "If she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted." That list is a rebuke to the modern obsession with visible ministry glamour. The Holy Ghost chooses simple, practical, often unseen acts of service as examples of a life that diligently followed good works. That tells you where heaven's values lie. God notices what men overlook. The world is impressed with platform. The Lord is impressed with faithfulness.

This means a believer must not define service merely in terms of public ministry. Some of the most Christlike good works are small, quiet, inconvenient acts of mercy, hospitality, burden-bearing, child-rearing, practical care, hidden generosity, and humble labor that never trend, never go viral, and never get applause from the crowd. Yet God sees them, records them, and in some cases builds whole households, churches, and generations through them. The person diligently following good works may not look important in the eyes of religious spectators, but heaven reads the trail differently.

That should both encourage and correct the saint. It should encourage the believer who serves in obscurity and sometimes wonders whether any of it matters. It matters. The Lord

sees it. And it should correct the believer whose idea of service is too bound up with visibility. If he is only eager to do good when it is public, then the flesh has probably gotten into the thing. Real service does not despise public usefulness when the Lord appoints it, but neither does it need a spotlight in order to move. It follows every good work, including the ones no one tweets about.

## **6. Dead Formalism and Careless Passivity Are Both Enemies**

This chapter must guard against two opposite enemies: dead formalism and careless passivity. Dead formalism says, I will perform works mechanically because that is what respectable religious people do. It keeps lists, maintains appearances, and can even become very busy, but its heart is not warm toward Christ or people. It does not serve because it loves. It serves because it has learned how to look useful. That kind of religion is exhausting and cold. It may do certain acts, but it does not truly follow good works from a living inward bent.

Careless passivity is the opposite ditch. It says, I believe in grace, therefore I do not need to be pressed toward practical usefulness. It is content with good intentions, half-formed desires, and warm thoughts about service that never materialize into anything concrete. It imagines that because the Christian is not saved by works, he therefore need not be diligent in them. That is a lie. The same grace that saves also teaches, redirects, and produces fruit. A passive saint may talk a lot about truth and yet leave little actual help behind him because he never gets beyond intention.

The biblical path cuts between both ditches. It is living, diligent, intentional service rooted in grace and shaped by truth. It is not dead machinery, and it is not lazy spirituality. It is the kind of life that has learned to move toward what is useful without needing carnal excitement to get started. It knows works do not justify, but it also knows a justified man ought to be useful. It knows service must be sincere, but it also knows sincerity without action is often just another flattering name for sloth.

## **7. Good Works Should Become a Direction, Not an Exception**

At the heart of 1 Timothy 5:10 is this fact: good works had become a direction. They were not occasional interruptions in the woman's life. They were part of the course she followed. That is what should most search the reader in this chapter. Is good actually a trail you pursue, or is it something you dabble in when the moment happens to be convenient? Do your days have a bent toward usefulness, or are they almost entirely spent preserving comfort, pursuing personal concerns, and making sure your own little world stays undisturbed?

When good works become a direction, a believer begins ordering life differently. He leaves margin for service. He notices where help is needed. He trains his household in usefulness. He sees his resources as tools, not trophies. He understands that the Christian life was not given to him merely for private enjoyment, but also for public and practical usefulness under the Lordship of Christ. He still rests in grace, but grace has put work clothes on him. He is not restless in the flesh. He is purposeful in the Spirit.

That is one of the beautiful marks of maturity. A mature Christian is not merely a person with more Bible information in his head. He is often a person whose life has become more deliberately available to God for good. He becomes easier for the Lord to use because his heart has learned the road of service. He does not need to be begged, bribed, and emotionally manipulated every time something needs to be done. He follows every good work with diligence because that path has become part of his very way of life.

## **Conclusion**

1 Timothy 5:10 gives us one of the strongest phrases in the New Testament on practical Christian service: "diligently followed every good work." That wording lifts good works out of the realm of occasional niceness and places them in the realm of pursued direction. It shows that service is not supposed to be a random event scattered through an otherwise self-centered life. It is meant to be a pattern. A habit. A bent. A road the believer consciously walks because grace has changed his heart and Christ has become his Master.

That does not mean works save. They do not. Salvation is by the blood of Christ and received by faith alone. But the saved man is created unto good works, and the good he does under grace matters. The Lord sees it. The saints feel it. The afflicted are helped by it. The church is strengthened by it. And the testimony of Christ is adorned by it. A life that diligently follows every good work is one of the clearest practical proofs that grace has not made a man lazy. It has made him useful.

So here is the question this chapter leaves in your lap: are good works occasional interruptions in your life, or are they a direction you actually follow with seriousness? Do you merely approve of service, or do your steps keep finding that road? Are you passive, waiting for usefulness to fall into your lap, or diligent, asking the Lord to make you fruitful? The woman of 1 Timothy 5 did not become a memorable example because she had strong opinions about good works. She became one because she followed them. And that is the difference between admiring the path and walking it.

## **18 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Following Cunningly Devised Fables**

### **Introduction**

One of the great marks of the last days is not merely open unbelief, but sophisticated deception. The devil does not always come at a man with a naked denial of God. Very often he comes with a story. A theory. A tale. A secret history. A hidden key. A deep narrative. A clever explanation. Something old enough to sound ancient, strange enough to sound profound, and complicated enough to make the simple truth of God look embarrassingly plain by comparison. That is why Peter says, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables" (2 Peter 1:16). He knew the danger was not only lies in their crude form. The danger was lies put together with craft. Lies engineered. Lies designed. Lies dressed with enough skill to make fools think they are hearing wisdom.

