

A Leader Must Be A Follower

Posted by Dr. Gary H. Cote on October 5th, 2003

There is a philosophical position in the world that identifies a leader by the number of followers behind them. This thought simply states, “if one is a true leader then there will be people following them.” If one wants to determine “leadership level,” then check to see who and how many are following. Leadership guru, John Maxwell, uses this short quip to promote this thought pattern in the church, “if you are leading and no one is following, then all you’re doing is taking a walk.” I’ve heard this many times by various ministers who desire to see themselves as leaders. This principle of leadership has every humanistic tendency while ignoring the value of being a humble follower. My preposition to you this month is this, “One is a leader not by who is following them, or by how many, but by who they are following.”

Every person follows someone or something, and the value of one’s leadership will be determined by the value of the one followed. In the Church, a great crime will be committed if we are always turning around to see who is following, and how many, trying to determine if we are a leader. This truly is quite pathetic! This signifies that insecurity is present and at work, and it is coupled with a good dose of pride, vanity, ego, and arrogance, in other words, “self.” These leaders find value by looking over their shoulder to see the “who” and count the “how many.” Paul warned the Corinthians about “comparing themselves among themselves” (2 Corinthians 10:12)!

Considering our need to be deemed a leader and in charge of our own lives, Jesus plainly said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and Follow Me (Luke 9:23).” The leadership was not in who or how many would follow them, but in who they followed. Jesus will take care of “the who” and the “how many,” for He said that He will build the Church. If we are looking over our shoulder to check on our leadership effectiveness, then we are looking backward and not forward. Paul said that he presses onward and toward (Philippians 3:14). To look back is to discern and decide your next step by what seems to be working rather than what is right (true American pragmatism at work). Jesus admonished, “Remember Lot’s wife (Luke 17:32).” In other words, don’t look back! Paul wrote to the church in Philippi and in Corinth with this basic principle, follow me as I follow Christ. When Jesus called for Matthew He said, “Follow Me.” To Peter and Andrew He said, “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men (Matthew 4:19).” Jesus the Lord of all is the One who makes us what we are in Christ, and He is the One who made Peter a leader in the Church. Peter did not need to check who is following, nor did his contemporaries have to look to see who was following to decide if he was a leader. Leadership burst forth as Peter was led by the Spirit of Christ.

Our leadership value is based on who we follow not who we lead, or in how many are following. Doing right is rarely popular, and speaking truth can reap isolation, but when we

follow Christ, there is no other alternative. When Jesus spoke of the cross a multitude left him being greatly offended. This did not make Jesus less of a leader! Paul was in prison and he wrote that all forsook him, but the Lord stood with him; losing those who followed him did not make him less of a leader. Beware, for the temptation of popularity lurks at the door desiring to lead us down the road of “success.” But our benchmark of success is following Christ wherever He goes. John the Apostle saw the end times in Revelation he wrote, “These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4).” Jesus said, “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor (John 12:26).” What a blessed honor, to be known and honored by the Father of all. We are servants in the Kingdom, who are now and will one day be known as sons of the Father. May the Lord grant all wisdom and grace to receive this message and live out its purpose!