

The Development of the Biblical Followership Profile

Leadership studies often concentrate on the traits of leaders rather than those of followers (Chaleff, 1997). This concentration has led to a neglect of the important role of followers and their impact upon leaders and organizations (Heller & Van Til, 1982; Thornborrow, 1994). Most of these studies imply that followers are merely the respondents to the actions of the leaders and have no inherent value except as they respond to the leader's influence. Such characterizations of followers have prompted some to refer to this leader bias as being paternalistic in nature (Blake, Mouton, Sloma, & Loftin, 1968). Others have taken a more positive approach and sought to determine the characteristics of followers as more than mere responders but as persons who have specific characteristics that allow the leader to lead more effectively (Kelley, 1991).

Although the term "followership" has been used for decades, the study of the characteristics of followers has been lacking until the last few years. Kelley (1991) describes effective followers in two dimensions. One dimension perceives followers on a scale that ranges from independent, critical thinking at one end of the scale to dependent, uncritical thinking at the other end of the scale. A second dimension perceives followers on a scale from active followers to passive followers. Chaleff (1995) posits five characteristics of followers specific to "courageous followers." Courageous followers are characterized by: (a) the courage to take responsibility, (b) the courage to serve, (c) the courage to confront leadership, (d) the courage to change, and (e) the courage to take moral responsibility. Dixon (2003) furthers Chaleff's research by developing the Courageous Follower Profile which measures the follower's degree of courageous followership. A review of the literature reveals no other follower-specific measurement tool available.

One area of literature that has yet to be investigated is the biblical literature related to followership. The concept of following is prevalent throughout the biblical text. This study

outlines the steps by which a questionnaire, the Biblical Followership Profile (BFP), was developed which measures five specific characteristics of followers of Christ as found in the biblical literature. Questionnaires offer a convenient methodology for acquiring a large sample response (Sims, 1979). The BFP instrument will allow the user to determine his or her level of specific follower traits based upon a biblical understanding of the concept of what it means to follow after Christ. Such an instrument would be beneficial to the individual in that he or she would be able to self-assess his or her level of followership toward Christ. Such self-assessment is valuable in the lives of Christians so that they may grow in their relationship to God and maturity in Christ, and make a greater impact on those around them (Willard, 1997).

Another benefit of such an instrument is for leaders in the church to give the assessment to groups within the church. By assessing the overall followership level of the group, the leader might then be able to identify areas of weakness and assist the followers in addressing these weaknesses which may lead to greater effectiveness and efficiency in doing the work of the ministry.

Biblical Literature

The sixty-six books of the Bible compose the content of the authoritative literature. The authority of the biblical text is primarily recognized by those of the Christian faith (Bush, 1988). These sixty-six books are comprised of two different literatures: (a) The Old Testament, written in Hebrew, and (b) The New Testament, primarily written in Greek. Because of the bifurcation of the language in the biblical text, word studies require an understanding of Hebrew and Greek in order to attain a full-orbed understanding of the biblical meaning of a word.

From a biblical understanding, God is the leader and His creatures, all that is created including human beings, are in the universe for “His good pleasure” (Isaiah 46:8-10, NASB).

From a New Testament perspective, Jesus Christ is God in the flesh (John 1:1-12) and as such is the Lord before whom “every knee shall bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11). During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He often confronted individuals with the command to “follow Me” (see Matthew 8:29; 9:9; 19:21; Luke 9:59). When interpreting the construct of “following”, the biblical view requires an understanding that the leader has the authority, as God, to direct the activities of the follower. Thus, followers of Christ are not merely following the suggestions of a human leader but are obeying the commands of God (Shorter Catechism, 1990).

In order to gain a greater understanding of followership in the biblical text, a word study of the word “follow” was conducted in the Old and New Testaments. The study produced two major categories of concepts: (a) relationship concepts, and (b) responsibility concepts. From these two major categories several subcategories of concepts were developed from an understanding of the biblical literature.

Relationship

One of the unique qualities of Christianity is that the worship of God involves more than mere servitude. The biblical record teaches that God loves the world (John 3:16) and reconciles the world in relationship to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18; Romans 5:10). During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He emphasized this relational aspect of belief and worship by speaking of those who follow Him as “friends” (John 15:14). This relationship aspect is further emphasized when Jesus, speaking metaphorically of those who believe upon Him, said, “My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

Abandonment to the leader

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word, *achar*, is literally translated by the English word *after*. In Numbers 14:24, Caleb was acknowledged with these words, “But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.” The Hebrew phrase “followed Me fully,” can be literally translated “fulfilled after me” (ISBE, 1996). One biblical commentator understood this as, “Caleb abandoned himself completely to God” (Wycliffe, 1962).

