

Following the Lamb

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There are some who have dismissed the idea that there is any possibility that current-day followers of Christ could follow Christ in the same way that the original disciples followed Christ. Because we cannot follow Jesus the Man over a given geographical area as the first disciples did, the argument goes, we must content ourselves with an established habit of obedience to the *commandments* of Christ. Some have even tried to say that “follow” in the Greek (*akoloutheo* [190]) as it was used by Jesus to call the disciples after Himself, covers this idea, leaving us to believe that following Christ’s commands is the exact same and only way of following Christ. Some go so far as to deride, mock and ridicule those who insist that the following the Lamb is not just an unctuous little phrase that, in reality, deludes those who try to practice it.

It is true that obedience (to virtually any of the requirements found in the New Testament) is an abandoned doctrine that needs to be revived among those who claim to follow Christ. It is also true that the New Testament contains many injunctions to obedience:

- The house of the man who obeys is built upon a rock that will withstand the floods and winds of life. (Mt. 7:24-25)
- The one who loves Christ and God shows it in his obedience to the commands of Christ and both the Father and Christ will make their home with him. (Jn. 14:21, 23)
- The one who obeys the Father’s commands remains (or abides) in His love. (Jn. 15:10)
- Those who obey from the heart the teachings of Christ are set free from sin and made a servant of righteousness. (Rom. 6:17-18)
- The Holy Spirit is given to those who obey Him. (Acts 5:32)
- The one who does what the word says is delivered from self-deception and blessed in what he does. (Jas. 1:22-25)
- Like Abraham, our faith is perfected or completed by our obedient actions. (Jas. 2:22)
- Those who obediently love one another, not with words alone, but with actions and in truth (or from the heart), are assured and given confidence believe God and prayer so that they receive from Him what they ask for. (1 Jn. 3:18-22)

All this and more is true in the New Testament yet it is not the whole counsel of God regarding the subject of following the Lamb. To show the short-sightedness of the above interpretation – that following Christ’s commandments is the same as following Christ – we need only recognize that the same Greek word is used of the 144,000 who “follow the Lamb wherever

He goes.” (Rev. 14:4) If “follow” (Greek *akoloutheo* [190]) must mean to follow a subject over a given geographical area, we must then hold the interpretation of “the Lamb standing on Mount Zion” (Rev. 14:1) to mean that Christ has already returned to the earth – even though the return of the King of kings is an event which comes much later in the Revelation. (Rev. 19:11, etc.) There is indeed a more likely interpretation – that the 144,000 are simply those who truly follow the Lamb, in *all* that that means, wherever He leads them. We need not rely on a manufactured eschatological presupposition when we can simply take the passage at face value.

We find a surprising depth, though, when we examine the meaning of *akoloutheo* [190] – the word is a joining of two ideas: *a* [1], as a particle of union, and *keleuthos*, a road. Thus it literally means to “be in the same way with, to accompany.” When we recall that Jesus alone has the words of eternal life (Jn. 6:68) and that many are on the road to destruction while few find the road that leads to life (Mt. 7:13-14), it is thus of prime importance that we be followers of Christ in union with and accompanying Him on the same road to life upon which He walked and still leads. This picture is more than merely obeying commandments – it is living one’s life in partnership with the Spirit of Christ and God.

This is precisely what Paul told us: “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14) Here he uses a different Greek word (*ago* [71]) but the meaning is simply “to lead.” One cannot be led by the Spirit if one does not follow Him. It is simply that this Greek word focuses more on the leading and the previous Greek word more on the following.

The Corinthians were told to follow Paul’s example just as he followed Christ’s (1 Cor. 11:1) and the Thessalonians were commended for following the example of Paul and his fellow workers and even of the Lord by welcoming the truth in spite of severe suffering. (1 Ths. 1:6) The writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers to avoid laziness and follow the example of those who through faith and patience inherit what God has promised (Heb. 6:12) and to follow the example of the faith of those who led them in the way of following Christ. (Heb. 13:7) In these verses we find the Greek words *mimeomai* [3401] and *mimetes* [3402] which means, respectively, “to follow,” and “a follower.”

Peter builds on the idea of following Christ when he writes, “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.” (1 Pet. 2:21) In this one of only two places in the New Testament where Christ is said to be our example (see Jn. 13:15 for the other), Peter uses *epakoloutheo*, a combination of *epi*, “after” [1909], and *akoloutheo*, “follow” [190].

