

Following Paul

by Raymond Golsworthy

The sermon emphasizes the importance of following Paul's example of renouncing our old life, revaluing our priorities, and prioritizing knowing Christ above all else.

Scripture: John 17:3, Romans 5:17, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Philippians 3:7-17, Colossians 1:29, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 12:1, Revelation 22:12

Topics: "Following Christ", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Raymond Golsworthy preaches on the importance of following godly examples, focusing on Paul's exhortation to the Philippians to be followers of him as he follows Christ. Paul emphasizes the need to renounce worldly gains and embrace Christ, to aspire to know Him deeply, and to concentrate on the spiritual race towards the eternal prize. The sermon highlights the significance of following together in fellowship, encouraging believers to commit to pursuing God's will collectively.

Transcript

"Brethren, be followers together of me." Phil. 3:17

The title of this study will probably raise some questions. Should we, or should we not, be followers of God's servants? Did not Christ say, "Follow Me" (Matt. 9:9)? Is not that sufficient? And do we not read that God's overcomers are they that, "Follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (Rev. 14:4)? Why, then, follow men? These are honest questions and they deserve an honest answer. What did Paul mean when he said to the Corinthians, for instance, "I beseech you, be ye followers of me" (1 Cor. 4:16)? And what of his word to the Thessalonians, "Ye ought to follow us" (2 Thess. 3:7)? And now this call to the Philippians, "Be followers together of me."

We must remember, in the first place, that there is the factor of godly example and this is actually mentioned at the end of the verse we are considering, "So that ye have us for an ensample." This factor also appears in numerous other verses such as 2 Thess. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:12 and 1 Pet. 5:3. Then, again, we have to recall what Paul said in 1 Cor. 11:1, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." That is the main thought to bear in mind, "Follow me, as I follow Christ." It is surely right to follow our God-given leaders in those matters and in those ways, in which they themselves are evidently following Christ. And it still remains that Christ Himself is our main concern and He holds our first allegiance.

That Paul was following Christ in this case needs no proving. Anyone who reads through Philippians three knows immediately that the great apostle was not only following his Lord, but doing so in such a way as to make him a shining example, for all time, of what true godliness is and also of God's gracious design and purpose for His people. We certainly need not be perturbed when such an one says to us, "Be followers of me." The only valid question in such a case is, are we doing so?

In the pages that follow, we shall seek to trace what it was that Paul had specially in mind when he said to the Philippians, "Be followers of me." We shall find our question clearly answered when we examine the verses which lead up to the exhortation, so that is what we shall be doing.

As we look over the chapter as a whole, we are confronted with three tremendous considerations, each of which demands our earnest prayer and our personal response. Let us consider these one by one.

We are to follow Paul in his great renunciation (Phil. 3:3-9)

The key verse in this regard would be verse seven. "But what things were gain(s) to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Paul has been looking back over his life, particularly his life as a natural and unregenerate man, and now he gives this remarkable testimony regarding a complete change that has come over him. Something has happened, he says, which has compelled a complete reassessment of everything: "Those things which were gains, I counted loss."

What the apostle is saying is that, in those earlier days, there were certain natural assets of his in which he had greatly gloried and he thought legitimately so. He actually lists some of those supposed assets, but now testifies that everything has changed, all has had to be revalued. The fact was that he had seen the Lord and, in so doing, had seen those gains of his in a light in which he had never seen them before. He had encountered truth and in the pure light of that truth he had been given an entirely new view of 'those vain things that charmed me most'. Now he openly avows that they are not only vain things, they are positively vile and he actually uses the word dung in referring to them. Of this we shall say more later.

