

**FOLLOWERS
OF JESUS**

F. S. MARSH

"FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS" SERIES—NO. 22

FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

JOHN 1 : 35-41 ; 10 : 3-5 ; 12 : 26 ; 19 : 25-27 ; 21 : 19-22

EACH of the four gospels lays emphasis upon the thought of believers being "followers" consistently with the presentation of Christ in the gospel.

In Matthew we are to loyally follow Christ, the rejected King ; in Mark, Jesus the perfect Servant has those who follow Him in the path of service ; the evangelist Luke describes the followers of the lowly Man, Christ Jesus ; but in the gospel of John the followers of the Son of God are seen in their various characteristics.

Following does not mean *having followed* ; it is not some incident in our past history : the normal present feature of the Christian is that he *is* following.

By profession all believers are followers of Christ. If we, who have believed in Him, who are cleansed by His precious blood, and who love Him, were challenged by an unbeliever, we should have no hesitation in confessing that Jesus is our Lord and that we are His followers ; yet that is not sufficient. It is not enough to be a professed

follower, nor to have followed in the past ; the great objective of the Spirit of God, especially in this gospel, is to ensure that we should each, at the present moment, be following ; that spiritual movement should be marking us now ; so that instead of going back, or turning aside, we should be making steady forward progress, with Jesus, the Son of God, as our Object.

A follower is one who has come under the influence and attraction of another, having been so impressed that he has turned his back upon that which once held him, and is now definitely pursuing his object.

There is an outstanding instance in the Old Testament of such an one. Five times in the Holy Scriptures it is recorded that Caleb “ wholly followed the Lord,” and once the Lord said of him that “ he had another spirit with him and hath followed me fully.”

How important it is in this day of great profession, and yet of sad departure from the truth, that this should be true of each one, that we are *wholly* following the Lord and that we should not be found in company with those of whom it was said, “ From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”

How many spiritual shipwrecks are the result of not wholly following! Peter failed so seriously because he “followed him afar off.” We may well exclaim, as the bride said in the Song of Songs, “Draw me, we will run after thee.” This is not a spasmodic movement, but following steadily in a clear, straight, positive path—the path of the just which is “as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day”—until the coming of the Lord.

Following is such a full word in the gospel of John. It may have been limited in some minds to the initial thought of discipleship, but this inspired writer does not do so ; he develops it to its fulness. He speaks of following in the first chapter, and carries the thought, by the Spirit of God, to the close of his gospel, thus emphasising its importance, each mention having a distinctive significance.

This is so important for those who are young, who have not yet wholly committed themselves to the Lord. He would bring them under His influence, and draw them by His own personal attractiveness ; for every heart must have an object, and every path must have an end! Persons are held by that

which allures and attracts the heart. How encouraging to discover that while many are held by objects other than Christ, there is on earth to-day a vast number of people who are truly following Him.

Paul, in his epistle to the Philippians, speaking as a pattern Christian, says, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." He had been set in movement by the glory and attractiveness of Christ, to pursue with diligence and spiritual energy the path that leads to Christ in glory, so that he could say, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Thus many things that were once his objectives are now thrown aside and counted as filth that he might "win Christ and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

The instances of "following" in the gospel according to John are progressive in soul history. The two followers of whom we read in chapter I were men who had already been attracted by "a man sent from God whose name was John," truly one of God's

prophets ; indeed, the Lord Himself said that “there is not a greater prophet than John the baptist.” He was a great man, and impressive, so that multitudes came to him, and under his influence many were baptised, confessing their sins ; and a great spiritual movement had taken place. No doubt John the baptist, a young man—only thirty years of age—with a distinctive message from God on his lips, marked by devotedness and energy, was exceedingly attractive. These two men had come under his influence, they had followed him, and had become his disciples. Was that the end of the matter ? Indeed it was not ! It may be that there are many who have been attracted by the servants of God, helped and impressed by them, and who have followed them, being glad of the spiritual help they have received, but the work of God has not this objective in view. The one who has been the most help to us is not intended to become our object. No, the Lord would Himself become everything to our hearts. So there comes a test, as every true believer is tested, and it does not harm any of us. The question arises : Are you prepared to go forward, and take a further step than you have yet taken ? Have