That phrase, "cunningly devised fables," is one of the most revealing descriptions in the New Testament. A fable is not just a harmless children's tale. In the biblical sense, it is a fabricated narrative, a humanly constructed story, something imaginative and misleading that competes with revealed truth. And Peter says such things are not merely devised, but cunningly devised. That means they are built with art, calculation, and intent. They are made to appeal. They are designed to catch attention. They are formed to stir curiosity, flatter pride, awaken fear, and produce the delicious feeling that the listener has stumbled onto secret light hidden from ordinary people. That is why fables are so dangerous. They do not ask a man simply to sin. They invite him to feel enlightened while remaining disobedient.

This chapter matters because many people imagine discernment consists merely in publicly denouncing lies. But a man can denounce a falsehood with his mouth and still follow it with his imagination, fears, emotional energy, and assumptions. He can say, I know that is not true, and still let it govern the way he interprets life. He can mock a fable in public and then privately live in the atmosphere it creates. That is not discernment. Discernment is not merely exposing lies. It is refusing to walk after them. It is refusing to let a cunningly devised narrative become the lens through which you think, fear, react, and move. Peter's warning takes us right into that battlefield.

### **1. Fables Are Stories Built to Compete With Revelation**

Peter says, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:16). That tells you immediately what a fable tries to do. It competes with revealed truth. It offers another narrative, another framework, another explanation, another imagined reality to stand beside or over the plain word of God. Peter is saying in effect, what we preached to you

about Christ was not some religious story men invented to give themselves purpose or power. It was truth. It came from eyewitness testimony and prophetic Scripture. It did not arise from man's clever imagination.

That is the fundamental distinction. Revelation comes from God. Fables come from men and devils using men. Revelation is given. Fables are devised. Revelation is received in faith. Fables are constructed to manipulate. Revelation tells the truth whether men like it or not. Fables are tailored to make error attractive enough to gain followers. This is why the Bible keeps warning about them. Paul says to Timothy, "Neither give heed to fables" (1 Timothy 1:4). Again he says, "refuse profane and old wives' fables" (1 Timothy 4:7). Then again, men "shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:4). The danger runs throughout the New Testament.

What makes the thing so serious is that fables often do not present themselves as competitors to truth at first. They may present themselves as supplements, hidden layers, recovered secrets, missing pieces, or interpretive keys. But once a man begins trusting them more than the Book, they become governing narratives in his mind. And then the plain truth of Scripture starts to feel small to him because his imagination has been captured by a larger, more elaborate story. That is one of the devil's favorite tricks. He does not always deny the Book outright. Sometimes he simply gives a man another storyline he likes more.

## **2. Cunningly Devised Means Intelligently Engineered**

The phrase "cunningly devised" matters. Peter does not say fables are always crude, childish, or easy to spot. He says they are crafted. Engineered. Arranged. Put together with skill. That means a lie can be sophisticated. It can have structure, historical references, symbols, emotional power, intellectual appeal, and even partial facts woven into it. The devil is not lazy. He knows how to take fragments of truth, mix them with speculation, add some fear, some pride, some mystery, some indignation, and produce a narrative strong enough to capture unstable minds.

That is why many intelligent people get caught in nonsense. Intelligence alone is no defense when pride and curiosity are in the driver's seat. A cunning lie flatters the hearer by making him feel sharper than ordinary believers who simply trust the plain words of God. It whispers, You see what others missed. You have gone deeper. You are not one of the simple ones anymore. You know what is really going on. That kind of seduction is powerful because the flesh loves feeling superior. It would often rather feel advanced than be obedient.

And this is why ancientness does not prove truth either. A fable can be old and still be false. A lie can survive centuries. A myth can gather prestige simply because generations passed

it around. People talk as though antiquity itself confers authority. It does not. Some old things are true because God said them. Other old things are just old lies. The age of the fable does not cleanse it. What matters is whether it agrees with the words of God. A lie with wrinkles is still a lie.

### **3. Fables Appeal to the Flesh by Offering Enlightenment Without Holiness**

One reason fables are so attractive is that they let men feel spiritually and intellectually stimulated without requiring submission to God. That is one of their most seductive traits. A man can get intoxicated on speculation, theory, narrative, hidden meanings, coded patterns, and shadowy explanations and still remain untouched in his actual walk with God. He can feel awake, informed, and deeper than others while his prayer life is dead, his obedience is weak, his charity is shallow, and his holiness is neglected. The fable has done its work. It has flattered his mind while leaving his heart unbroken.

This is exactly the opposite of how the truth of God works. The truth humbles. The truth sanctifies. The truth exposes. The truth calls for repentance, faith, obedience, sobriety, and trembling. Jesus said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The word of God does not merely entertain curiosity. It cleanses. It cuts. It orders the soul. But fables can make a man feel lit up without being cleaned up. They can give him a sense of being in the know while he remains practically carnal. That is why the flesh loves them.

This also explains why some people are endlessly fascinated by speculative things while showing little appetite for plain Bible duties. They can spend hours discussing hidden narratives, secret schemes, shadow histories, and elaborate possibilities, but grow impatient when the conversation turns to prayer, forgiveness, holiness, doctrine, gospel preaching, charity, purity, or the fear of God. That imbalance is a warning sign. It shows the imagination has been fed while the conscience has been starved. A man may call that discernment. Scripture calls it danger if it becomes his trail.

### **4. A Man Can Publicly Denounce a Lie and Still Follow It Practically**

This is where the matter gets especially piercing. Many people assume that because they can identify or denounce a falsehood, they are therefore free of its power. Not necessarily. A man can expose a fable verbally and still follow it practically if it governs the atmosphere of his thinking. If it controls his fears, assumptions, interpretations, reactions, and mental habits more than Scripture does, then he is still walking behind it. His mouth may be ahead of his feet. He may have the right denunciation while his inner life is still governed by the wrong narrative.

That is why discernment must go deeper than verbal criticism. The real question is not only, Can you argue against the lie. The real question is, Have you stopped walking in its shadow.