It may be well for us now to look at some of the listed details in this testimony and to note what were some of the named areas of his erstwhile glorying. What was it that had needed to be so drastically revalued? As we said, there is quite a list, and it begins with verse five. At the beginning of that verse, Paul refers to what we may call his national standing, "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel." How proud the original and natural Paul had been of that and for so long 'one of God's own chosen nation', he would say. But now, in the pure light that has emanated from Christ, he realises that all that must be changed. For the first time in his life he begins to see and to register the actual truth about his nation and about himself. Important factors which he had previously (and conveniently?) preferred to disregard concerning Israel, are now borne in heavily upon him and it has shocked him. What, after all, even in the plain light of history, if nothing more, was this Israel of which he had so proudly boasted? Of course, he knew the history, but discretion, maybe, had blinded him to detail and kept him back from logical conclusions. Israel, unquestionably, was the most privileged of nations, but the same Israel had also shown itself to be the most despicable, warranting not pride at all, but only pity! And Saul of Tarsus was part of it and so was that natural man within the apostle, as long as that natural man was permitted to survive! But now he sees and he makes the drastic reassessment. The light has dawned! In Christ's light he has seen light.

Perhaps we could be permitted here, to make a brief survey, in few words, of the sad history of Paul's nation, although to most it will be well known.

Think of Jacob, for instance, the great father of the nation, his name now accepted as a synonym for craftiness and deception and that in the holiest of matters, so that it is only in utmost grace that God was ever willing to call Himself the God of Jacob. We know that Jacob, personally, was finally broken and made again, but history shows that the nation which sprang from him consistently manifested a similar shamefulness and unworthiness. Think of it. Rescued from Egypt, but immediately murmuring and complaining against the God who had rescued them. Fed from heaven in the wilderness for forty years, yet loathing the bread of heaven and lusting again for the leeks and onions of Egypt (Num. 11:5,6; 21:5). Moses had been their heaven-sent deliverer, wielding the mighty powers of God against their tyrant enemies, but always dealing gently and patiently with his brethren, yet, from their side, they were almost ready to stone him (Ex. 17:4). We may say that in their hearts at least, they killed their prince of life. And so the story goes on. Building their idol groves, slaying God's prophets and finally needing to be transported as captives to the land of Babylon. How Jeremiah wept over this incorrigible nation, but all to no avail. They finally consummated their evil by crucifying the Christ Himself. And, as we are saying, this was Paul's nation in which he had boasted so long. I am, "Of the stock of Israel", he would say. Paul himself had come from that same stock, with all its baneful history; he was, indeed, a vital part and expression of it. Yet, in his time of blindness, he could only boast concerning it! How true it is that Satan has blinded the minds of them that believe not, making them completely unaware of the simplest and most obvious things! Often times, what is plain history is never really seen, or accurately interpreted, even by the most learned of this world, until the true Light shines!

Perhaps, as earlier indicated, we should pause here to make clear a very important point. We need to understand that in this passage Paul is not simply saying that he now regards those gains of his as if they were loss, loss in comparison with Christ. While that is obviously true, that by itself would be a totally inadequate reading of the text. What he is saying is that they are loss and only now has he come to see it. The illustration, of course, is that of an accountant and Paul is now admitting that in the past his accounts have all been wrong and his books in terrible confusion. What he had fondly reckoned were his credits, are now discovered to be plain debits! And all those years he had been writing them in the wrong column and entering them on the wrong side of his ledger! But now, at last, the light has come; he has discovered the great fundamental error and, by God's grace, the immense correction will be made. Henceforward he will account as loss what is loss, he will faithfully reckon it according to its true character. That is the basic teaching of the passage.

The great underlying fact, or course, is that all these supposed credits really pertained to Adam, derived from Adam and were a part of Paul's Adamic life. They were a part of the Adamic creation; a creation now darkened by rebellion, away from God and in all its parts unacceptable. The psalmist declares that this creation, even at its best state, is altogether vanity (Psalm 39:5). But Paul had not seen it, hence his continued glorying in those vain things. But now the light has come and henceforth his accounts will be different. He will personally endorse the psalmist's word and say, "I know that in me ... dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). In God's mercy, Paul has now seen Christ, the one and only Man approved of God (Acts 2:22), raised from the dead and highly exalted. Now he realises that, because of his simple faith, he has his place and standing in that new man and has become, in fact, a member of his body. Here, indeed, is the new creation, where old things have passed away and all has become new (2 Cor. 5:17). In other words, Paul has really perceived the inner essence of the gospel. Now he knows that Adam and things Adamic, have all been judged in Christ and God has now secured his second man (1 Cor. 15:47). Gladly will he renounce those old Adamic things and find his glorying instead in the great divine alternative. In this way Christ has become his All. He belongs now to God's new nation, his citizenship is in heaven (Phil.