you reached your real objective? As they were in company with the one whom up to that moment they had been following, who held and commanded them, there came before their vision the Son of God, and they listened to John breathing the very language of his heart, entranced by the glory of this Person. It was but a short word—a most beautiful message—“Behold the Lamb of God!” Here is a man who in the power of the Holy Spirit speaks five words with the understanding, with the result that his two disciples left John and followed Jesus. They were

FOLLOWING IN AFFECTION.

We know the history so well; but we must dwell on it for a moment, because it is the beginning of this great spiritual development which is to reach a point in our history when Christ fills the vision of our souls. The appreciation of Jesus as the Lamb of God is essential to us if we are to follow this path. We must tread it from the beginning; so these two disciples began their real spiritual history as followers of Jesus, by coming under His influence as the Lamb of God. “Behold the Lamb of God!” they heard John say. How attractive that would be!

Think of the thousands of lambs slain during the past dispensation, all pointing on to *this* Lamb! It is as though, in the power of the Holy Spirit of God, those five words gathered up the whole of the Old Testament, and centred all the light of its types and shadows on this glorious Person, Jesus! The suggestion is that the two disciples saw the whole of the Old Testament teaching in relation to the types, set forth in a Person—not that they understood the fulness of it, but they saw the Person who was Himself the Antitype—the Lamb of God! How often they had eaten the passover lamb, and had looked back to the experience of their forefathers in Egypt! They understood little of the import of it; but now they see the Lamb of God, “as he walked.” What an attractiveness there was about Jesus! Every step He took was filling heaven with delight and the heart of God with pleasure! And John the baptist, coming under the influence of Christ, enraptured by the glory of His Person, exclaimed out of the fulness of his heart, “Behold the Lamb of God.” That influence was so powerful that it transformed the whole life of those two disciples: they followed Jesus! It meant leaving John, and going beyond

him. It has to be so ; often those who are used to the blessing of souls see them going further and following Jesus, and they rejoice in it.

Now these two disciples meet another test : the Lord Himself challenges them. It is a very interesting moment. Perhaps a fellowship meeting is an occasion for the Lord to challenge our hearts. In the rush of life, the pressure of business, and of home life, it is so easy to get distracted ; but in the quietude of such an hour, with nothing to occupy us save the immediate matter before us, the Lord Himself would take the opportunity to say, “ What seek ye ? ” Let every heart be prepared for the challenge ! The Lord knows whether we are wholehearted. We must emphasise the seriousness of being half-hearted. ‘ Oh, he is a believer ! ’ they say—but is he wholeheartedly following in the path ? Is he going after *Christ* ? If not, what will happen ? Spiritual shipwreck. Persons cannot be held by mere outward belief. They may assent to the truth, they may even have a living faith in the Saviour, but that in itself will not hold them ; it must be *Himself* they are following if they are to be held.

Dear Christian friend, we appeal to you with the deepest affection, and urge you to be wholeheartedly for Christ, to be marked by wholly following the Lord. Is there anything standing between you and this wholehearted committal to Christ? Is there any object claiming your attention that would divert you from the path of true discipleship? If so, may the Lord attract you by the glory of His Person so that you can let nothing stand in the way of devotedly following Him! Let us remind you that the service of God in all its glory and greatness is being continued to-day on earth by wholehearted brothers and sisters; those who have come under the influence of Christ, who have yielded their bodies a living sacrifice, and who are prepared to devote all that they have to the highest and best interests of the service of God here. Those who are half-hearted retard progress, cause difficulties, present other objects, stumble in the path, and alas! often turn out of it to the discouragement of others. Those who are unreservedly committed to the path, experience the grace of Christ upholding them, the power of the Holy Spirit with them; and unquestionably the service of God is maintained in spiritual

power by those who are marked by wholeheartedness.