Suppose a man says, I know that theory is false, but he keeps interpreting every event through it, keeps living under the emotional pressure it creates, keeps feeding on its ecosystem, keeps treating it as the controlling backdrop of reality, and keeps talking as though the word of God must now be filtered through it. Then however loudly he denounces it, it still has him by the imagination.

The Christian must therefore judge not only what he says publicly, but what narrative has practical control over his mind. What framework rules your fears. What storyline sets your expectations. What explanation of the world governs your emotional reactions. If it is not grounded in Scripture, then you may be following a fable in practice even while criticizing it in speech. The Lord wants truth in the inward parts, not just correct slogans on the lips.

### **5. Fables Often Grow Strongest Where the Plain Truth Is Neglected**

Paul says there comes a time when men "will not endure sound doctrine" and "shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). That tells you the soil in which fables thrive. They flourish where sound doctrine has become unwelcome. Men do not usually turn to fables while delighting in the full weight of biblical truth. They turn to fables when the plain Book has started feeling too narrow, too searching, too ordinary, too direct, too demanding, or too unfashionable for their taste. Once the appetite for sound doctrine declines, the appetite for narrative stimulation rises.

That is why a church weak in doctrine becomes vulnerable to every imaginative wind that blows through. If the people are not being grounded in the words of God, they will eventually start craving something else. The human mind and heart do not remain empty. If they are not fed with truth, they will start grazing on speculation. If they are not grounded in revelation, they will float toward invention. And if their teachers do not give them doctrine, somebody else will gladly give them stories. The appetite of the people determines much of what gets power among them.

This also applies privately. A believer who neglects the Scriptures but constantly feeds on theories, narratives, and speculative frameworks is setting himself up for confusion. The mind takes its shape from its diet. If the plain words of God become a small part of what feeds you, while fable-like material becomes a large part, then the fable will start feeling more vivid, more interesting, and more emotionally compelling than the truth. And once that happens, discernment weakens badly. Sound doctrine must remain central or the imagination will become a playground for deception.

### **6. The Answer to Fables Is Not Ignorance, but Scriptural Government**

Now the answer to deception is not to become stupid or uninterested in the world around you. Scripture does not call the believer to naivety. It calls him to sobriety. It calls him to

judge everything by the Book. Peter does not say, We ignored all hard questions. He says, "we have not followed cunningly devised fables" (2 Peter 1:16), and then immediately points to eyewitness testimony and "a more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:19). In other words, the answer to fabricated stories is not mental laziness. It is submission to divine revelation.

This is important because some people react to deception by becoming proud of how much they know, while others react by giving up on all serious thought and hiding in anti-intellectual passivity. Neither response is healthy. The Christian is to be awake, discerning, thoughtful, and alert, but governed by Scripture. He is to test claims, weigh narratives, and judge voices, but always with the understanding that the final authority rests in what God has said. He does not need to know every hidden thing men speculate about. He needs to know the truth well enough that deception loses its glamour.

And that means the mind must be brought under discipline. Not every thought deserves lodging. Not every theory deserves hours of meditation. Not every narrative deserves emotional investment. The saint must learn to ask, Does this help me obey God. Does this align with the plain word of God. Does this increase sobriety, holiness, charity, and truth. Or does it merely inflame curiosity, agitation, pride, suspicion, fear, or vanity. Scriptural government of the mind is one of the great protections against cunningly devised fables.

## **7. Refusing to Follow a Fable Is a Matter of Moral Obedience**

In the end, following a fable is not merely an intellectual mistake. It is often a moral issue. Men follow lies because those lies suit something in them. The lie may flatter pride, justify fear, stir resentment, feed curiosity, excuse disobedience, or create a dramatic sense of importance. But however it works, the attachment is usually not just mental. It is moral. That is why Paul says in another context that people receive not the love of the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10). The problem is not only that they were tricked. It is that they did not love truth enough to submit to it.

That means refusing a fable is not merely a matter of being clever enough to see through it. It is a matter of being obedient enough to reject what the flesh likes about it. A believer may know something is speculative or corrupt, but if the thing keeps scratching his fears, excitements, and sense of superiority, he may still cling to it. So the refusal of fables requires humility. It requires the willingness to let Scripture govern not just the intellect, but the appetite. A man must be willing to lose a favorite storyline if God has not spoken it.

This is one reason Peter's phrase is so strong. "We have not followed." That is moral language. It is path language. It means they refused to let such things become their road. They did not merely critique them from a distance as an academic exercise. They refused to

walk after them. That is exactly what the believer must do now. He must not only identify cunningly devised fables. He must decline to live under them. He must not let them train his instincts, emotions, and assumptions. He must refuse the road.

## **Conclusion**

Peter's warning about "cunningly devised fables" is one of the great safeguards in an age full of narratives, theories, secret frameworks, and religious inventions. It tells the believer that not every old thing is true, not every sophisticated thing is wise, not every exciting thing is light, and not every elaborate explanation is revelation. Some things are simply stories men have built, shaped, polished, and circulated because lies travel well when they are engineered cleverly enough. The Christian must not be impressed by craft when craft is serving falsehood.

And the danger runs deeper than public error. A man can talk against a lie and still live under its shadow. He can expose it verbally and still follow it practically if it governs his imagination more than Scripture does. That is why discernment must be more than criticism. It must be refusal. It must be a real turning of the feet. The believer is not only to identify the false trail. He is to stop walking behind it. He is to bring his mind, fears, assumptions, and expectations back under the plain truth of God.

So the question for this chapter is not only, What lies have you denounced. It is, What narratives are you actually following. What governs the way you think, fear, and interpret life. Is it the plain word of God, or some clever story that keeps your imagination busy while your obedience stays thin. Peter said, "we have not followed cunningly devised fables" (2 Peter 1:16). That needs to become more than a quotation. It needs to become a way of life for every saint who intends to walk in truth.

