

FOLLOWING JESUS: INTRODUCTION (part one of a four-part study)

We cannot find a better description of what it means to be a Christian than “a follower of Christ.” He leads, we follow. He tells us what to do, we do it. This is why the apostle Paul establishes a bottom-line standard for all of us in 1 Corinthians 4:2, in that “following” demands faithfulness. If we are to follow fully, as Joshua and Caleb did at Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 32:6-15), then we must develop a spiritual consistency in our relationship with the Lord known as faithfulness.

In seeking to be faithful to the One who is always faithful to us (2 Timothy 2:13), we must be aware of the hindrances that can so easily prevent the spiritual progress which God desires for each of us. Those obstacles can be *internal* as well as *external*. Without a doubt, our natural propensity toward sinful behavior is the primary internal impediment which can interrupt our goal of following Jesus on that straight and narrow path every day. At the same time, as individuals, we possess personal predispositions, consisting of specific weaknesses, that aren't necessarily sinful, but which can interfere with the fulfillment of God's purpose for our life.

Externally, the most obvious barrier to following the Lord fully would consist of direct opposition, in the form of some kind of persecution. That can take place on a variety of levels, ranging from the most intimate (Matthew 10:34-39), to other expressions far more impersonal, such as governmental edicts which restrict religious freedoms. We also must be aware of Satan's subtlety, as he often can bait us with honey rather than vinegar. In other words, the devil can influence us with positive persuasion, rather than an obviously negative persecution; designed to prohibit us from becoming everything God wants us to be and do, so that we follow Christ partially rather than fully. Jesus' warning to His disciples in the parable of the Sower is more relevant now than ever, where we read this in Matthew 13:22 –

“And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

The better our awareness of the many pitfalls confronting us, from within and without, the greater the likelihood of avoiding them, enabling us to remain on that straight and narrow path of following our Savior fully, every day.