

Hello! Who's There?

THEY'RE IN

CHOOSE TO LIVE

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many came to believe in Him.
So Jesus was saying to those
Jews who had believed Him,
“If you continue in My word,
then you are truly disciples of
Mine; and you will know the
truth, and the truth will make
you free.”*

John 8:30-32

Hello! Who's There?

You are an officer and recruiter for the U.S. Navy and have been requested by the principal of a high school to speak at the student body assembly. As you step to the podium, you are applauded in gratitude for your service to the country. However, boos are heard from some students in protest. Your audience includes those who wish you were not there or could care less, others who are too young to join the Navy, and seniors, some of whom may join a branch of the military. To that mixed audience, you present the proud heritage of the U.S. Navy in protecting the freedoms these very students take for granted. You also speak about the benefits of considering the Navy as a career. While you hope to encourage the recruitment of a few, you also want to instill a sense of responsibility, service, and patriotism to all present.

When Jesus spoke to the multitudes, the audience included a mixture of protesters, the scribes and Pharisees; curious people, coming to see the miracles; convinced believers; and committed followers.¹ Like the military officer, Christ's teaching addressed individuals on different levels. When considering any passage, it must be understood who are the intended recipients, realizing the remaining listeners would find instruction from the message as well.

Issue Three Paradox Recipients

To bring clarity to the exchanged-life paradox, we must de-

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termine to whom it was addressed. For whom was the message intended—unbelievers or believers? If the former, these passages indicate that there are prerequisites for obtaining eternal life. On the other hand, if the latter, these same demands specified in the text are understood to support the concept of increasing intimate fellowship with Christ. The former concerns proof of saving faith, while the latter pertains to evidence of fellowship with Christ. The former concerns someone’s spiritual position in Christ, while the latter addresses a believer’s maturity in Christ.

“Come after Me”

When the exchanged-life is addressed, we must consider the meaning of Christ’s use of “come after Me.” The immediately preceding verse to each exchanged-life teaching contains the words, “If anyone wishes to come after Me” (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; and Luke 9:23).² An explanation of what He meant when He said, “come after Me” is provided by using three criteria: (1) he must deny himself, (2) he must take up his cross daily, and (3) he must follow Me. Self-denial concerns not only a change of loyalty, but also reorienting one’s own life. The cross-bearing imagery relates to a criminal carrying his own cross on the way to his crucifixion, publicly displaying “a person’s submission to the state.”³ The third requirement means being committed in an intimate association with the teacher who is being followed. The “come after Me” appeal of self-denial, submission, and intimate association is an echo from His words to the rich ruler in Luke 18. “*Come, follow Me*” (Luke 18:22) surely parallels “*come after Me...deny himself...take up his cross...and follow Me*” (Luke 9:23).⁴ Both are appeals to discipleship for those who are already believers.

As already discussed in chapter 6, “When All Else Fails,” the rich ruler was presented with two sets of instructions. The first instructions, “go, sell, give” (Matt. 19:21), pertain to salvation, and

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the second, ““come, follow Me” (v. 21), involves a growing intimate fellowship or discipleship. This, along with its association with the discipleship texts mentioned above, is in direct disagreement with those holding a Reformed mindset. They believe that the phrase, “come after Me” or “follow Me,” is the gospel according to Jesus.⁵ From their viewpoint, “come after Me” relates exclusively to saving faith.

For a brief review of the phrase “follow Me” used in other passages see the timeline chart, *Exchanged-Life Paradox and Life of Christ* (page 149), regarding the early, first-twelve-month ministry of Christ. In Matthew 4:18-20 (Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11) as discussed in chapter 6, Jesus says to Peter and Andrew, “Follow [come after] Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” And they immediately “left the nets and followed Him” (Matt. 4:19-20). Most scholars place the event of Matthew 4 some months after Peter and Andrew had first met Jesus in John 1:40-42. Then two days later in Cana, Peter and Andrew observed Jesus’ first miracle (John 2:1-10). The John 2 text stated that as a result of that miracle “His disciples [including Peter and Andrew] believed in Him” (2:11). Months later in Matthew 4, Jesus called Peter and Andrew, who are already believers when they were in their boats fishing, to “come after Me” or “follow Me.” From the historical context it is obvious that the request of Matthew 4 was to those disciples who are already saved to come, follow Jesus in intimate fellowship in order to begin preparing for their future ministry.