## **19 of 20: What Do You Follow? - Follow the Lamb Whithersoever He Goeth**

### **Introduction**

After all the dark roads in this series, after the multitudes doing evil, after the broken loyalties, after the false gods, after the vain pursuits, after the false teachers, after the cunningly devised fables, after Peter following afar off, after all the crooked trails men choose when left to themselves, the Holy Ghost brings you at last to one of the purest pictures in all the Bible. He shows you a company marked by one glorious thing: "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Revelation 14:4). There is the summit. There is the highest form of following. There is the true answer to every false trail. Not

merely following morality. Not merely following principle. Not merely following religion. Following the Lamb.

That is what makes this passage so majestic. It rises above all the noise of earthly confusion and fixes your eye on the rightful King. The world is full of men following crowds, systems, idols, lusts, teachers, pleasures, narratives, and themselves. But here the Spirit of God singles out a people whose great distinction is not worldly power, not cultural influence, not religious success, not public admiration, and not earthly security. Their mark is attachment. "They follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Revelation 14:4). That is not casual admiration. That is not occasional agreement. That is total allegiance. That is devotion that has settled the issue of lordship once and for all.

And that is why this chapter serves so well near the close of the series. It shows the true end of redemption. Salvation is not merely escape from wrath, though thank God it includes that. It is not merely forgiveness of sins, though bless God it includes that. It is not merely exemption from hell, though surely it means that for all who are in Christ. The true end of redemption is attachment to the Redeemer Himself. God does not save a people merely to keep them out of judgment. He saves a people for the Son. He saves them to bring them into loyalty, devotion, purity, and everlasting relationship to the Lamb. This is where all right following was always meant to end.

### **1. The Lamb Is the Center of All True Following**

The first thing you have to see in Revelation 14:4 is that the object of this following is the Lamb. That title is not accidental. The Holy Ghost did not say merely that they follow a king, though He is King. He did not say merely they follow a conqueror, though He is the conqueror. He said they follow the Lamb. That means the One they follow is the sacrificial Redeemer, the One who was slain, the One whose blood purchased them, the One who stood in their place, the One who redeemed them to God. Their following is rooted in redemption. They are not attached to Him merely because He is powerful. They are attached to Him because He bought them.

That is what separates true Christianity from every other religion in the world. False religion tells man to follow principles in order to earn acceptance. Biblical faith presents a Lamb who gives Himself for sinners and then gathers the redeemed to Himself. The saints are not following the Lamb to get redeemed in Revelation 14. They are following because they are redeemed. The verse says, "These were redeemed from among men" (Revelation 14:4). There is the order. Redemption first, following after. Purchase first, attachment after. Blood first, loyalty after. The Lamb is not merely their model. He is their Savior.

That gives true following a wholly different character. It is not the cold following of hired servants trying to earn wages. It is the loving following of the redeemed after the Redeemer. It is not bare submission without affection. It is allegiance warmed by purchase. They follow the Lamb because He is worthy of everything. He is worthy because He was slain. He is worthy because He redeemed them. He is worthy because the scars in His hands outrank every crown on earth. The center of all true following is not self-improvement. It is the person of the Lamb.

## **2. Whithersoever He Goeth Means Total Allegiance**

The expression "whithersoever he goeth" (Revelation 14:4) is one of the most absolute phrases in the verse. It leaves no room for selective obedience. It leaves no room for negotiated discipleship. It leaves no room for a divided life where Christ is followed in places of comfort but abandoned in places of cost. Whithersoever means wherever. It means they do not follow Him on agreeable roads only. They follow Him wherever He leads. That is total allegiance. That is a devotion that has surrendered the right to edit His path.

Now that is the exact opposite of how the flesh wants to deal with Christ. The flesh is willing to follow the Lord into blessing, but not into reproach. It is willing to follow Him into comfort, but not into suffering. It is willing to follow Him where crowds applaud, but not where the world mocks. It is willing to follow Him as long as the road serves self-interest. But whithersoever he goeth tears all that to pieces. It means the Lamb sets the route. The follower does not. He does not reserve certain territories for himself. He goes where the Lamb goes.

That principle reaches far beyond the prophetic picture in application. It shows you the spirit of real consecration. A consecrated life says, Lord, the path is Yours. My preferences do not govern it. My fears do not govern it. My plans do not govern it. My comforts do not govern it. If You go through rejection, then I will follow there. If You go through obedience that costs something, then I will follow there. If You lead in ways that humble me, strip me, expose me, and demand trust, then I will follow there. Whithersoever He goeth is the death of selective loyalty.

## **3. Purity and Devotion Belong Together**

Revelation 14:4 says, "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins." Whatever the prophetic specifics of that company in that future context, the spiritual principle still stands out clearly: purity belongs to devotion. The followers of the Lamb are marked by separation. They are not a defiled crowd trying to attach themselves to a holy Savior while remaining polluted. There is purity connected to their following. The

Lamb does not gather a corrupt people and leave them in affectional filth. He produces a separated people whose loyalty to Him has practical consequences.

That ought to correct a lot of modern religious sentimentality. People talk about loving Jesus while clinging to defilement, compromise, and spiritual adultery. But in Scripture devotion to the Lamb and purity of life are bound together. A people truly attached to Him cannot remain at ease with corruption. The more clearly they see Him, the more offensive defilement becomes. The more strongly they follow Him, the less comfortable they become with rival loves. Purity is not an optional accessory added to devotion. It is one of devotion's fruits.

This is why spiritual adultery is so serious in the Bible. Idolatry, compromise, and mixture are not merely mistakes in ritual. They are violations of covenant attachment. A people claimed by the Lord are not free to scatter their affections among rivals and still call that devotion. Revelation 14 places before you a company that is marked by singular loyalty. They are not spiritually mixed. They are not half the Lamb's and half the world's. Their purity reflects the exclusiveness of their allegiance.