3:20). He boasts in the earthly Israel no more; he only yearns over it in brotherly and sympathetic prayer. It has meant a deep and terrible severance by the cross, but O the immeasurable gains!

And the same Paul says to the Philippians and to us, "Be followers of me." It is a fact that all who are in Christ will find that they cannot henceforth glory in any old national standing, for they are partakers in an entirely new creation, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, but where Christ is all and in all (Col. 3:10, 11 and Gal. 3:27, 28).

Only the briefest reference now needs to be made to those other gains which Paul has listed in the passage, for the message is clear and uniform. What he has said about his national standing is true, in principle, of all those other imagined gains. He refers in his list to what we may call his social standing: "Of the tribe of Benjamin". Quite apart from that major matter of the new creation, which we have been considering, it would also appear that in his earlier days, Paul had quite forgotten much of the history of his boasted clan, for example, that outstanding Benjamite, king Saul, who had spent the 'better' part of his life seeking to slay the anointed David. If Paul had given due consideration to that and to some similar episodes in the history of his tribe, he might have been less inclined to boast that he was part of Benjamin. And, incidentally, how ashamed some of us might be of our social standing and family tree, if all the facts were tabled for all to see! How foolish and how childish it is for anyone to boast of anything, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The list goes on to mention what we could call his religious standing: "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church." That, on his own admission, was the sign and the measure of his previous vaunted religion; he had been, "Breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord", "Binding and delivering into prisons both men and women", "Compelling them to blaspheme", "Exceeding mad against them" and all, "According to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers ... zealous toward God." In this religious fever he willingly subscribed to and participated in the heartless stoning of the Christ-like and Spirit-filled Stephen. It seems that in every conceivable and diabolical way he was dedicated to that he hoped would be the swift and final liquidation of God's true testimony. Such, he says, was his religion and such was his proud religious standing in the Jewish community.

The apostle concludes his list by reference to what he thought was his high moral standing: "Concerning the righteousness which is of the law, blameless." With such a record, he felt he could lift high the head in any company. Poor blinded Paul; how totally astray in all his calculations! It was only when the true light shone that he was prepared to bow the neck and name himself, instead, the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

Looking back over the section, we can only say that Paul had had a revelation of Christ and with it a corresponding revelation of the total corruption of Adam and of all things essentially Adamic. Now he realises with shame that for all his boastings, he was only a part of that corruption. Now, however, he has embraced the available alternative and Christ, and Christ alone, is all his glorying.

It is in this context, notice that Paul makes reference to what he calls the real circumcision, the people who truly are God's own. These, he says, are they, "Which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). Only now has it dawned on him that that original rite of circumcision, instituted with Abraham, was but a figure, or illustration, of this far deeper thing pertaining to the spirit. Now he sees that it is the flesh in its totality, which is revolting, due to be cut off, requiring the deep surgery of the cross and fit only for outcasting and burial. All this was clearly in Paul's heart and in his thinking, when he wrote, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ".

Thus it is that Paul pleads with the Philippians: "Be followers of me" (Phil. 3:17). He himself has embraced the cross; he himself has accepted the righteous crucifixion, in Christ, of all that derives from Adam and he would have the Philippians do the same; "Be followers of me."

The question, of course, comes on to us: "Are we following Paul in this regard?" Have we embraced that all-removing cross? The question is indeed a deep one, but we venture to say it is basic to everything, not only for the life of the individual Christian, but also for the securing of a true church testimony. But this is the sure pathway that leads on to the glorious reality of resurrection and to the unutterable blessedness of having the living Christ Himself as our new standing, our new resource and our new everything. God forbid that anyone of us should miss this way! To say the very least, we would all do well to pray earnestly about it.

It is at this point that the apostle introduces another most important matter in which he would have us be his followers.