In the New Testament, the primary word for *follow* is *akoloutheo* (ακολουθεω). This compound Greek word is formed from the prefix *a* which expresses union, or likeness, and the root word, *keleuthos*, which means *a way* (ISBE, 1996). Thus a possible reading of this term could yield the construct of someone going in the same way. The term is used 77 times in the Gospels and refers to following Christ. The term is used in the literal sense of actually following Christ (see Matthew 4:25) and metaphorically with the concept of discipleship (see Mark 8:34, 9:38, 10:21).

The New Testament concept of following as “abandonment to the leader” is demonstrated by the disciples, Peter and Andrew, when, at the command of Jesus to follow Him, they “immediately left their nets and followed [Jesus]” (Matthew 4:20).

Intimacy with the leader

The Hebrew word, *dabheq*, may be translated *to cause to cleave to* or *follow hard after* (ISBE, 1996) as in Psalm 63:8 when the psalmist wrote, “my soul clings to Thee.” The English word *to* may be literally translated *after*. This phraseology indicates that “between himself and God there subsists a reciprocal relationship of active love” (Keil & Delitzsch, 1996).

In the New Testament the disciples of Jesus were identified as those who were closely associated with Jesus. Upon one occasion, Peter and John, having been accused by the religious leaders and gave a strong defense of their activities, the Scriptures note that, “when [the religious leaders] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13-14). Jesus emphasized this close proximity of relationship with His followers when before ascending into heaven he told His disciples “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). The follower’s understanding of intimacy with Christ appears to engender a sense of oneness that Christ seeks to have with His followers. Thus, Christ can say to his followers, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (John 14:18-21).

Responsibility

The category of relationship is complimented by the category of responsibility. From a biblical perspective, the idea of relationship naturally results in the follower having certain responsibilities toward the leader. This concept was emphasized when Jesus stated, “he who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him” (John 14:21). Additionally, Jesus made the connection between relationship and responsibility when He said, “You are My friends if you do what I command you (John 15:14).

Obedience

The Old Testament, Hebrew word, *radhaph*, can be literally translated *to pursue, follow, or follow after* (ISBE, 1996). The word was given as a command when Joseph commanded his steward to “follow the men” (Genesis 44:4). The actual sense of the word is to be “dispatched” (Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown, 1997). The word is also used as the result of obedience when the psalmist writes, “goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life” (Psalms 23:6).

The Greek word, *epakoloutheo*, precedes the word *follow* with the prefix *epi*, meaning *upon* giving the idea of following after or close upon a person or a concept (ISBE, 1996). 1 Peter 2:21 expresses this concept when Peter writes, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps....” This concept of following after Christ is further clarified by Peter’s continuing statements describing the person and activities of Christ:

Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness for by his wounds you were healed (1 Peter 1:22).

A similar Greek word, *parakoloutheo*, uses the prefix *para* which signifies “to follow close up, or side by side, hence, to accompany or conform to” (ISBE, 1996). The word is used to describe signs that accompany believers who are sharing the gospel and following good doctrine so as to practice it. This idea is conveyed in 2 Timothy 3:10 when the apostle Paul proclaims, “you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance....”

Faithfulness

In the Old Testament book of Numbers, Caleb is personally fulfilled in his relationship with God and it is this relationship that guides his obedience and stimulates his faith in following after the purpose of God. Caleb's disposition is referred to as a "different spirit." This "different spirit" is juxtaposed against "all the men who have seen My glory and My signs, which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice" (Numbers 14:22). Caleb's actions are described as "a spirit of obedience and believing trust ... so that [Caleb] followed Him with unwavering fidelity" (Keil & Delitzsch, 1996). This concept of "unwavering fidelity" is reiterated in Numbers 32:11-12, and Deuteronomy 1:36 and carries the idea that a follower is a person who is able to hear the word of God and have no reservations in his attitudes or activities. This person is fully engaged in a relationship with God that allows the follower to seek the purpose of the one being followed through faithful obedience.

The New Testament has many references to faithfulness being a characteristic of those who follow Christ (see Ephesians 1:1; 6:21; Colossians 1:2; 4:9). Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 1:2 "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (KJV). The Greek word *pistos* is often translated *faithful* but may also carry the meaning of trustworthiness (Strong's, 1992).

Persistence

Exakoloutheo, combines the Greek word, *ek*, meaning *out* with the word *follow* to present the idea of following out to the end certain teachings. Peter presents this concept in the negative by stating that the apostles did not "follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (2 Peter 1:16).

The Greek word *dioko* has two meanings. The first denotes *driving away* in the sense of persecution. The second means “to pursue without hostility, to follow after” (ISBE, 1996). In this second sense the word describes the means by which followers of Christ are to pursue the character of Christ. To that end followers are directed to follow: (a) that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:15), (b) righteousness (1 Timothy 6:11), (c) peace with all men and holiness (Hebrews 12:14), and (d) righteousness, faith, love, and peace (2 Timothy 2:22). The intensity of the verb is captured when the word, *dioko*, is translated “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).