#### **4. The Followers of the Lamb Stand Against a Corrupt World System**

You cannot read Revelation 14 honestly without seeing the contrast. This company is set in the middle of a prophetic world full of corruption, beast worship, deception, and judgment. In that environment, the mark of this people is that they follow the Lamb. That means their following is not soft, private sentiment detached from conflict. It is a public distinction in the face of a wicked world order. The Lamb has followers, and the beast has followers. The issue is not whether men will follow something. The issue is whom they will follow when loyalty costs everything.

That is one reason this passage shines so brightly. It shows you that in the darkest hour of earth's rebellion, God still has a marked people whose allegiance does not collapse. The world may rage, the powers of hell may gather, false religion may swell, and judgment may be hanging heavy in the air, but there remains a company that follows the Lamb. They are not seduced into switching masters. They are not bullied into changing allegiance. They are not so fascinated by the system around them that they forget the rightful King. Their following is victorious because it remains fixed.

And there is a Church Age application in spirit as well. Every believer lives in a world system hostile to Christ. The details differ from that future scene, but the principle remains. The saint of God is called to live in a world full of rival voices and still keep following the Lamb. That means devotion must be stronger than atmosphere. It must be stronger than public

pressure. It must be stronger than visible power structures. The believer does not take his cue from the mood of the age. He takes it from the Lamb.

### **5. Firstfruits Unto God and to the Lamb**

The verse goes on: "These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:4). The language of firstfruits carries the idea of consecration, belonging, and presentation to God. These are not self-owned people. They are not drifting through existence as independent units deciding their own purpose. They are firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. They belong to Him in a dedicated way. Their very existence is bound up with divine ownership and divine pleasure.

That strikes at the very root of modern self-centered Christianity. Many want redemption without ownership. They want forgiveness without consecration. They want heaven without surrender. But Scripture never presents redeemed people as spiritually autonomous. If they are redeemed, they are purchased. If they are purchased, they belong. If they belong, then they are firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. That means their life is not finally for themselves. Their direction is not determined by private whim. They are set apart for Another.

This is what gives following its beauty. It is not the trudging obedience of those who lost their freedom. It is the fitting response of those who finally belong where they were always meant to belong. Sin is slavery. Self-rule is bondage. The world's paths are chains. But the redeemed who belong to the Lamb are not degraded by His ownership. They are dignified by it. They are firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. Their following is the glad movement of purchased people toward their rightful Lord.

### **6. The Highest End of Redemption Is the Person of Christ**

This is where the whole chapter reaches its brightest point. The highest end of redemption is not simply what the redeemed escape, but whom they gain. They escape wrath, certainly. They escape judgment, yes. They escape the eternal consequences of sin through the blood of Christ, praise God forever. But Scripture always presses beyond the negative. The saints are redeemed unto God. They are brought near. They are reconciled. They are made accepted in the Beloved. And here in Revelation 14, they are seen following the Lamb. That is the true end. Not merely getting out of hell, but getting Christ.

That truth is often lost in low-grade gospel talk. People speak as though salvation were mainly a rescue package from consequences, and of course it is a rescue in glorious measure. But if that is all a man sees, his Christianity will remain thin. The true glory of salvation is not that the sinner misses judgment only. It is that he is brought into attachment to the Lamb of God. He gets the Shepherd. He gets the Redeemer. He gets the

King. He gets the One who loved him and gave Himself for him. Redemption is not merely legal clearance. It is relational nearness.

That is why this company in Revelation 14 is so beautiful. They are not merely described as those who escaped something. They are described as those who follow Someone. Their identity is bound up with the Lamb. That ought to deepen every believer's understanding of salvation now. You were not saved merely to become less guilty. You were saved to belong to Christ. You were not redeemed merely to have a new destination. You were redeemed to have a new Master, new attachment, new object of love, and new center of life.

## **7. The Final Victory of the Saint Is Unbroken Allegiance**

There is something triumphant in the simplicity of the phrase, "they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Revelation 14:4). After all the deceptions of Scripture, all the apostasies, all the false trails, all the idolatries, all the half-heartedness, all the cowardice, all the crowd-following, all the broken loyalties, here stands a company whose allegiance has not fractured. That is victory. Victory is not merely surviving. Victory is remaining attached. Victory is not merely escaping outward defeat. Victory is staying with the Lamb.

That should encourage every saint who feels the daily pull of divided loyalties. The end of God's work in His people is not a muddled mixture. It is a purified devotion. The Lord is not gathering an uncertain people who always remain partly His and partly the world's. He is bringing forth a company whose mark is steadfast attachment. The same grace that saves also secures. The same Lamb who redeems also gathers, keeps, and leads. Final victory does not rest on the strength of the sheep, but on the worth and power of the Lamb they follow.

And yet the passage still searches the present heart. If that is the final beauty of the redeemed, then every believer should ask now whether his life is moving in that direction. Is your loyalty becoming simpler or more divided. Is your following more complete or more negotiated. Are you learning now the spirit of following the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, or are you still trying to reserve sections of your life from His authority. The prophetic picture does not merely inform. It calls the conscience higher.

## **Conclusion**

Revelation 14:4 gives one of the highest portraits of true following in all of Scripture: "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." After all the false roads in the Bible and in this series, the Spirit of God lifts your eyes to the purest path of all. The object is right. The devotion is right. The purity is right. The allegiance is right. Here are redeemed people whose great distinction is not their cleverness, not their force, not their fame, but their attachment to the Lamb. That is what glory looks like from God's side.

