

Disciples That Don't Follow

John 8:30-31

As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. ³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."

A friend comes up to you and says, 'I want you to see my new car.' You walk up with him, and you see its shiny exterior. He opens the door and begins to tell you about all the features – the sound system, the aircon, the GPS navigation, the seat warmer, the DVD screens; he just goes on and on. You say, 'Can we go for a ride in it?' He looks a bit embarrassed, and says, 'Well... this car doesn't come with a functional engine. But we can sit here and enjoy the sound system.' Well, you will no longer be impressed – because take away all the bells and whistles, and the primary function of a car is to drive. A car that cannot go is in fact not really a car – that's the most fundamental thing about a car. When the most important thing about something isn't there, the externals don't make much difference.

A car that cannot go is like a plane that cannot fly, a heater which cannot heat, a radio without sound, or a telephone which cannot connect

Here's another one – it is like a disciple who does not follow!

A disciple who does not follow! The word disciple means 'follower' - a pupil, a learner, who obeys, follows, submits to his or her master or teacher. When a disciple is not following, they are not a disciple.

As we have seen, the word used to describe believers more than any other word is the word 'disciple.' To be a born again believer is to be a disciple. To be a Christian is to be a regenerated follower of Christ. You cannot be a Christian and not be following Christ.

However, today it seems people are not shocked by that idea because they have heard or bought into an unbiblical form of Christianity. They have heard that you can at some point in your life get a get out of hell free card by repeating a simple sinner's prayer. Having done that, they feel they are now safe. The card is in their pocket. They do not believe that if they do not follow Christ for the rest of their lives, this invalidates their claim to be Christians – after all, they have the card in their pocket.

And while they will laugh at the idea of a car that cannot go or a plane that cannot fly, they will not blink at the idea of a Christian who does not follow Christ. Or, they will assume that to have prayed a sinner's prayer is to follow Christ. After all, since I gave the nod to Christ, I must now be on that side of the fence – the Christian side – so I am by definition a follower of Christ.

Not so. To follow Christ entails more than, at one point, agreeing He is the Saviour and calling on Him to forgive you and give you His righteousness, though certainly that is where it begins. To follow Christ is to actively and continuously hand over the direction of your life to Christ.

Jesus Himself said in **John 8:31**: *'Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;'*

The English word 'submit' comes from Latin and means 'to put under.' When you submit, you put yourself under. You put yourself under what? You put yourself under the authority of Jesus Christ. It means the actions and decisions of your life are always referred to Him, and He makes the decision, and you submit to it.

That means He now decides what you will do. He decides how you will do it. He decides when you will do it and where and how often.

The process of discipleship is the process of increasingly coming under His authority. It is learning to more perfectly follow Christ.

Since the age of kings is over, we battle to really understand submission. We are taught all the time – 'You are equal to everyone else, you have rights, no one can tell you what to do, people can give you advice, which you can take or reject, but you're the boss, like everyone else.' Most people don't submit to the government, they just tolerate it, and keep the laws to make their lives less problematic. In the family, the world teaches that wives don't submit to husbands because that's considered archaic and narrow minded. Children no longer submit to parents; they just kind of grow up with advice from parents. And in the workplace – while there may be a hierarchy, people are quick to assert their rights, and call for arbitration or strike, or resign if they feel they aren't getting their rights. The whole concept of submission is looked upon with suspicion in our culture and age. It sounds undemocratic. It sounds like you are losing your rights.

And in a sense, that's exactly what it is. You are surrendering rights – the right to rule yourself (which in fact, you never had; it was a stolen right). And it isn't democratic, because Christ is a King; He was not elected by us. And He has the right to lead us.

But to be a disciple is to live counter-culture. It is to recognise that authority and submission is the way God has designed the universe, and you cannot go far in God's universe if you do not accept that. You step off a building into thin air and shout, 'I defy you gravity,' but that sudden acceleration downwards will show you were very naïve. And so you can say, 'I don't have to do this or that! I have the right to do it my own way! I will do it the way I want to!' But reality will catch up with you. You will find, if you are indeed a disciple, God will not let your life work properly if you live it for yourself, according to your own ways. God will discipline you; God will train you in righteousness. And your life will lack the joy and power it ought to have, if you follow Christ half of the time, and the world the other half.

But how do you follow Jesus Christ?

I want to show you three ways we follow Christ in this period before His return, or He takes us to be with Him.

1. You Submit to Christ in His Word

John 14:23 *Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."*

Christ's authority remains with us in the form of His Word, taught by His Spirit. To talk about following Christ without obeying His Word is pure nonsense.

Someone says, 'I follow Gandhi.' How? Gandhi is dead. In what way can you follow Gandhi? You can follow him by his teachings.

It is the same as talking about following Gandhi but never having read a thing of what he said or did. Such a person is imagining he is following Gandhi but isn't really doing so in any tangible way.

Christ is alive, but seated at the right hand of the Father. But to know His will, to know His authority in your life, to know what He wants for you, is to seek it in His Word.

Again, to be a disciple disinterested in the Word of God, is equivalent to a racing car driver being disinterested in petrol. To drive you need fuel. To follow Christ, you need instruction.

A believer is ever seeking to saturate himself in the Word of God and bring it to bear on every part of life - on being a husband, on being a wife, on being a parent, on being a Christian son or daughter, on being single, on dating, on sexual purity, on life direction, on the use of money and finances, on the choice of job, on choices within that job, on being a housewife, on entertainment choices, on music, on what you read and watch and hear, on driving, on dressing, on your body and your health, on eating, on everything – because being a disciple is following Christ through everything.

