

Paul - “Be Ye Followers Of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Jay Yeager

Paul is not asking us to follow him as our religious authority (Jesus Christ is our authority - Matthew 28:18; Colossians 3:17; 1 Peter 3:22); in fact, he had gone to great lengths to show how wrong that would be. *“Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”* (1 Corinthians 1:12-13).

“And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written... “ (1 Corinthians 4:6). Therefore, when Paul said be ye followers of me, he qualifies it with, *“As I also am of Christ.”* In other words follow me as far, and as long, as I follow Christ. Now, having said that, Paul wanted us to follow him because he knew that he was following Christ. To follow Paul’s example as a devoted Christian, worthy of emulation, is the focus of our study.

Follow Me from Lost to Saved

Please notice that it is not “follow me from lost to religious,” Paul was lost while being a very religious man, zealous toward God, but he was religiously wrong! Multitudes are on that road even as we speak. It is never easy to ask tough questions of ourselves, to look beyond where we are comfortable and familiar, but that is just the examination we are required to make; *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”* (2 Corinthians 13:5).

I realize that many find the possibility of being wrong uncomfortable and decline the examination. *“I am satisfied right where I am, don’t make me think”,* or *“if it was good enough for dad and mom, it is good enough for me”,* are the sentiments expressed by many. This passage may not change their minds – but it does scream a warning for all who will hear.

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Questions we must ask ourselves:

1. Have I obeyed the gospel?
 - a. By hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17).
 - b. Believing the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15-16).
 - c. Repenting of past sins (Acts 17:30).
 - d. Confessing Christ before men (Romans 10:10).
 - e. Being baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
2. Am I a member of the New Testament church (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; Ephesians 2:16)?
3. Am I living faithful to Christ (Revelation 2:10)?

Folks, that is a journey every accountable soul must make (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23; 2 Corinthians 5:14), from lost to saved, will you follow Paul?

Follow Me for Today and Tomorrow - Not Yesterday

There were so many things that Paul regretted - driven by hatred, he was such a fierce persecutor of Christianity. He breathed out threatenings and slaughter (Acts 9:1), he made havock of the church (Acts 8:3), persecuting this way unto death (Acts 22:4). Years later he would look back and say that he was the chief of all sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Frequently, I refer to this particular point, but that is certainly not the heart of that verse. It is that which comes before Paul speaks of his own sin that makes every Christian so profoundly grateful: *“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”*

Did Paul have regrets? Oh, he surely did! However, you cannot live in yesterday's failures. Please understand that I am not talking about continuing to live in sin, or a sinful relationship. Genuine repentance **must** precede baptism. What I am talking about is allowing a sinful past to rob a Christian of the joy, peace and hope that is to fill their lives. Paul absolutely refused to allow the past to keep him from faithfully serving Christ, and longing for heaven. Hear him as he penned these verses by inspiration.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I might win Christ. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is through the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I might know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:8-13).

God knew, and Paul certainly recognized that no Christian can live mired in regret without guilt robbing them of the joy that accompanies being a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). I have little doubt that Paul encountered those who suffered in some fashion because of his past persecution of the church, and it must have been difficult for him. But he never, a single time, said “Follow me because I persecuted Christ”. It was not what he used to be that mattered, but what he had become. Will you follow, Paul because he lived and preached New Testament Christianity?

Follow Me in Seeking the Lost

Paul had a genuine care for lost souls, and where better to see this caring and compassionate heart than in his love for his own countrymen. *“I say the truth in Christ, I lie not ...that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Romans 9:1-3).*

Beloved, if Paul could have surrendered his salvation to see the Jewish nation be saved, he would have. But there is a truth taught in the Bible that needs to be emphasized; namely, righteousness is a personal matter. That truth is evident in a verse where righteousness is attributed to three men. Noah, Daniel and Job were commended for their righteousness (Ezekiel 14:14). Six verses later we find that their righteousness could not be transferred to others, not even to their own children (Ezekiel 14:20). The next time you are studying the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) remember these verses. Righteousness can neither be borrowed nor lent.

Beloved, this dedicated soul winner did not see the lost through his own eyes, he saw them through the eyes of God, and here is why. The salvation of man cost him nothing, but it cost God and Christ a great deal. In Malachi 1:2 God said to the Jews; “I have loved you,” and they answered *“wherein hast thou loved us,”* in other words demonstrate your love. God gave a demonstration that went far beyond the Jewish mind set, a love so immense that it would embrace all men for all time (Hebrews 2:9).