These two disciples had to be challenged : “ What seek ye ? ” Is it a matter of curiosity, or some personal gain, some ulterior motive ? Let our hearts be challenged in the presence of Christ. “ What seek ye ? ” That is a very searching word ! Their answer is, “ Master, where dwellest *thou* ? ” They employed the choicest title they knew. They are now wholeheartedly under the influence of Christ. He may lead them where He will : wherever He leads them they will go. They have Christ before them : that is the secret. He says, “ Come and see.” The Lord will always encourage those seeking Him. Never has there been a seeker who sought Him in vain when he has sought Him with all his heart. Solomon, Hezekiah and many others in the Old Testament demonstrate this beyond question.

What is presented to us in chapter 1 of John’s gospel is a necessary preliminary to what is developed later. In chapter 10 the question arises of

FOLLOWING WITH THE FLOCK.

The Lord said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." In the first nine chapters of John the work of God is seen proceeding and developing. Individuals are brought forward to illustrate certain stages or developments of the work in souls. In our spiritual history it is intended that we should step into the blessing indicated in these individuals ; in other words, that each should receive the blessing Nicodemus gained in his interview with Jesus ; the living water which the woman of Samaria received ; that each should be empowered to walk as the paralytic man in chapter 5 ; and that, as the man in chapter 9, each should have his eyes opened, and be developed until he becomes a worshipper of the Son of God. But in chapter 10 the Lord begins to speak of His own collectively, as a flock, or a company—not as individuals only, but the individuals now forming a flock ; and He talks about leading them, and of their hearing His voice. This brings us to this very interesting point : As a follower of the Lord Jesus, you will not be called upon to follow alone. The Shepherd will lead you to the flock. You will find He has His objective in mind, as well as you having yours. As the

bride says in Song of Songs 1 : 7, " Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon ; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions ? " Ah! she was learning the lesson. She had just said, " Draw me, we will run after thee " ; now she says, There is only one place in which I can be found—by the flock! A lonely sheep is a sick sheep, and resourceless. The only safe place for a sheep is to keep with the flock. We need to follow our Shepherd by the footsteps of *His* flock, not that of any other. The Lord is opening our spiritual minds to see the importance of the assembly. An aged brother said recently, ' As I look back over more than sixty years which have elapsed since my conversion, how I thank God that soon after I was converted the light of Christ and the assembly dawned upon my soul, and I was brought to see that the Christian path is not an individual but a collective one.' We are to walk together. The Lord would open your soul to this wonderful thought, that it is not an individual path in which the Lord would lead you as the Shepherd. Each has his own personal path to tread, we know ; but what is involved

in this thought of following is that, under His leading, you find yourself with the flock. Has everyone here experienced what it is to come in this way under the leading and the shepherding and the feeding of Christ, under the care which He exercises towards the flock? Have you enjoyed the bounty of the Shepherd's provision for the flock, those pastures of tender grass? Are you following where He leads? How we need His Shepherd care! We are not wise enough either individually, or collectively, to get on without the ministry of the Shepherd. How He is serving us collectively to-day! But the whole secret of getting the gain of His shepherd care lies in following.

We should appreciate this much better if we understood the conditions in the East where the sheep are absolutely dependent upon the shepherd's leading to find their food; in a land where there are no fields, only patches of grass here and there. We do well, dear brethren, to recognise that despite all the wealth of ministry which is being given, with the Scriptures in our hands, and all the privileges which are available to us, we still need to come under the shepherd care of Christ, to find the pastures of tender grass,

and to be kept together. What power there is with Him to hold us together! He says, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd"—"one flock," not "one fold," it should read according to a better translation. There is no need for a fold now because the Shepherd is there, and He is the point of attraction: He holds the sheep together. The fold is an artificial means of holding the sheep together, encircling them with a wall. The power of the Shepherd to hold the sheep individually and collectively makes unnecessary the appointment of religious leaders, organisations, committees, and such humanly devised means to hold together persons who are following Jesus in the path where He leads. The Lord has raised up leaders certainly; and we thank God for them! We should remember our leaders and follow their faith; but the Lord Jesus Himself is the Shepherd of the sheep, and He is the One we follow. So He takes us in chapter 10 from the individual into the collective thought. He says not only, "I know my sheep," but He speaks of the one flock that we might each know consciously

our part in it, proving all that the Shepherd can be to that flock collectively.

