

One Message, One Mission

If you heard Jesus saying to you, "Follow me" what would you do? Maybe you'd say, "Well Jesus, I'm already following you." What if He replied, "Just come with me, over here." Would you do it? Even if it were to a place in your life you've heretofore avoided? Can you trust the One who said, **... you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man, John 2:51.** Trust Him enough to follow Him anywhere?

Know Who You Follow

Who do you trust to follow? What crowd do you run with? Years ago, wizened older friend advised me: "Choose your friends carefully ... because you will become like them." When Jesus says, "Follow me" He's saying, "Let me become your foremost friend and influencer."

All social interactions between humans are a response of personality to personality, from the most casual brush between two people to the most intimate communion of which the human soul is capable. So, what Jesus is saying here is that through Him we will be responding as created personalities to the Creating Personality – God himself. **Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent, John 17:3.** Responding not to the god of our **imagination, but to the One, True God.** That's how real and true life is found, for with Him we become who we were designed to be.

Following Jesus, we become His companions on the journey through this imperfect world. Along the way He urges us to join Him: to seek and save the lost and bring God's kingdom into the world. **Jesus says "Follow me"** - not so God can show what a wonderful man or woman He can make of us - Rather, **so that God can reveal His Son through us.**

In communion with the Savior, we discover the truth that it is not our victories that make us who we are. It is His divine presence that carries us through both victory and defeat, and the mundane ... that's what really defines who we are.

St. Paul got this, and I hope each every one of us will get it. In answer to the question "Paul, why do you what you do?" he outlined a message, a method, and a motive. If we want our lives to have the meaning we seek in Christ, we need to pay attention to his answer.

Paul's Message: Christ Only

If people want to know about sports or the latest news, they can scroll the internet, social media, or turn on the TV. These days you can watch 500 different channels, listen to every kind of radio you can imagine, and receive a boatload of messages every few minutes. If it's news or sports or the weather or the latest world crisis, there are plenty of ways to follow the story. But if you want to know how to be right with God, if you want to know how to have your sins forgiven, if you want to know how to go to heaven, then you need the message Paul preached: **For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified, 1 Cor. 2:2.**

The phrase “I resolved” means he made a conscious choice to do things a certain way. He didn’t fall into it by chance or by force of habit. **Paul preached as he did because he chose to do it that way.** It’s so easy to be sidetracked by good and worthwhile things. We can talk about social issues, the political debates of our day, the crisis in the Middle East, or the decline of the family. We can tackle Bible prophecy or we can spend our days arguing about some aspect of church governance. There is a place for all those things, but that place is never at the center. For Paul the choice was clear: “Jesus Christ and him crucified.” After his conversion St. Paul became a “johnny one-note;” a man of one message. If you heard him in Thessalonica or Athens or Rome, it was always the same—Jesus Christ and him crucified. He never strayed from his basic message.

And every notable Christian leader, including John Wesley, made that choice too. Preaching all over England Wesley said: “Let me be nothing and ‘Christ be all in all.’” **Once the center is in place, every other truth can be arranged around it.** He is Alpha and Omega and everything in between, because He is Immanuel, God with us.

I have seen many trends, movements, and fads in churches in the last 30 years: Charismatic renewal, church growth movement, the balanced church movement, contemporary worship, renewal worship, drama teams, liturgical dance, concerts of prayer, liturgical recovery, seeker-sensitive church, Experiencing God, the Prayer of Jabez, the Purpose-Driven Church and the 40 Days of Purpose, Gen X worship, and preaching to the postmodern mind. I’ve read a ton of books on things Christian and church, and there are valuable insights to be found in all. But here’s the truth: ***The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever, Isaiah 40:8.*** We might well pray: “Lord, strip away the things in my life that don’t matter, so that what is left are the things that will still matter 1,000 years from now.”

Paul’s Method: Keep It Simple

In Paul’s day crowds flocked to hear noted speakers in the style of traditional Greek rhetoric, with extensive quotations, with literary allusions, and with a refined style that made them seem brilliant, witty, charming and entertaining. Yet, though he was an educated man, Paul chose to speak in simple terms.

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God ... I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, 1 Corinthians 2:1, 3-4.