The Salvation of Man Was a Costly Matter for the Father

The Father **sent** Jesus into the world to **die** in our stead. *“For Christ also hath once suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God...”* (1 Peter 3:18), love lying at the root. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16).

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:9-10).

This death would be so horrifying that the instrument of death (the cross) and manner (crucifixion) would be symbols cherished in the hearts and minds of all Christians, and recorded repeatedly in the book Divine. A stark reminder that the price of our redemption went far beyond any monetary consideration (1 Peter 1:18-19).

- *“For I am determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified”* (1 Corinthians 2:2).
- *“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world”* (Galatians 6:14).
- *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:19).
- *“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness. But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

- *“And having made peace through the blood of the cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Colossians 1:20).*
- *“And that he might reconcile both [Jew and Gentile - jy] unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Ephesians 2:16).*

Paul saw the lost through the eyes of the Father and he knew how costly it was. All that happened to Jesus, the Father knew (Acts 2:23), foretold (Isaiah 53:1-12) and witnessed at least to a point (Matthew 27:46; Psalms 22:1; Habakkuk 1:13). While others may have casually observed the scene at Calvary (Matthew 27:35), the Father was anything but casual. He responded, not in words to be sure, but in action:

- Darkness that covered the earth (Matthew 27:45; Amos 8:9). Darkness seems fitting.
- The earth that quaked, rocks rent and graves opened and the veil torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-52).
- The centurion and those with him finally knew, they feared greatly, saying, *“Truly this was the Son of God”* (Matthew 27:54).

The Salvation of Man Was a Costly Matter for Jesus Christ

What Jesus surrendered! To surrender heaven, even for a time, would be a sacrifice few of us would consider, yet Jesus willingly left the grandeur of heaven for our sakes. *“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich”* (2 Corinthians 8:9).

What Jesus became! God took human form. *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God. But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men”* (Philippians 2:5-7). Jesus departed heaven to be conceived in the womb of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23), to begin a human journey that would span some 33 years. That would, by itself, be an amazing fact revealed in the Bible. However, the purpose for Jesus taking human form was to pay a debt that was none of his making. A debt beyond the ability of any other to pay, the sins of every accountable person would be the burden placed upon Jesus (Isaiah 53:5-6).

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). *“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed”* (1 Peter 2:24).

What Jesus endured! Knowing that no other was qualified to carry that burden did not diminish in any way the anguish Jesus would suffer. In fact, as the events which would ultimately end in his pain-filled death drew near, so did the apprehension Jesus felt. *“Now is my soul troubled; and*

what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour” (John 12:27). Please understand, apprehension does not equal wavering. Had Jesus made the request, an angelic army could have blocked the path to Calvary (Matthew 26:53), but Jesus voluntarily surrendered his life (John 10:18).

Further, Jesus refuted any other suggestion. When Pilate claimed that the life or death of Jesus was under his control, Jesus immediately dispelled that notion. *“Then said Pilate unto him, speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have the power to release thee? Jesus answered, thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above...”* (John 19:10-11).

But that death was anything but easy:

1. The curse of hanging on a tree (Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:23).
 - a. Jesus hated it – despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2; 2:10).
2. The scourging – a cruelty that often crippled, maimed or killed.
 - a. Did Herod have Jesus scourged in hopes of satisfying the blood-thirsty crowd (John 19:1-5)? Some thoughts to consider.
 - i. Pilate knew the Jews delivered Jesus out of envy (Matthew 27:18).
 - ii. His wife warned him to have nothing to do with this just man (Matthew 27:19).
 - iii. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent (Matthew 27:23-24).
3. The crucifixion, capital punishment, intended to bring the greatest amount of human suffering (Psalms 22:16).

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). The salvation of man cost the Father and the Son a great deal. Will you follow Paul in seeking the lost; see precious souls through the eyes of God and not your own?

Follow Me to the Journeys End

Inspired history has no shortage of souls who began the journey only to exchange truth for error (1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:3-4), or the crown of life for the glitter of this world (2 Timothy 4:10; 2 Peter 2:20-22). No congregation is exempt from the loss, and all the pleas, prayers and tears cannot keep some from abandoning the hope of heaven.