2 Tim 3:16-17 *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

When we talk about Biblical authority it means the Bible always comes into view for what you do. Like a filter over a camera – the Bible comes over your thinking as you live life.

Here's an illustration. You don't have an accent, right? The first time you notice you have an accent is when you are surrounded by people who have a very different accent. We little realise how much of the world's accent we have. We think like the world because it is how we have grown up; it is what we have imbibed and taken in, and seen in others. It is what we think of as 'normal' The only thing which confronts what we thought was 'normal' is the Word of God.

1 Pet 2:2 –as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

You say you are following Christ? The Bible is the compass, the map, the homing beacon. As the star guided the wise men to Christ at His birth, the Word guides you to Christ right through life.

To follow Him, is to learn and obey the Word.

2. You Submit to Christ in His Church

Heb 13:17 *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

Submission to Christ is not just obeying the Word. It is obeying the Word in the context of a community of believers to which you are accountable – the local church. And to follow Christ is to join a local church and place yourself under the instruction and pastoral oversight of that church. God places leaders in your life to supervise your obedience to the Word of God.

The Bible knows nothing of disciples who are not submitted to a local church. The Scripture makes it clear – submit to the ones who watch over your souls. Consider them to be carrying the authority of Christ, to the degree that they accurately handle the Word of God.

Primarily, that is in the pulpit ministry. But it is also in biblical counselling. It is in decisions that are made. Insofar as the actions are Biblical – they carry Christ's authority.

Now, certainly we all know of the abuses. We know of tyrants in the pulpit. We know of people who want people to follow them for their own pride. We know of authoritarian set-ups where it's his way or the highway. The Bible does not expect us to submit to men who themselves are not submitted to Christ.

But the opposite danger is also true – where the pastors are nothing more than spiritual cheerleaders, spiritual motivational speakers who present a weekly speech at the appointed time, but if they start meddling in people's lives, woe to them. Or where their counsel can be ignored, or shunned, or brushed aside, or treated like a doctor – 'I'll just get a second opinion from someone else.' Or if things don't work out, 'I'll just go where they won't be like this.'

Now, it is one thing if a pastor is mishandling the Word of God – particularly on a regular basis. It is one thing if he has failed to be the husband of one wife, or to be blameless, or if he has become greedy, or intemperate, or a striker – or failed to be the man I Timothy 3 or Titus 1 describes. Certainly, you have grounds to say – 'Your authority rests on the Word of God, and since the Word of God disqualifies you, I cannot conscience being under your authority.' But to dismiss, or to be indifferent towards, pastoral authority that is biblical in character and in teaching, is to disobey Christ.

To follow Christ is to be so connected to a local church that you indeed have pastoral guidance in your life. God gives the body under-shepherds, to carry His rod and staff.

Are you faithful enough to make it plain you desire such guidance? Are you submitted enough to where you actively seek this kind of oversight in your life?

If your pastor plays little to no role in your life, it may indeed be his fault. But it may also be yours. It may be that you intentionally duck under the radar, you deliberately dash out the door quickly; you make sure you stay on the periphery of the church.

Have you become a member of the church you attend? Are you fulfilling your role as a member?

3. You Submit to Christ in His People

Eph 5:21 *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

Here we come to the one we least expect. We are okay with submitting to the Word of God. We're less okay with the idea of submitting to men who are given oversight of the church. But perhaps, we can deal with that. But submit to one another! How can that be? What does this mean?

It does not mean that we must do whatever another Christian tells us to do at any time. It does not mean that we can exercise authority over each other.

It means, we must be submitted to how God will use one another in our lives. We must be clothed with humility, **1 Peter 5:5** tells us, *‘and be willing to yield to the accountability we will receive from each other.’* We are the instruments which God uses to disciple each other. All the ‘one another’ commands of Scripture add up to this – *fellowship with each other, and disciple each other.*

But here is the thing. The ministry we will have to one another includes such things as instructing each other, rebuking each other, restoring each other, admonishing one another. And it may be that, when another believer challenges us to follow Christ more carefully, our pride may react. ‘Who are you to tell me about my sin? You’re not the pastor! What about you?’ And to do that would be to violate God’s command to be submitted to one another. Yes, the beauty of God’s church is this: we are sinners in need of change, helping other sinners, also in need of change. And if you reject the ministry of other believers to you, you will not be following Christ – because that is part of it.

You see this mentality sadly in many people. They follow man. If the rebuke does not come from so and so, they will not hear it. Or they will come to hear so and so preach, but not so and so. God has not given you the right to pick and choose who will minister to you from God’s people in a local church.

Imagine the kidneys deciding that they were not going to receive ministry from the heart, only from brain. They would cease to function properly.

Now, I’m not saying that everything everyone does or says is going to necessarily be right or beneficial; I am saying – do not refuse to hear and be taught by one another.

To follow Christ as a disciple is to be submitted to discipleship. That means submitting to other disciples who disciple you.

Because Christ is Risen and ascended, there is always a danger that people will claim to follow Him, while not following Him at all. So Jesus gave us three visible, measurable standards. We’re following Him if we are submitting to the Word in our lives. We’re following Him if we are submitting to the Word under the spiritual leaders God gives us in the local church. And we are following Him as we submit to each other in the local church as we disciple one another.