May we raise this important question ? Is everyone here definitely following the Shepherd ? Have you found the place where He feeds His flock, making it to rest at noon ? The Lord would lead you there. Do you ask, What am I to do ? Where am I to go ? Tell me where to find it ? We would rather tell you to follow Him : He will lead you to it. Say to the Lord, ' I want to follow Thee ! ' He will surely lead you to where He has a place for you in this one flock. You may say, I know the Lord Jesus has prepared a place for us in the Father's house ! Yes ; but He has a place for you in His assembly to-day ! Have you thought of that ? And, if so, have you found it ? Have you followed Him to where He says, This is your place ? If He has assigned a place to you, no one else but you can fill it ; it will be empty till you do so ; and the Shepherd is leading you to it. The assembly is composed of persons like that who have been led by the Shepherd to find their place in the flock.

In chapter 12 it is a matter of

FOLLOWING IN SERVICE.

“ If any man serve me, let him follow me.” It is important not to divorce these two great thoughts of serving and following. This verse is the Lord’s own words : “ If any man serve me, let him follow me ; and where I am, there shall also my servant be.” Precious as service is, it is of no value to Christ, or to His own, unless the service is rendered in relation to following ; that is to say, the servant must be characteristically a follower. He is himself progressing. He is near the Lord, and is himself under the Lord’s leading. Let us dismiss from our minds the limited use of the word *servant* as applying only to those who serve publicly. One recognises that the Lord has entrusted to some the holy responsibility and privilege of serving publicly ; but in this verse the Lord is not limiting the application of His words to such. We credit every true child of God with possessing in his own heart a longing desire to serve. You cannot love without desiring to serve, and becoming characteristically a servant. It is so even in relation to human love. A little child of four years heard for the first time the story of the cross and the love of Jesus. She came to her mother the next day and said, ‘ Is there anything I can *do* for Jesus ?

I do *love* Him! ’ That is the spirit of service ; it is what the work of God produces in the soul. We recognise that every true lover of Christ has that spirit. But that has to be worked out according to God. You cannot serve at your own dictation ; it is too holy, too dignified, too magnificent, for anyone to take up of their own volition, and according to their own ideas. Remember, dear fellow believers, you are servants. We may have to say we are unprofitable ones (we all have to say that!), or perhaps we have not done much, but we are all servants who belong to Him. The Lord’s service is being carried forward by those who love Him ; and everyone who loves Him has the spirit of service implanted in his heart, and thus we become servants, but then, if we are to serve we must follow. How often we have to lament the poverty of our service, and when the matter has been faced it is seen to be because we were not following closely enough to the One who alone can make that service effectual. The Lord sets out the principle here : we do well to heed it. “ If any man serve me, let him follow me ; and where I am, there shall also *my* servant be.” And then the Lord gives a further word of encouragement : “ If any

man serve me, him will my Father honour.” What a cheer that is! How it would encourage the dear young brothers and sisters who may have felt how little opportunity they have to serve the Lord. It may be the Lord leads them to take up some apparently insignificant service (though, really, there is no service which is insignificant—every detail is dignified), and out of true love for Christ they take it up and pursue it in devotedness. The Father will honour them. The Lord is disclosing to us the wonderful secret that the Father’s heart is gratified by everyone who is pursuing service for Christ’s sake. “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,” Matt. 25 : 40. Oh, to think of spending the few days that may be left to us, rendering no service! What a serious thing! We believe the Lord is pleased to develop greatly the souls of His people as they pursue with diligence and devotedness the dependent path of service. Perhaps you say, I would love to serve the Lord, but I do not know what to do! The Lord Himself is the only One who can answer that question for you. What did Saul of Tarsus say? “Lord, what wilt *thou* have me to do?” The Lord said,