To these we could add Paul’s examples where he “was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.” (Acts 26:19 - referring to his conversion experience) and where, upon having a vision of a man from Macedonia begging for help, he concluded “that God had called [Paul and his co-workers] to preach the gospel to them.” (Acts 16:9-10) And we would certainly include Paul’s persistent begging before the Lord regarding his “thorn in the flesh” – about which he was told, “My grace is sufficient for you...” (2 Cor. 12:7-9) – as well as Paul’s refusal to be swayed by the prophetic sign given by Agabus. (Acts 21:10-11)

Why is this so and why is it of vital importance? Because we can know all the commands of Christ, do all kinds of wonderful things in His name, even exercising spiritual power, and still not know Him or be known Him. (Mt. 7:22-23) There are many, many “good Christian folk” who obey the commands of Christ (some or most of them anyway, at least most of the time) who have nothing of the Spirit of Christ. (see Rom. 8:9) This is the road to lawlessness, doing what is right in one’s own eyes. (Jdgs. 21:25) It is to decide that what Christ has said (most of it, anyway) is right and good in our own eyes and then go about “obeying”

what has been said in our own strength and power, subtly choosing which parts we wish to focus on and which parts we think are right and true. None of this, however, is the way of the cross. It is the way of manmade religion, the way of churchianity and counterfeit “Christianity” – but it is not the way of Christ.

The cross is an instrument of death. There is no quarter or mercy to be shown to our flesh nature. (Col. 3:5, etc.) The flesh is never asked or expected to obey anything of Christ – it is only to be brought to the cross and be executed. It is then that our soul and spirit can be renewed and we can know and attain to the will of God for our life. (Rom. 12:1-2)

Because “following the Lamb” entails going through death and resurrection changing from light to darkness, leaving the path to destruction, and finding the path to life, it is not as simple a matter as hearing commands from the Lord and then going about to do them – though there are indeed circumstances in which that is exactly what happens. (see Acts 9:10-11 for example) Whenever our life is controlled or influenced by our flesh, the Lord *cannot* instruct us in which way to go until we obediently put our flesh to death. Anyone struggling with a need for the Lord to give direction would be wise to stop demanding instruction and begin asking the Lord which areas of his life are still dominated by the flesh and are thus preventing the renewal and revelation the Lord waits to give.

To anyone who seems struck or immobilized in their walk with Christ, there is one piece of advice that is critical: do what you last knew to be the will of God, especially if you left it undone. If it is an event that cannot be re-enacted, then repent and wait for the Lord to bring a similar circumstance around again – for He certainly will do so if your obedience to His will is in question. When you have passed this hurdle, He will be faithful and prepare you for the next.

If you truly do not know the Lord’s will and you are unaware of any previous mis-steps or stumbles, then simply walk quietly before Him. Take your next steps slowly and in step with His Spirit as best you are able, knowing that He is aware of every depth of your being and that, in the absence of specific instructions, He may be waiting for you to make a wise and mature choice that is the fruit of the work He has already done in you.

When it comes to following the Lamb, there are so many variables that it cannot be boxed or packaged or programmed or written down as laws or precepts. “The wind blows where it will.” (Jn. 3:8) It is not a popular message at “church” because it requires absolute obedience to the Head and excludes all man-made hierarchies and institutions, and this would be fatal to “church” business and profit margins.

If we will not follow the Lamb – in all of His commandments and directives – we would do well to recognize that we truly have nothing to do with Him. His sheep hear, obey and follow Him. (Jn. 10:27) His true subjects of His kingdom are those who obediently attend His wedding feast, obediently wearing wedding garments – those who come in their own attire are removed from His light and cast out into the darkness from which they came. (Mt. 22:2, 11-13)

It is not enough to know about Christ and believe those facts to be accurate. That is only the first step. Our faith is made perfect by what we do (Jas. 2:22) and our salvation is worked out with fear and trembling. (Phlp. 2:12) Anything else is a mere counterfeit that robs us of the truth and, ultimately, our inheritance in Christ, exactly what the enemy of our souls would like to do to each and every one who has ever called upon the name of the Lord. The gospel of Christ *is* simple but those who over-simplify the complexities of life in this world or who overlook the dangerous nature of the warfare into which we are called, do so at their own risk.

Let he who has ears hear.

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