This shows us that the true end of redemption is not merely escape from wrath, though wrath is gloriously escaped by every blood-washed saint. It is attachment to the Redeemer Himself. God saves men for Christ. He claims a people for the Son. He does not merely pull them out of judgment and leave them to themselves. He binds them to the Lamb. He makes them His. He produces in them a loyalty that no rival can finally overthrow. That is the beauty of salvation fulfilled.

So as this series nears its close, let the question become as simple and as lofty as Scripture makes it. Are you learning to follow the Lamb. Not merely to admire Him, not merely to speak of Him, not merely to defend His name in argument, but to follow Him whithersoever He goeth. That is the highest road in the Book. That is the purest form of discipleship. And that is the destiny of all those truly redeemed by His blood.

## **20 of 20: What Do You Follow? - The End of Every Path**

### **Introduction**

At the end of a study like this, the question is no longer academic. It is no longer a matter of word definitions, thematic patterns, or neatly arranged categories. It comes down to a man and his road. It comes down to where his feet are actually headed. Through this whole series the Holy Ghost has shown us that men follow many things. Some follow the Lord. Some follow idols. Some follow a multitude to do evil. Some follow vanity. Some follow strong drink. Some follow pernicious ways. Some follow cunningly devised fables. Some follow Christ. Some follow Him straightway. Some follow afar off. Some follow after righteousness. Some follow good works. Some follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. And all of it presses one final truth into the conscience: every trail reaches a destination.

That is what men spend their lives trying to forget. They talk as though life were a collection of disconnected moods, statements, opinions, posts, reactions, and private impulses with no final line tying them together. But the Bible will not let a man have that illusion. Scripture presents life as a path. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). Jesus Christ said there is a broad way that "leadeth to destruction" and a narrow way "which leadeth unto life" (Matthew 7:13-14). There is an end to the road. There is a place where the trail comes out. There is a final arrival point. So the issue is not simply whether you are sincere while walking. The issue is where the path you chose is taking you.

That means the real question in the Christian life is not what a man says, claims, posts, debates, signals, performs, advertises, or manages in public. A man may say all the right things while walking the wrong road. He may argue theology on one road and still be traveling toward ruin. He may have a perfect religious vocabulary and still be following at a distance from God. He may win debates and lose his soul. He may impress men and be rotten before heaven. The final question is not what noise he made on the road. The final question is what trail his feet were actually on. Because in the end, every follower arrives where his chosen path was always leading him.

### **1. Every Path Has an End Because Every Path Has a Master**

No road in Scripture is morally neutral. Every path has an end because every path has a master. Men talk as though they are self-directed creatures choosing little preferences in a morally weightless universe. The Bible says otherwise. A man follows something because something has claimed his trust, his fear, his delight, his loyalty, or his imagination. He follows the Lord because he believes the Lord is true and worthy. He follows vanity because his heart has been stolen by appearances. He follows a multitude because he fears man more than God. He follows Christ because Christ has become his rightful center. The path is always linked to the master.

That is why the end of the path reveals the truth about the master. If a road ends in ruin, the thing leading the man there was not worthy to begin with. If a road ends in darkness, the guide was not light. If a road ends in corruption, the object followed was corrupt. A man may spend years dressing up his chosen trail with beautiful language, but the end still tells the truth. God has fixed the connection between road and destination. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). That is not poetry. That is moral law under divine government.

This should make every person suspicious of his own self-justifications. The human heart is very good at relabeling roads. It calls rebellion realism. It calls compromise balance. It calls vanity success. It calls lust freedom. It calls cowardice caution. It calls pride discernment. It calls unbelief complexity. But God still sees the road for what it is. And the end of it will not bow to the man's preferred terminology. The path has a master. The destination reveals who that master was all along.

### **2. Some Follow Idols and End in Ruin**

The Old Testament shows again and again that those who followed other gods did not end in enlargement, but in ruin. Israel followed Baal-peor and the judgment of God fell (Deuteronomy 4:3). They followed other gods, followed vanity, followed the heathen, and found themselves emptied, judged, scattered, and broken. That is what idols always do.

They promise life and deliver death. They promise liberty and produce bondage. They promise fruitfulness and leave barrenness. No idol can carry the soul safely because every idol is a liar.

And that principle remains true even where the idol does not have a carved face. Modern men may not bow to Baal with incense in their hands, but they follow money, pleasure, sex, power, image, audience, reputation, ideology, celebrity, family pride, comfort, and self. The shape changes, but the law remains. The idol always takes more than it gives. It always asks for trust it cannot justify. It always leaves the worshiper smaller, meaner, emptier, and more bound than before. That is the path of all idolatry. The trail ends in ruin because it started in betrayal of the true God.

This is why the end of an idol path is so tragic. The man did not become independent by refusing the Lord. He became enslaved to a substitute. He did not rise above worship. He merely gave worship to something unworthy. And the end of that road proves it. Broken homes, hardened consciences, poisoned affections, deadened spiritual senses, wasted years, and eternal loss if the man dies in unbelief - that is where idols take their followers. They never deserved one step of trust, but men gave them miles.

### **3. Some Follow a Multitude and End in Blindness**

One of the oldest warnings in the series was "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2). The reason that warning matters is because the crowd is not a safe guide. The multitude makes men feel secure while blinding them morally. Once a man begins treating numbers as proof, he loses the ability to judge by truth. He assumes consensus equals wisdom. He assumes majority equals righteousness. He assumes publicity equals legitimacy. Then he stops asking whether the road is right and starts caring only whether he is marching alone.

That kind of following ends in blindness. A crowd can normalize evil so thoroughly that people stop seeing its ugliness. They laugh at things that should have made them tremble. They cheer things that should have made them grieve. They persecute truth while calling themselves compassionate, enlightened, balanced, or progressive. The broad road in Matthew 7 is broad precisely because many are on it, but the many are still headed to destruction (Matthew 7:13). The crowd does not give sight. It often removes it. Once a man starts borrowing his moral vision from the group, he is in real danger.