While that is heart-breaking (and it always should be), surprise should not be a part of the reaction. Jesus told us that two-thirds of those who initially respond to the gospel fall short of the goal (Luke 8:11-15). Some desert at the first sign of persecution (Mark 4:17), for others the surrender is slower (but as deadly) as the cares and riches of this world slowly choke out the word (Mark 4:19), like a cancer that spreads until it strikes that vital organ, the heart for a Christian. Demas is an example of one who served faithfully for a time (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24), until those fateful words; *“For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world...”* (2 Timothy 4:10). No one else may have been aware that Demas was dying a little at a time.

Now this question, can you know if you are spiritually ill? Of course you can. The disease may not be visible to others, but you can know. What are the symptoms of the world worming its way back into the life of a Christian?

1. When worship becomes a chore instead of a privilege (Psalms 122:1).
 - a. Excuses become a cover to justify your absence (Luke 14:16-24).
2. When the Bible is a book you carry but rarely open (2 Timothy 2:15).
3. When giving slips from first to leftovers (Malachi 3:8).
4. When you tear up members instead of trying to build them up (Galatians 5:15).
5. When those things above seem less important than things on the earth (Colossians 3:1-3).

Beloved, far too often brethren ignore the symptoms until they become fatal (Jude 12). Such would be discouraging were it not for the fact that there are Christians who never entertain the word “quit”. Like the faithful of old, these pilgrims will not finish the journey short of the city four-square (Hebrews 11:13-16).

The apostle Paul nearing the end of his earthly sojourn spoke of the journey, and his words have been a source of encouragement down through the ages.

“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, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

“I have fought a good fight.” Fighting the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12). The battle that is raging is not for land or money, power or influence; it is for the hearts and minds of precious souls. The only weapon Christians possesses is the word of God, but that weapon is mightier than all others combined (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). There is no other power on earth that can both save and condemn souls for all eternity (2 Corinthians 2:15-17). Little wonder that down through the ages the battle cry has been embodied in three words “Preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:2).

1. Preach it in love (Ephesians 4:15).
2. Preach it without addition, subtraction or modification (Galatians 1:8-9; 2 John 9-11; Revelation 22:18-19).
3. Preach it to the whole world (Matthew 28:18-20).

“I have finished my course.” The victory is at the end of the journey, one must finish to win. Endurance not speed the key element here, the Hebrew writer reminds us that patience is necessary in this race (Hebrews 12:1). Patience with ourselves (Luke 21:19), and patience with

others (1 Thessalonians 5:14). I do not know which is harder, but I know both are necessary to reach the finish.

“I have kept the faith.” Paul foretold of a departure from the faith, and it must have been painful for him to write of an apostasy (1 Timothy 4:1). But no matter who or how many would depart, Paul would have no part of it (and neither can we). Keep the faith! Beloved, there is a reason that we emphasize Christianity based upon knowledge (the one faith Ephesians 4:5) rather than emotion, not that we are seeking to eliminate emotion from religion. It is impossible to serve God without the heart (Matthew 22:37-38), but there are those who have allowed emotion to rule their actions with devastating results:

- Emotion (not God’s divine instruction) carried the day, when David and all Israel went to retrieve the Ark of the Covenant (1 Chronicles 13:1-12; 15:13-15).
- The emotions of a father allowed him to believe that his son was dead for over twenty years (Genesis 37:33-35; 45:25-26).
- The Jewish rulers were successful in igniting the emotions of a multitude against the Son of God. That emotion, once kindled, cared nothing for justice, only for a bloody death. *“Let him be crucified”* (Matthew 27:22).

Emotions are not a safe guide in religious matters. Knowledge does not rely upon feelings that fluctuate depending on circumstance. The apostle Paul, facing death, had a confidence based upon knowledge *“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”* (2 Timothy 1:12). Keep the faith; no one can take away what you know to be the truth (John 8:32)!

“The crown of righteousness.” The crown of righteousness will be given on that day. Jesus the righteous judge will come, and that coming is repeatedly referred to in the scriptures as:

- The day (2 Peter 3:10).
- That day (2 Thessalonians 5:4; Matthew 24:36).
- The great day (Revelation 6:17).
- A day (Acts 17:31; Matthew 24:50).

On the day our Lord returns time will cease (1 Corinthians 15:24-26), judgment will be rendered (2 Corinthians 5:10) and the faithful will be ushered into heaven (John 14:1-3). Look for him brethren, *“For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry”* (Hebrews 10:37).