“ Arise, and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do,” Acts 22 : 10. The Lord may use those who are His to indicate to you and to encourage you as to service for Him, and to support you in it, but you have to go to the Lord first of all for the answer to that question. Think of the Father honouring the one who follows and serves Christ! What a dignity attaches to that service! It will involve reproach, sacrifice, and oftentimes putting our own matters on one side, but “ him will my Father honour! ” So it is worth while. The Lord would lead us until, qualified, equipped and filled spiritually, we can take our intelligent part in the service of God.

Now along with this service is the reproach of Christ. In chapter 19 this is in evidence. Jesus goes on His way to the cross. Now the test comes! Who will be with Him as the rejected One, the crucified One? Nailed to the cross, between two malefactors, scorned, hated, and spit upon ; the object of man’s derision, who will follow Him there?

“ Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the

wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene . . .
and the disciple standing by whom he loved.”
These sisters and the brother are

FOLLOWING IN REPROACH.

How encouraging this is, especially to those who are in small gatherings, where the fewness of numbers and outward feebleness of the position is realised! Yet it is the reproach of Christ! Think of that little gathering at the cross! There were but few: the multitudes had cried, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” but these were a few lovers of Christ, in the minority indeed, yet prepared to stand by the cross in the darkest hour! What it must have meant to them to be there, but what must it have meant to the Lord’s heart to see them there: prepared, if needs be, to suffer the same indignities as were heaped upon their Master.

No doubt, but for the ordering of God, the enemies would have treated every follower of Jesus as they treated Him, but those devoted hearts said in effect—If to follow Him means going the whole way, we will go with Him!

Surely at the judgment seat of Christ,

when He will review the paths of His own, those who stood by the cross so devotedly will stand out then in a holy dignity before the vast company of the saints to hear the Lord express His great appreciation of their loyalty. Can we do likewise? Let us remember our brethren who are in reproach to-day—following our rejected Lord, turning away from formal religion and from all that exalts the man after the flesh, to stand true to the cross with all its deep meaning and import! It was the same devoted love that led Mary Magdalene to remain at the sepulchre—still following Him as her heart said—I cannot leave Him. She was speaking in the language of Psalm 73 : “ Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.”

It is important that we should be prepared to suffer the reproach of Christ. Up to the present time many of us have not been called upon to suffer much in this land ; some of our younger brethren are being tested more than hitherto, but the Lord would have us all follow Him with such true and deep affection that we may all be able to rejoice to be “ counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.”

The last reference to following in the gospel is in chapter 21, where the Lord Jesus in resurrection-life is heard saying to Peter, "Follow thou me!" He would have us

FOLLOWING IN TESTIMONY.

We are left here awaiting His coming, and the one important matter is for each one to be in the path of testimony, in affectionate loyalty to Him. Peter had said, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death," but he had proved his inability to do so : now, humbled and restored the Lord enjoins him, "Follow thou me!"

Then in reviewing the words of the Son of God throughout this gospel, can we limit the thought of following to our path here on earth : as we follow Him, will He not delight to lead us even now into the deep joys that are His—the Son of the Father : will He not lead our hearts into the Father's realm, into the enjoyment of the Father's love, until at last we are found with Him in the Father's house—having followed Him there ?

May the Lord be pleased to bring each heart under His influence, and allure us after

Himself, and as He says to each of us,
“ Follow thou me,” may our sincere response
be—

“ Saviour, we long to follow Thee,
Do Thou our hearts prepare
To count all else, whate’er it be,
Unworthy of our care.”

F. S. MARSH.

STOW HILL BIBLE AND TRACT DEPOT,
2, Upper Teddington Road, Hampton Wick
Kingston-on-Thames.

Made and printed in England

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