The blindness of crowd-following is especially deadly because it feels safe. A man looks around and sees so many fellow travelers that he cannot imagine the whole thing could be wrong. But Noah stood against the world. Micaiah stood against the prophets. Elijah stood against the national mood. Christ stood against a religious establishment fat with

confidence. So the crowd is no defense before God. A blind multitude is still blind. And a man who followed them into the ditch cannot plead safety in numbers at the judgment.

#### **4. Some Follow Vanity and Become Empty**

One of the sharpest lines in the whole series came from 2 Kings 17:15: "they followed vanity, and became vain." There is the law of the empty road. Vanity is not just something a man chases. Vanity is something he becomes when he chases it long enough. He runs after appearances, applause, rewards, excitement, trends, strong drink, vain persons, and worldly gain, thinking he is collecting life, and all the while his own soul is being hollowed out. The path itself is empty, and it makes the traveler empty too.

This explains why so many lives look full from a distance and feel hollow up close. A man may gain visibility, influence, possessions, admiration, and social success and still become vain because the thing he followed had no eternal substance in it. He was living on vapor. He was feeding on wind. He was decorating a shell. Vanity can be attractive, profitable, and socially approved, but its end is still emptiness because nothing outside God can bear the weight of a human soul.

And the awful thing is that vanity often deceives longest those most intoxicated with it. They do not know they are becoming hollow because the applause is still loud and the rewards are still arriving. But time tells the truth. Death tells the truth. Judgment tells the truth. The soul tells the truth when it sits awake in the dark and feels how little all the glitter has fed it. The vain path cannot produce fullness because it was never real bread to begin with. It leaves its followers emptier than it found them.

#### **5. Some Follow Christ and Receive Life, Light, and Honour**

Against all the false roads of Scripture stands the blessed path of those who follow Jesus Christ. He said, "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). He said, "If any man serve me, let him follow me... if any man serve me, him will my Father honour" (John 12:26). There is the other side of the doctrine. Some follow Christ and receive life, light, and honour. Not because following earns salvation, but because the One followed is life Himself. His path is not merely right in the moral sense. It is right because it is attached to Him.

That makes all the difference. The roads of the world are dead roads because they are severed from the Source. Christ's road is living because He is the resurrection and the life. The world offers darkness decorated with electricity. Christ offers light. The world offers applause that vanishes. Christ offers honour from the Father. The world offers temporary intoxication. Christ offers life. A man who follows Christ may lose some things on earth that the flesh values, but what he gains cannot be measured by those losses. He gains the

Shepherd, the truth, the light, the way, the life, the favor of God, and the end that answers to all of it.

This is why following Christ cannot be fairly judged by short-term earthly metrics. A man may look at a saint on the narrow road and say, he has less money, less applause, less approval, less ease, and therefore he has chosen poorly. That is blindness. The end of the path has not yet fully broken open. The saint on Christ's road walks in light now, receives life now, and will receive honour where it matters forever. The road is not judged by the noise of its enemies, but by the worth of the One at its end.

## **6. Some Follow Afar Off and Fall, While Some Follow the Lamb to Glory**

Not every bad end belongs to open rebels only. Peter followed afar off and fell. That is a needed warning in the final essay because it shows that the issue is not merely whether a man claims Christ in some general sense. The issue is how he is following. Distance matters. A man can remain in the general orbit of Christian things and still grow cold enough to deny the Lord under pressure. Following afar off ends in weakness, fear, confusion, compromise, and a fall unless grace intervenes and restores. The path of distance has an end too.

But over against that darker picture stands Revelation 14:4: "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." There is the purest end of all. While some follow afar off and stumble, others follow the Lamb to glory. Their loyalty is whole. Their devotion is clear. Their path is not fragmented by competing loves. They follow the Lamb, and the path leads to triumph because the Lamb Himself is triumphant. The final beauty of redemption is not merely that a people escape wrath, but that they are attached to the Lamb forever.

That contrast should search every believer. Are you on the road of distance or the road of attachment. Are you following just enough to keep a religious identity while preserving self-rule, or are you learning the spirit of following the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. One path leads to collapse in the hour of pressure. The other leads to glory. And both roads begin long before the final scene. They are being chosen now, step by step, in secret loyalties, daily decisions, quiet obediences, tolerated distances, or yielded attachments.

## **7. The Feet Tell the Truth in the End**

By the time you reach the close of this series, the great principle ought to be clear: the feet tell the truth in the end. A man may claim anything with his mouth. He may post, preach, argue, signal, persuade, defend, deny, explain, brand, or perform. But the trail of his feet reveals what he really follows. Sooner or later the path interprets the profession. If his feet keep carrying him toward idols, crowds, vanity, compromise, fables, false teachers, or the preservation of self, then the path is telling the truth about him. If his feet are carrying him

toward righteousness, peace, holiness, Christ, and the Lamb, that path is telling the truth too.

That is why the final issue is not public performance. A hypocrite can manage performance for a long time. A coward can speak boldly on safe topics. A religious man can build an image. A clever man can learn the right rhetoric. But over enough time, the road exposes the reality. The road shows what the man fears most, loves most, trusts most, and obeys most. His feet are sermonizing all the while. They preach the real god of his life. They announce the true master of his heart. They reveal what his mouth often tries to hide.

So the Christian who wants to be honest with God must stop grading himself mainly by his statements and start judging himself by his trail. What road am I actually on. What direction has become normal to my life. Where do my feet go when no one is managing the impression. What path am I wearing deeper day by day. Because in the end, a man does not arrive somewhere by accident. He arrives where the trail has been taking him for a long time. The feet tell the truth.