We are to follow him in his great aspiration (Phil. 3:10-12)

In the words of verse ten, we have a clear statement of Paul's supreme and all-governing ambition, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings." This, we see, is a threefold ambition, but the key-phrase, without question, is the first one, "That I may know Him". Beyond all doubt, Paul's first and foremost aspiration and his perpetual heart-longing was to know his Lord. And this, we may be sure, was very prominently in his mind when he urged the Philippians, in verse seventeen, to be his followers.

Before we go further, we should perhaps pause to clarify a simple point which could possibly raise a question in some hearts. There are those who have said, "Did not Paul already know the Lord? Why, then, should he ask to know Him?" The answer is not hard to find. We all realise that in everything there are always degrees of knowledge and, as far as knowing persons is concerned, this is particularly so. There is what we may call the knowledge of mere acquaintance, but there is, as well, that far deeper knowledge which is the fruit of long and personal experience. It is one thing, for instance, for a person to say, "Yes, I know the postman", or, "I know the professor", but it is quite another thing for the wife of that postman, or that professor, to say she knows him! In that case, the reference is to a deeper kind of knowledge, a knowledge of character, or inner strengths and weaknesses, and, it could be, of secret sufferings and heartaches, something far deeper than that initial or superficial knowledge. Now Paul did know Christ in that initial and preparatory way; he had personally met Him and acknowledged Him as Lord. And he meant it. But now his inmost spirit cries out for more; he longs for that far greater thing; "that I may know Him." Evidently he realises that this extra fellowship and intimacy and this fuller unfolding of his Lord were equally his heritage and birthright and now his burning heart cries out for that.

The point that we are making is that Paul wanted the Philippians to be his followers in this matter also. He would have them set their hearts too, on this further and fuller knowing of the Lord. As his own hands stretch up eagerly to heaven and his eyes search out that incomparable countenance of his Master, he turns his spirit momentarily to his brethren and says to them, "Be ye followers of me." He would have them set their hearts too, on knowing Christ and longs that his ambition become their ambition, that in due time they might all rejoice together that they have come to know their Lord.

We venture to suggest that far too little is said these days about this fuller knowing of the Lord. The emphasis is almost entirely on what we must do for Him. Possibly a little later (and happily so), the

emphasis shifts to what we must be, but very seldom, if at all, is the emphasis found on what we must know, or, more importantly, Whom we must know! How foolish we are to reverse completely that divine order of which we read in Daniel 11:32, "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." According to that verse, it is the knowing that comes first, then the being and then the doing. In other words, the being and the doing, important though they are, are all subservient to and dependent on the knowing. To say the very least, it is the knowing that makes possible the being and then gives power and effectiveness to the doing. And yet, so little is ever said about it.

It is a fact that according to the Bible and the statement of the Lord Himself, the whole purpose of our having eternal life is that we might come to know the Lord. In His High-Priestly prayer, Christ declared, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee... and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3). Again the tendency is to reverse the order (how upside down we are!) and jump to the conclusion that we get eternal life by knowing the Lord, whereas the teaching of the verse is that we are given eternal life so that thereafter and along life's pathway, we might come to know the Lord in the manner that we have described (see also verse 24). The point is that it is not until our spirits are quickened into newness of life, that we are in any way conditioned or equipped to know the Lord, for "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: ... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). All of us need to receive a new faculty and indeed a new life, if we are to begin to enter that realm and penetrate those mysteries. Now, in His mercy, God imparts that new faculty and infuses that new life, introducing us thereby to an entirely new dimension of knowledge, spiritual knowledge.

Certainly God's servants need to understand this principle, for it is always this knowing of the Lord that gives spiritual substance and true value to all ministry. People are not impressed when we talk to them about a Christ we scarcely know and who perhaps is just a name or a figurehead. And still less are they inclined to repent before Him, or come under His glorious dominion, to say nothing of pursuing Him with all the heart for what He is Himself. It is a simple fact that if we only present a formula we shall only get formal results and these, really, are no results at all. It will be proved in the end that they are only a diabolical deception and they will certainly not stand up to any coming test. If, on the other hand, we present a Christ we really know (or are coming to know), the results will be genuine, spiritual and abiding.