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From the above information, would it not be odd to equate the phrase “come after Me” or “follow Me” with the gospel message, particularly if another more logical approach were staring you in the face? The introductory verses preceding the exchanged-life teachings relate to Jesus’ appeal for commitment. The audience included believers and unbelievers. In Mark 8:34 we read “He summoned the crowd with His disciples.” This is no different than Jesus’ teaching first and foremost to His Twelve disciples (Matt. 5:1) in the Sermon on the Mount with the multitudes tagging along (7:28). There was a mixed audience of followers, but the teaching addressed fellowship or discipleship. Instead of a gospel invitation, Jesus is invoking commitment for intimate fellowship with those who already had believed in Him. Yet, “In the case of the unsaved, this truth could provoke them to reexamine their own values and begin to seek God’s,”⁶ possibly preparing them to trust in Christ for salvation.⁷

Who Is a Disciple?

In order to determine the intended audience in these discipleship texts, we must consider the variety of disciples present. Actually, the term “disciple” can refer to a wide assortment of followers including unbelievers (Matt. 22:16) and interested followers in the crowd gathered, some of whom were believers and some were nonbelievers. Then there were the Twelve disciples plus other close supporters. All these were called disciples. The timeline chart indicates that Jesus selected the Twelve (Mark 3:14) from a group of disciples during the first tour of His Galilean ministry (review the chart, *Exchanged-Life Paradox and Life of Christ*, page 149). Previously, these same men had been His followers since the events in John 1. Others along the way began to follow Christ—curious unbelievers and believers alike.

During the third tour of Christ’s Galilean ministry, two events involving the disciples are significant. *First*, Christ sends out the

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Twelve to begin to minister, fishing for men (Matt. 10), just as Jesus had stated He would do in Matthew 4. For nearly a year and a half, they had been exposed to His ministry and experienced intimate fellowship with Him. They were becoming like their Teacher (Luke 6:40b). The on-the-job training produced workers for the harvest in God's field. *Second*, when Jesus stated that He was the bread of life in John 6, teaching the necessity of eating His flesh, "many" of His disciples were shocked (v. 60). "Some," evidently within the "many," were not believers (v. 64). As a result, verse 66 indicates that "many" of His disciples withdrew and no longer followed Him. Would that mean that both unbelievers and also some believers departed and no longer followed Him from that point? Apparently it should be taken in that way, since Jesus immediately turns to the Twelve in verse 67 and asks, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"

John 8 also lends perspective to the various types of disciples surrounding Jesus. (John 8 is the only instance in the New Testament where Jesus makes a distinction in disciples, other than when He selects the Twelve in Mark 3:14.) While in Judea during the last six-month period of His earthly ministry, Jesus presents His light-of-the-world teaching. John 8:30 states that "As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him." The next verse states that He then spoke "to those Jews who had believed Him" (v. 31). With not a hint of a time lag, immediately He continues to speak in verses 31 and 32 to those who had just believed. He said, "If you continue [abide] in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Jesus gives a condition with a promise. The condition is to abide in His word. Since a condition may or may not be kept, the promise of being a *true* disciple is only assured if one abides in

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Christ's teachings. On the other hand, if a believer does not abide in Christ's teachings, that one remains a believer and a disciple, but he is not a truly, abiding disciple. That one will *not come to know* the truth of Christ's teachings, which would make him truly free.

Notice the progression in John 8:30-32. Out of a large group of followers, including curious nonbelievers, the text tells us "many came to believe in Him." A relationship between those who believed and God was established. They had become convinced that Christ is indeed the light of the world. To these convinced followers, "who

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had believed Him," Jesus appeals to them to abide in His word. If these convinced followers would abide in His teachings, it would reveal their devotion to Him and they would be known as true disciples—committed followers. These curious followers had become convinced followers, and if they abide in Christ's teachings, they could become increasingly committed.⁸ Is this not the

concept Jesus taught in Matthew 28:20, "*teaching them [convinced disciples] to observe [obey] all that I have commanded you?*" Convinced disciples are to grow in commitment to Christ. However, they must abide in His teaching to know and then to obey, thereby giving evidence that they are committed disciples.

