

34. Follow Me

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mk. 10:17) The question would seem to be an evangelist’s dream come true – on a par with having someone ask, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30) Indeed, one interpreter of the New Testament actually translates the rich young ruler’s question as, “What one act shall I do in order that I might inherit life eternal?” (Wuest) But after two thousand years of “theology” and professional “church” “ministry,” why, of course, it’s time to steer the hungry soul down “the Roman road,” have him say “a sinner’s prayer,” counsel him to “go to church on Sunday,” and carve another notch in our leather Bible cover as proof that we’ve done the right thing for this guy. Interestingly, Jesus (as is also true of Paul and Barnabas) did *not* do any of this modern religious foolishness.

Jesus answered the man by pointing him to the commandments – those laws which the young man had obeyed from his childhood. (Mk. 10:19-20) Jesus then, in one of those moments where He demonstrates His ability to know the depths of a man’s soul, pinpoints the one thing that is still lacking in his spiritual life: “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” (Mk. 10:21)

In pointing the man to the commandments, Jesus was not suggesting that the man could get to heaven by keeping them. Rather, this man, even though he had kept the law since his childhood, knew in the depths of his being that he still did not have eternal life in his possessions. Jesus was prompting the man to look at the commandments because, as Paul would later write, “The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith (justified from all the things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses.)” (Gal. 3:24, Acts 13:39) This man who had been well tutored by the law now stood before the Christ – and his money would cause him to reject the Christ (Mk. 10:22) and to return, however miserably, to the tutor which would surely continue to work to bring the man to Christ. Some scholars see the observation that “Jesus, looking at him, loved him...” (Mk. 10:21 – an observation not made by either Matthew or Luke – Mt. 19:21, Lk. 18:22) as possibly being one of those subtle hints dropped by the author, in this case John Mark, that this was his own personal experience. If John Mark was the rich young ruler – certainly a possibility but by no means anything resembling a certainty – it would certainly provide a “happy ending” to the story which the gospel narratives did not see fit to provide. For all we know, the rich young ruler (as did so many of the ruling class of the Jews) could have progressed in his miserable condition under the law, come to hate Jesus as a false claimant to being Messiah and participated in the murder of Christ at Jerusalem. We will never know until we are in eternity what the man’s outcome was.

But we must see that even though money was the tripstone that kept him from Christ, Jesus had given him instructions as to what to do after he sold off his goods and gave it away to the poor: “Come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” (Mk. 10:21) And it is in these instructions that we find the way that leads to eternal life, that condition or process men like to call simply *salvation*.

On another occasion Jesus said to the Jews, “You do not believe [what I have said about Myself], because you are not of My sheep... My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” (Jn. 10:26-28) This passage is one that is relied on to promote the doctrine of eternal security, another of those inventions of modern religious foolishness. Those

who would receive eternal life from Christ must *hear His voice and follow Him* - precisely the same instructions given to the rich young ruler. It is not sufficient to have a *doctrine* that tells us we are “saved” – we must hear His voice and follow Him and in this way genuinely have a *Savior* who comforts and confirms us in this condition and process that men like to call simply *salvation*. When we substitute the doctrine for the Savior, we begin the process the New Testament calls “falling away from the faith” (1 Tim. 4:1) or “neglecting so great a salvation.” (Heb. 2:3), a process that can ultimately end in dire and drastic consequences. (Mt. 7:23, etc.) Interestingly, those who rely on the eternal security doctrine seem to have no problem with judging others, mostly only because they differ in doctrinal beliefs, as “wicked and unsaved” (contrary to Christ’s instructions – Mt. 7:1, etc.) all while they refuse to rely on God’s ability to judge all men, including themselves, according to their deeds. (Mt. 16:27)

Jesus, as He said to the Jews and the rich young ruler, still says that the way of the cross is not optional but is instead *mandatory*. “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Lk. 9:23) On another occasion He said, “He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.” (Mt. 10:38) Though two thousand years of “theology” and professional “church” “ministry” has tried to establish obedience to the way of the cross as mere foolishness, the taking up of the cross and following after the Messiah-Savior *is* the power of God to those who are truly being saved. (1 Cor. 1:18)

Fishers of Men

When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, He said, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Mt. 4:19) It is not to be supposed that this calling is reserved for Peter and Andrew alone for Jesus also taught, “The kingdom of God is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind.” (Mt. 13:47) Everyone who has entered the kingdom of God through new birth (Jn. 3:5) is called to be involved in the care for souls – for winning new converts to the kingdom and for caring for and bringing to maturity the younger, less mature believers around them.