And here it is we can thank God for the Holy Spirit, Who is called, "The Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:17). The Greek there, incidentally, is 'epignosis', full or thorough knowledge, the kind of knowledge we have been talking about. The work of the Holy Spirit is always to glorify Christ and He does this against the background of daily experiences and our ever-changing need. It is His prerogative and joy to make us into men and women who really know their Lord. We can be sure that Paul Himself was depending continually on that great divine Indweller to enable him to realise his heart's ambition. And in the confidence that his beloved Philippian brethren were similarly indwelt and endowed he says to them, "Be followers of me." He would have them also to look to this same indwelling Teacher to enable them likewise to enjoy this richest of all blessings, a fuller and deeper knowing of the Lord. And he would say the same to us. "Be followers together of me", "That I may know Him."

And now there is one more matter in which according to our chapter, we are to be followers of Paul. We have considered the matter of his renunciation (verse 7) and his aspiration (verse 10) and now there remains what we shall call his concentration, for that too is strongly raised in the passage.

We are to follow Paul in his great concentration (Phil. 3:12-16)

It would seem that it was this matter particularly which was uppermost in his mind when he issued his appeal, "Be followers of me." We deduce this from the fact that in the verses immediately prior to verse seventeen the apostle had been making reference to what we call the Christian race. And He had testified that, as far as he was concerned, he was in that race and, indeed, "Pressing toward the mark for the prize" (verse 14). The revised version renders it, "I press toward the goal unto the prize", but in either case the emphasis is on intense concentration. Paul says, "This one thing I do" (verse 13). Now, it is exactly at that point that Paul says to the Philippians, "Be followers of me", meaning, of course, that he would have them join him in a similar concentration and a wholehearted pursuit of the prize.

We may notice that this figure of the Christian race is frequently used in scripture and we give the following references:

To the Corinthians (world centre of the Olympic games) Paul wrote, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible" (1 Cor. 9:24, 25).

Then, towards the end of his life, he wrote to Timothy, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, (i.e. a righteous crown), which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8).

And most of us will be well familiar with that great word to the Hebrews: "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1, 2).

Yes, the Christian life is indeed a race and as we know a race requires very much in the way of concentration. That was the point the apostle was making when he wrote those words to the Philippians, "I press toward the mark for the prize." We can be assured, of course, that in such passages the idea is never that of competing selfishly or unkindly against our fellow-Christians, or in any way seeking personal advantage or glory at their expense, for that would be entirely contrary to the whole teaching of the Lord. Rather is it this simple matter of intense concentration on the part of all as we all press forward to the promised upward calling in Christ Jesus.

Much has been said and written in connection with this upward calling, but our single purpose for the present is to emphasise this matter of the apostle's concentration in the Christian race and his immediate call to us to be his followers in that regard.

We do well, of course, to recognise that the word does have much to say about a coming spiritual prize-giving, whatever form that prize-giving may take. Christ Himself said, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father, with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27).

The apostle John re-echoes this same truth when he writes in his epistle: "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (3 John 8).

And, (very significantly, we would say), the very last chapter of the bible confronts us, likewise, with the same great matter when the coming King Himself proclaims: "Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is

with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

Detailed expositions of these verses we are not attempting here, but certainly no one can deny that there is a biblical principle of rewards. And that, perhaps, is all we need to know at present.

The simple question we are raising here is, are we really concentrating in this race? Are we truly following Paul in this regard? Are we pressing toward the mark for the prize? Have we at least got a heart to seek that prize, whatever it might be? Even if it be nothing more than God's "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21), have we got a heart for that? And should the prize be something more specific, say, sharing the throne with Christ, as promised in Rev. 3:21, shall we qualify? We know that this can only be by His grace, but the Lord did say, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne" (Rev. 3:21). This, too, is a tremendous subject which we are not embarking upon just here. We simply note the fact that a great prize-giving is surely coming. That day will bring great glory to the Lord and Paul, for one, was concentrating. No time for fond reminiscences over the past (how fatal in a race!), or for that matter, for any futile regrets over the same, but simply, "I press toward the mark for the prize."

