

Should We Follow Godly Men or Only Follow Jesus?

by Zac Poonen

In the new covenant, we have both the written Word and the example of Jesus to guide us, and we should follow godly men who follow Christ's example.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Matthew 11:29, Luke 16:13, John 1:4, John 5:39, 1 Corinthians 4:16, Ephesians 5:25, Philippians 3:17, 2 Timothy 2:22, Hebrews 13:17

Topics: "New Covenant", "Following Jesus"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches about the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant, where Jesus not only gave us the Word of God but also an example to follow through His life. In the new covenant, we have the written word and the Word made flesh in Jesus to guide us. The importance of following godly examples like Paul, who said 'Follow me as I follow Christ,' is emphasized to help us navigate through life and avoid deception.

Transcript

Under the old covenant, the Israelites could only follow the written Word that God gave them through Moses and the prophets. No-one could say, "Follow me" - not even the greatest prophets like Moses or Elijah or John the Baptist. God's Word alone was the light for their path (Psa.119:105).

But Jesus came and initiated a new covenant. And He gave us not only the Word of God, but an example to follow, by His own life. He was the first person in the Bible to say, "Follow Me" (Mt.4:19; Jn.21:19; Lk.9:23). So in the new covenant, we have both the written word and also the Word made flesh in Jesus - or in other words, the written word made visible in a human life - to guide us.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for merely studying the Word of God but not coming to Him: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. But they testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me to have life." (Jn.5:39,40).

The life of Jesus is now the Light for our path (John 1:4) - and not just the written Word. If we are unable to find clear guidance in God's Word in some matter, we can look at the life of Jesus (as revealed by the Holy Spirit to our hearts) and we will always find an answer.

Further: In the new covenant, the Holy Spirit also inspired a godly man like Paul to say, "Follow me - as I follow Christ". And the Holy Spirit made him say that three times - to emphasise the fact that we should also follow the example of truly godly men who follow in Christ's footsteps. (1 Cor.4:16; 1 Cor.11:1; Phil.3:17).

A true new-covenant servant not only proclaims God's standard in the written Word, but also says, as Paul said, "Follow me as I follow Christ".

Some Christians say, "We must not follow any man. We must only follow Jesus". That sounds like a spiritual statement. But it is totally contrary to the Word of God. Because, as we have just seen, Paul (inspired by the Holy Spirit) told us to follow him.

The reason why Paul told the Christians in Corinth to follow him and to imitate him, was because he was their spiritual father. He said, "If you were to have ten thousand teachers in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I exhort you, be followers of me." (1 Cor. 4:15,16). One cannot follow a Bible-teacher - because even if his teaching is good and accurate, he may not be a good example by his life. According to the above verse, one spiritual father is better than 10,000 Bible-teachers. So it is good for all Christians to have a spiritual father like Paul, whose example they can follow. Following such a spiritual father can save us from sin and from false teaching.

Paul urged Christians to follow other godly men also, who were "following Christ's example", as he was doing. He said, "Pattern your lives after mine, and learn from others also who follow our example" (Phil. 3:17- NLT).

The Word of God also commands us to obey our leaders and to imitate their faith.

"Obey your leaders and submit to them" (Heb. 13:17).

"Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; consider the result of their conduct (their life), and imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7).

We are NOT called to follow a person's ministry, because God gives each of His children a unique ministry that others cannot have. Christ's Body has members with different functions just like our human body has. When Jesus called people to follow Him, He did not expect them to do miracles or even preach as He did. That was His ministry. He called people to follow the example of His life - that is, to live by the principles by which He lived. Likewise, when Paul called believers to imitate him and follow him as he followed Christ, he was not asking them to be apostles or to heal the sick, but to live as he lived - by the principles by which Christ lived.

It is the Holy Spirit Who has commanded us in the above verses to follow the examples of godly men. Those who are too proud to follow the examples of godly men usually end up following carnal men, or the promptings of their own Self-life. Then the results can be disastrous.

Immediately after telling the Philippian Christians to follow his own example and the example of other godly men (Phil.3:17), Paul warned them not to follow the example of some others: "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18,19).

If however they followed Paul's example, they would be saved from being deceived by those other ungodly men.

Here are seven tests by which you can evaluate whether a man is a truly godly man worthy of being followed:

1. Is he a humble man - easily approachable and easy to speak to? Jesus told us to learn humility from Him (Matt.11:29). A godly man is one who has learned humility from Jesus.
2. Is he free from the love of money and one who never asks anyone for money (as far as you know)? A godly man will follow Jesus' example, Who never asked anyone for money even for His ministry. Jesus said that one who loves God cannot love money and that one who holds on to God will despise money (Luke 16:13).
3. Is he pure in his life - and especially in his dealings with women (as far as you know)? A godly man will not just avoid the temptation to sexual lust but will flee from it (2 Tim.2:20-22).
4. If he is married and has children, has he brought up his children in godly ways? A godly, married man will be one whose children are believers who have been brought up in a disciplined way (1 Tim.3:4,5; Tit.1:6).
5. Have his closest co-workers become godly men through their association with him? Godly men will produce other godly men. Timothy became a godly man through being with his spiritual father, Paul (Phil.2:19-22).
6. Has he built (or been active with others in building) a local new-covenant church? Jesus came to earth to build His church (Matt.16:18). He gave Himself up to death to build the church (Eph.5:25). Godly men will not only bring people to Christ but will then build them up as a local church.
7. Does he connect you to Christ and not to himself? A godly man will connect you to Christ, so that you in turn, can become a godly example for others? (Eph.4:15; 2 Cor.4:5).

We cannot follow most Christian leaders, because they fail in one or more of the above areas.

If however, you find a godly leader who has the above qualities, it will be good for you to follow him as a spiritual father, because he will help you to come closer to the Lord and thus be saved from sin and false teaching.

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

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