The command to “Follow Me” is both mandatory and vital for those who embark on this task. This is the “prime directive” which the mature believer is to practice as well as the primary, perhaps even the *only* skill he or she needs to pass on to others – the necessity and ability to abide in and follow Christ by His Spirit. It is from this abiding in and following Him that all our good works must flow. (Eph. 2:10)

Paul lists the “ones” of our life in God: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above and through all, and in us all. (Eph. 4:4-6) From this oneness springs the myriad, manifold grace (mercy *and* power of God) which Paul describes by saying, “But [from this One-ness] to each one of us grace was given according to the measure by which Christ gives it.” (Eph. 4:7) Paul then goes on to say that Christ gave some people to be expressions of His grace – listing here apostles, prophets, heralds, shepherds and teachers while using other words (as does John) in the lists in his other writings. These people, as they express the grace of Christ to those around them, will equip the saints to do the work of service to Christ, His body (people) and even the world (Eph. 4:11-12), empowering them (by means of their personally partaking of the grace of Christ and God in the work of these people) to attend to the orphans and widows and the least of Christ’s brothers (Jas. 1:27, Mt. 25:40, 45) and to love one another as He commanded. (Jn. 13:34-35) When these people fulfill this work by expressing the grace (mercy *and* power) that comes from their oneness with Christ and God, then – ***and only then!*** – will we see the oneness, (unity, unanimity) of the faith, the

oneness (unity, unanimity) of our knowledge of the Son of God, true spiritual maturity and a tangible and visible similarity and resemblance between our lives and that of Christ Jesus. (Eph. 4:13) One of the major reasons the “church” is so divided is because carnal men seek to achieve doctrinal solidarity prior to and apart from the oneness of the Spirit of Christ and God. The “church” has concocted its own “better way” – often in ignorance or in blind obedience to “church” traditions – and, like Cain, they are offended when their carnal offerings are rejected by God. (Gen. 4:5) It is an inescapable part of any true work *of* God that apart from Christ we can do *nothing* (Jn. 15:5) but in and through Christ we can do *all things*. (Phlp. 4:13)

Paul wrote, “I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we [the original apostles] have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit [from the Holy Spirit] which you have not received, or a different gospel [from the original good news of the kingdom of God] which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it.” (2 Cor. 11:3-4) There are many different Jesus-es to choose from these days – any of the “theological” “Jesus-es” of one’s choosing, a culturally bound and therefore spiritually irrelevant “Jesus,” the social reformist “Jesus,” etc., ad nauseam. The gospel of the “church” (which is largely “come to our place, hear our guy speak and do as much or as little as you like *for* God”) is very different from the gospel of the kingdom (“Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” – Mt. 4:17) And the Holy Spirit of God’s kingdom, characterized by “righteousness, peace and joy” (Rom. 14:17), is difficult to find at “church” while one is hard pressed to avoid the spirits of envy, self-seeking and confusion (see Jas. 3:16) and God have mercy on the “poor deluded soul” who dares to seriously question or contradict the overlord who regularly stands behind the pulpit and over the people!

The corruption of the mind by spiritual disinformation is one of the initial strategies of the devil and the demonic against the individual which, if successful, will be used as a concealed springboard from which further deceptions and oppressions will be attempted. This initial corruption of the mind is accomplished in *three* alternatives: a different Jesus, a different gospel *or* a different *spirit*. “Church” denominations that adhere rather carefully to the Scriptures do not readily fall for a different Jesus or a counterfeit gospel – but they are often *ruled* by a different spirit!

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the body of Christ in our time is the lack of ability to spiritually discern. We are not trained to know all men by the Spirit of Christ (2 Cor. 5:16) but instead we are trained to subject one another to our own preferred doctrinal tests whereby we mistakenly think we can judge and know who our true brothers in Christ are. This popular fallacy is both a cause and a result of the carnality which governs the “church” and is a key piece of evidence of just how subtle and effective the deceptive work of the devil is among the sons of the “church.”