How do you like **Paul’s plan for sharing the gospel?** It’s called “**fear and trembling.**” Sounds like something you and I could do. When he went to Corinth, he had a tough time (read about it in Acts 18:1-11). He became discouraged. Preaching became difficult, as inner doubts plagued him. [At one point he felt so abandoned and alone that the Lord came to him in a vision with these words, *Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city, Acts 18:9-10.*]

He wasn’t the picture of confident self-assurance that many of us may associate with the Apostle Paul. Have you ever had his experience when trying to share Christ with others? Have you ever even tried? Or do your fears stop you? Many Christians

think they have to be experts on the Bible, on world religions, and smooth talkers. Nonsense! The New Testament doesn't give us any descriptions of Paul's appearance or style, but Paul himself quoted his opponents who said of him, ***His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing, 2 Corinthians 10:10.***

Dwight L. Moody was one of the greatest Christian evangelists of the 19th century. His father died when he was 4, and His mother never encouraged Dwight to read the Bible, and he only acquired the equivalent of a fifth-grade education. It is told of him that when he preached a revival in London, one of local pastors commented to him, "Sir, you butcher the Queen's English and yet, for the life of me, I cannot understand why the people respond and come to faith." Moody replied, "May it ever be so." Moody admitted, "I know perfectly well that, wherever I go and preach, there are many better preachers ... all that I can say about it is that the Lord uses me... If this world is going to be reached, I am convinced that it must be done by men and women of average talent."¹

If you feel unqualified to witness for Christ, if you worry about what others will think, join the club. It's large and St. Paul is the president. But remember this: if people are impressed by your eloquence, they are unlikely to be impressed by Jesus. John Wesley: "God works in us, therefore we can work."

We don't need eloquence and knowledge, so much as we need the Holy Spirit. The Word of God, shared in the power of the Holy Spirit, always results in lives changed by God. That's what Paul meant when he said: *I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength, Phil. 4:13.*

Only God can take a person trapped in sin and set him free. Only God can take a person chained to alcohol and set him free. Only God can take a person living in the prison of sexual addiction and set him free. Only he can take a heart of stone and replace with a heart of flesh. Only God can give life in the place of death. "What a wonderful Savior!" Remember what John the Baptist said of Jesus? ***He must increase, but I must decrease, John 3:30.***

Here's the heart of the gospel: ***Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead.*** This is what we have to share with the world.

Paul's Motive: Not By Human Wisdom

Ministries built primarily on human personality do not last. I think our culture has idolized celebrity, which in turn has seeped into Christian circles. [Who's the next winning conference speaker, or worship leader, or televangelist? People talk about this or that pastor's church as the exciting place to go.] It's okay to look up to spiritual mentors. But the reality is one day all the pastors, leaders, committee chairs, and church members we respect will be gone. ***We need something deeper than the popularity and wisdom of even the most faithful Christian leaders.*** They cannot be faithful on our behalf. Their best work is to lead us to a faith built on the unchanging rock of God's truth. Jesus Christ is the rock of our salvation. That's why Paul labored as he did and gave his reason for his method: ***So that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power, 1 Cor. 2:5.*** What comes from God lasts forever.

One Mission Only

We have no other message but Christ, and Him crucified. If we substitute anything for the message of the cross, we have taken away the one message the world needs to hear. There is a popular notion in our culture that believes that humans are basically good and that everyone's going to heaven anyway. Beware - nothing could be further from the truth. A biblical worldview knows that the line separating good and evil runs through every human heart – it's our fatal flaw. We need Christ's saving grace on the Cross. Let us not labor for the applause of men and women, but labor to bring people to the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

We must declare that God Himself came down to earth in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We must declare that when He died on the cross, God laid on Him all our sins. He took our place on that cross. He died that He might be our Savior and bring us home to God. Ours is tell how Jesus has made a difference in our lives. This is a message the world cannot duplicate.

We have a simple message for a simple mission: plainly share what Jesus Christ accomplished in His death on the cross . . . over and over again. This mission is given to only one organization on the face of the earth—the church. Only to us did God vouchsafe the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That is our message, our only message. We are to tell it because if we don't, no one will.

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified, 1 Cor. 2:2.

¹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/evangelistsandapologists/dwight-l-moody.html>