## **Conclusion**

This final chapter gathers the whole series into one unavoidable reality: every path has an end. Some follow idols and end in ruin. Some follow a multitude and end in blindness. Some follow vanity and become empty. Some follow cunningly devised fables and drift into deception. Some follow pernicious ways and help swell the broad road to destruction. Some follow afar off and fall. But some follow righteousness and find life, righteousness, and honour. Some follow Christ and receive light. Some follow every good work and leave a useful wake. Some follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth and arrive in glory.

That means the ultimate question in life is not cosmetic. It is not, what image are you presenting. It is not, what side do you claim in debate. It is not, what religious tribe do you identify with in public. It is not, what arguments can you win. It is not even, what truths can you quote. The question is, what are you actually following. Because that road is going somewhere. And you are going there with it. The road does not care about your slogans. It carries you toward its end all the same.

So let this final challenge land where it ought to. Look hard at your trail. Judge it by Scripture. Stop flattering yourself with labels if your feet are on the wrong road. Stop assuming that a good profession can cancel a bad direction. Stop treating the end as though it were far enough away to ignore. The end of every path is coming. And every follower will arrive where his chosen trail was always leading him. So if the Lord has shown you the wrong road, get off it while there is still light enough to turn. And if He has set your

feet on the right one, then keep following the One who is Himself the way, because the end of that path is life everlasting.

### **Conclusion to the Series: What Do You Follow?**

After tracing this subject from one end of the Bible to the other, one truth ought to stand in front of the reader like a mountain: no man is standing still. Every man is following something. He may follow Christ. He may follow the crowd. He may follow righteousness. He may follow idols. He may follow vanity. He may follow pernicious ways. He may follow a fable, a lust, a fear, a teacher, a reward, a pleasure, or a lie. But he is following something. The great lie of human nature is that a man can drift without direction, think without being shaped, live without being led, and die without having chosen a road. The Scriptures give no quarter to that delusion. The Bible presents life as a path, and every path has a voice, every voice has a master, and every master leads somewhere. That is why this series has mattered. It was never merely about a Bible word. It was about the anatomy of the soul in motion.

We have seen that the issue is not whether a man can talk religiously, but whether he walks rightly. We have seen that a multitude can be wrong, that idols enslave, that vanity hollows out the one who chases it, that false teachers can gather many, that cunningly devised fables can capture the imagination of people who should have known better, and that even a true disciple like Peter can get far enough away from the Lord to follow afar off and fall. We have also seen the brighter side of the trail. We have seen that righteousness is to be followed, that peace and charity and holiness are to be pursued, that good works are not occasional accidents but a road of diligence, that the sheep follow the Shepherd because they know His voice, that goodness and mercy follow the saint, and that the highest and purest picture of all is a people who “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (Revelation 14:4). The contrast is as plain as daylight. One road leads downward into ruin, blindness, emptiness, and judgment. The other leads upward into life, light, usefulness, honour, and glory with Christ.

So the final burden of this series is not literary, but personal. Not what did Israel follow. Not what did Peter follow. Not what did false prophets follow. Not even what do churches tend to follow in times of decline. The final burden is this: what do you follow? What really governs the movement of your life? What has your trust, your fear, your loyalty, your imagination, your desire, your time, your money, your speech, and your direction? What voice have you become accustomed to hearing? What trail have your feet worn into the

ground by repetition? You may say Christ with your mouth and follow self with your habits. You may praise truth in public and follow vanity in private. You may denounce deception with your lips and still follow a false narrative in your fears and assumptions. You may talk about discipleship while preserving every idol that competes with the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This series has aimed to strip all that camouflage away. Because in the end, the issue is not what you claim. The issue is what your path proves.

And there is one more truth that must not be missed. What a man follows does not only determine where he ends. It determines what he becomes on the way there. The idolater becomes like his idols. The vain man becomes vain. The fearful crowd-follower becomes blind. The one who follows corruption becomes corrupted. The one who follows fables becomes unstable. The one who follows afar off becomes weak. But the one who follows Christ is changed by Christ. The one who follows righteousness grows in righteousness. The one who follows peace, charity, and holiness becomes more governed by those very things. The one who follows the Lamb is being fitted for the company of those who belong to the Lamb. That means every step matters now, not just later. The trail is not only taking you somewhere. It is making you into someone while you walk it.

That is why the right end of this series cannot merely be admiration for the study itself. It must be repentance where repentance is needed, separation where separation is needed, renewed consecration where coldness has settled in, and a fresh settling of the issue of Lordship before God. If the Lord has shown you through this series that you have been following too far off, then close the distance. If He has shown you that you have been following a multitude, then get out of the crowd. If He has shown you that vanity, applause, rewards, fables, personalities, or fears have been setting the pace of your life, then quit flattering yourself and turn. If He has shown you that your Christian life has become passive, self-protective, or spiritually lazy, then get up and follow after righteousness, peace, charity, holiness, and every good work with diligence. And if by His grace He has kept your feet on the right road, then thank Him for it and keep walking. Stay close. Stay watchful. Stay near enough to hear the Shepherd's voice and far enough from the world not to mistake its noise for His call.

In the end, every follower arrives somewhere. The broad road still has heavy traffic, but it still ends in destruction. The road of vanity still glitters, but it still empties the soul. The road of false religion still gathers crowds, but it still leads to darkness. The road of compromise still feels manageable, but it still breaks down under pressure. The road of distance still feels safer than outright denial, but it still leads to collapse. But the narrow road still leads to life. The road of faithfulness still matters. The road of following Christ still shines. The road of following the Lamb still ends in glory. And when everything else has burned away,

every lie exposed, every fable silenced, every idol shattered, every crowd scattered, every false teacher judged, and every empty thing reduced to dust, one truth will stand bright and eternal above all the wreckage: the only path that was ever truly safe was the one that stayed with the Lamb. So let the final answer to the question of this whole series be settled in the heart once and for all. Follow Him.