When Paul and Barnabas told the Philippian jailer what he needed to do in order to be saved – “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved...” (Acts 16:31) – Luke’s short record (which even he says Paul and Barnabas went on to more fully deliver “the word of the Lord” to the jailer and all in his household – Acts 16:32) has been used by some modern “theologians” to dismiss the need for both repentance and obedience and to produce an “easy-believism” false “gospel.” “Only believe” is their catch-phrase and any who fall for this deception are indeed ensnared to the point of falling away from the faith.

Jesus still calls upon His true followers to fish for men’s souls and to love those with whom they interact with the totality of their being. The “church” has so complicated the gospel

with its works-based counterfeits (that lure in the soulishly willful), its experienced-based counterfeits (that lure in the soulishly emotional), and its knowledge-based counterfeits (that lure in the soulishly intellectual) that one is almost forced to study Greek and become a “theologian” in order to find out what the original text said and meant. Be wary, however, anyone who pursues Greek or “theology” apart from the Spirit of truth (who is to lead us to Christ and into all truth – Jn. 15:26, 16:13) is one who may begin their life in the Spirit of God but become deceived by trying to walk the road that leads to life in the power of their soul and flesh. (see Gal. 3:3, Mt. 7:13-14) The “church” has thus exchanged obedience to Christ and genuine service to one another, to orphans, widows and the poor for the writing and publishing of books and treatises and arguments and apologies and exposes as if the latter were the only right and true way to follow Christ. The “church” thus gathers its followers into its own smug, self-concealed circles that comfort the “church”-ite in their lawlessness (what is right in their own eyes – Jdgs. 21:25), using flattery to hide the fact that blind leaders stand over blind followers leading all toward an eternal pit. (Mt. 15:14) And no one in the “church” seems able to see that churchianity itself is the disease that inhibits the gospel from accomplishing its redemptive and curative work in the world.

Sharing the good news of Christ’s kingdom is much more than speaking the religiously correct words. Those who have only the right words (but the wrong spirit), are those who have only a form of godliness but lack its power. From such as these we are to turn away! (2 Tim. 3:5) We must recognize that the way of Christ can never be properly taught by those whose lives are characterized by and filled with deception, darkness, oppressiveness and hatred. Unless we ourselves live in His light, following and abiding in Him, we cannot teach anyone else the real and true “prime directive” of following and abiding in Him. In this way, truth must come before liberty (Jn. 8:32) and whoever truly believes in Christ must not abide in darkness. (Jn. 12:46, 2 Tim. 2:19) Desiring truth and the will of God is our safeguard against being deceived (Jn. 7:17) and from entering into the apostasy, the great falling away from the faith that occurs prior to Christ’s return. (2 Ths. 2:3, 10)

God now commands *all people everywhere* to repent (Acts 17:30) and He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Pet. 3:9) At the resurrection, however, we find that much of mankind will not have their names written in God’s Book of Life and will be thrown into the eternal lake of fire. (Rev. 20:15, Mt. 25:41) Some of these will be believers who in unbelief drew back from the way of salvation into destruction (Heb. 10:39), who having known the way of righteousness, turned from (departed, left behind) the holy commandment given to them (2 Pet. 2:21), and who, by refusing to overcome, caused their names to be blotted out (erased, marked over, *removed*) from the Book of Life. (Rev. 3:5) Jesus is “the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb. 5:9) – not those who disobey Him! It is part of God’s plan of redemption that we be completely set apart for Him, that our *whole* spirit, soul and body would be blameless (1 Ths. 5:23) and “that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but *for Him...*” (2 Cor. 5:15) The notion that one can live with one foot in the “church” and one foot in the world is a fallacy because the “church” is part of the world. The notion that one can live part of life willfully obeying God’s Spirit and another part willfully obeying the flesh is a demonic deception because “he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption [death], but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” (Gal. 6:8)

Jesus still commands His true follower to “deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Lk. 9:23) Those who neglect or disdain to obey this command should not be

surprised at Christ's dismissal at the last day: "I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of unrighteousness." (Lk. 13:27, 2 Ths. 2:12) If we will not follow Him now, by what right will be able to demand to be received by Him then?

Let he who has ears hear.

Chapter 33: Ephesians: Paul's Time Capsule

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Chapter 35: Furthering the Kingdom

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