And now, in case there be someone who is perplexed or troubled by the thought, or fear, of using merely carnal energy in this regard, let us hasten to append Paul's clarifying word in Col. 1:29 where he speaks of himself as "Striving according to His working which worketh in me mightily." We may always be assured that the energy for this race is never intrinsically our own, but something entirely sourced in Christ. It is purely and simply His strength, graciously imparted to us through the Holy Spirit, a wonderful heavenly supply which we may breathe in, moment by moment, as an athlete would breathe in the air. It is what Paul in this same epistle calls, "The supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19). So, after all, as in all matters of spiritual achievement, it is basically a matter of yielding to Christ and drawing all from Him. You will recall that Paul wrote to the Romans that it is they who, "Receive abundance of grace who shall reign in life by One, Christ Jesus" (Rom. 5:17). Writing similarly to the Corinthians, he testifies, "I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). The question comes back to this: how much of God's grace are we willing to receive and to live by and to run by? Certainly no one abhorred carnal energy more than Paul did and yet he said, "I press toward the mark for the prize."

We are left, then, with this very solemn question: "Are we, or are we not, following Paul in this matter of the race? Are we in our day evidencing a similar concentration? Have we a comparable heart for the proffered prize? Are we receiving an abundance of the same grace?"

This kind of concentration will surely entail for us, as it did for Paul, a determined laying aside of all hindering weights, not to mention the obvious matter of sins (Heb. 12:2). We hardly need to be told that if any athlete in a race keeps on his comfortable overcoat, or tries to carry his easy chair, he cannot expect to gain the prize. Yet, how wedded to our comforts some of us are and how reluctantly we surrender them! Nor can an athlete afford to be weighed down by a large bag of gold! Gold may be all right in its place, but never in a race! And yet, again, how tenaciously many of us cling to this world's passing treasures and yet expect to win an eternal prize! Better far to follow Paul who, having nothing, yet possessed all things, and, being poor, yet made many rich (2 Cor. 6:10). Yes, we too have to learn this lesson of laying aside and then the accompanying lesson of utter concentration in the race. In all these things we are to be followers of Paul.

Following together

In concluding our study there is one further thought which we feel should be emphasized in connection with Paul's call for followers, for we sense it touches a matter which is of no small moment. It would appear from the actual wording of the call, that it was the apostle's desire and hope that there might be many at Philippi who would follow him in the various matters we have here considered and, moreover, who would do so together. The actual wording is, "Brethren, be followers together of me," and we feel sure that the insertion of that word together was studied and deliberate. Evidently Paul was envisaging not just one, or two, or more, isolated individuals who, as such, would rise up to his call, but rather of the whole church, or at the very least a considerable nucleus within the church, who would definitely commit themselves together to come behind him in these explicit matters which he had set before them. As you will see, this is no small matter and we should give it some earnest thought and prayer.

We may be well assured that God's servant had some important reason for including that vital word. Maybe he was thinking of the great encouragement and strength which such a group at Philippi could be to each other in the spiritual battle that would inevitably be involved in the following of Paul in these new ways. More likely, it was a combination of such considerations. In any case, Paul did reach out for a group, or a fellowship, of those who would faithfully follow him in the matters he had mentioned. Perhaps it would be timely and appropriate here to say that many of us have had to learn that it is in the disciplines of fellowship with others that we have come to discover the real depths of our own personal need and then the availability of God's gracious supply. That is certainly one reason why God puts us in churches and also into groups of fellow-workers in the gospel. The disciplines that are called for will prove to be His highway (or low way!) to spiritual enlargement.

However, we just return to the fact that Paul's call was for those who would follow him together in all the matters he had indicated and we feel that this is something that all of us should take seriously to heart. Should we not be asking God for something like that in our day; groups and companies of those who have seen the King and who, as a result, are committed to Him and to each other in pursuing God's good and perfect will for His people? What a difference it would make if, for instance, the elders of our churches could be brought to the place where they are solidly together in following Paul in all the matters we have here considered.

"What things were gain(s) to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Phil. 3:7

"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings." Phil. 3:10

"I press toward the mark for the prize." Phil. 3:14

Needless to say, it still has to begin with the individual and with individual decisions; costly, no doubt, but far more costly in the end to the Lord and to ourselves, if we foolishly turn aside. May God graciously help us to follow Paul even as he followed Christ.

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