Timing Is Critical

Again note the timeline chart, *Exchanged-Life Paradox and Life of Christ* (page 149). On five occasions (circled items) Jesus spoke of the criteria for following Him, which ultimately saved one's life. This period of instruction occurred during the last year of Christ's earthly ministry. Why at this time? After His rejection by the religious leaders which in turn led to the ultimate rejection

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by the nation and to Christ's crucifixion, His ministry shifted to the preparation of His intimate followers, those who would carry on the advancement of God's work on earth when He returned to the Father. Rather than trying to attract followers, Jesus was appealing to the loyalty of His followers. His invitation involved a growing intimacy—followers who would continue to abide in His word and be equipped for the birth of the coming church. He was in the final stages of preparing the Twelve (at least eleven of the Twelve) to carry on the work. Yes, things had changed, and His plea was directed not to the curious followers, nor the convinced followers, but to those who would be committed.

In rebuttal, the Reformed camp comes from a different perspective. They insist that Christ was simply seeking those who would become “real” believers. Of course, from the Reformed perspective the term “faith” (noun) or “believe” (verb) has three parts: (1) knowledge, (2) assent, and (3) commitment of life.⁹ As a result, Reformed thinkers would not agree to making a distinction between various types of disciples. Through their theological lens, one is either a disciple of Christ or not, or in other words a believer or not. Therefore every believer, by their definition, is a committed disciple. That is why they go to extreme efforts in their writings to make a distinction between types of believers—“true,” “real,” “genuine” believers versus “false,” “fake,” “only professing.” Nevertheless this distinction is never made in the Scriptures.

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Obedience is the very issue that makes the distinction between individuals in both views: Reformed and Free Grace. The difference, however, is that the Reformed view requires obedience for salva-

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tion, a relationship issue, while the Free Grace view necessitates obedience for present, progressive salvation, a fellowship issue. The present author believes obedience for saving faith is in conflict with the clear biblical teaching of faith alone, really alone. Simple faith is the only requirement for salvation.

Some might respond by saying, “Wait. Not so quick! The Reformed view only requires a *willingness* to obey at initial salvation.”¹⁰ That response, however, misses the import of the passages containing the conditions just discussed. Christ was not seeking a mere willingness. He pleaded for decisive action. These requirements were not suggestions, but were in fact commands (imperatives). Those wanting to “come after Christ” had to act, just as Peter and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed Christ when commanded to do so in Matthew 4.

A number of years ago while the military draft was in effect, I spent some time in Uncle Sam’s army. One thing I learned was that when a general gives a command it was not a suggestion; it was not a time for debating but for doing. In fact, willingness was not even in the equation. He said; we did. At times civilians would be present, but his commands had no legal status or hold on them, and they could disregard his orders. However, it was not an option for members of the military. In our passages under consideration, the audience included believers and unbelievers, but Christ’s command in these particular texts was unquestionably for the members of His believing army. If followed, there would be intimate fellowship and the saving of their lives.

Who’s Who

The exchanged-life paradox was Jesus’ benchmark for committed followers. The audience was mixed: the curious, the convinced, and committed. But the instructions were only for those who believed and who sought above all else intimate fellowship with Christ.

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Chapter 13, NOTES

1. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Design for Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), pp. 13-21.

Pentecost postulates the distinction between curious, convinced, and committed disciples.
2. This comment refers to the second of the five separate occasions that the exchanged-life paradox is found in the Gospels (see chart, *Exchanged-Life Paradox and Life of Christ* in chap. 11).
3. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Volume 1: 1:1-9:50 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 853.
4. Italics added.
5. John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel according to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 21; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 519; and William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 498.
6. Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2007), 39).
7. *Ibid.*, 47.
8. Pentecost, *Design for Discipleship*, 13-21.
9. Ken Neff, *Hold Fast* (St. Augustine, FL: LeaderQuest, 2010), 43-53.

“Myth 3: Faith Is a Tricky Word” presents the error of the nature-of-faith concept that is typically held by Reformed theology.
10. MacArthur, *The Gospel according to Jesus*, 140; and James Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 20.

