

95.3 Admirers or Followers?

I recently read **Rod Dreher's** book, "*Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*." The book's first half tells how we have gotten into our Marxist mess, and the second half gives instructions for dealing with it. I want to encourage you to read this eye-opening book.

Dreher tells one of the stories from the movie, "*Hidden Life*." Franz Jagerstatter was a Catholic who refused to swear allegiance to Hitler and join the Nazi army. The Nazis killed him in 1943 for his act of defiance. In the movie, Franz has a conversation with a frustrated artist who is painting a mural of Bible stories on the wall of the village church. The artist is frustrated by his inability to represent Christ well. He tells how his images comfort believers but do not confront them, and there is no repentance among churchgoers. He says to Franz, "*We create admirers; we do not create followers.*"¹

As long as "all is well," admiration for Jesus is sufficient. When tyrants turn up the heat, admirers will turn away or distance themselves from Him as those who left Jesus in **John 6**. **Soren Kierkegaard** explored this in "*Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard*," in which he wrote the following.

The admirer never makes true sacrifices. He always plays it safe. Though in words, phrases, and songs, he is inexhaustible about how highly he praises Christ; he renounces nothing, will not reconstruct his life, and will not let his life express what he supposedly admires. Not so for the follower. No, no. The follower aspires with all his strength to be what he admires. And then, remarkably enough, even though he is living among "Christian people," he incurs the same peril as he did when it was dangerous to openly confess Christ.

A high cost to following Jesus goes beyond shallow admiration of Him. The genuine disciple will gladly count and pay that price, and the admirer will turn away. You know this well, I am sure. Jesus said in **Luke 9:23** (NKJV):

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

Jesus repeatedly called His disciples with words like **Matthew 4:19** (NKJV):

Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Without getting too deep into why He spoke of "fishers of men," let me mention that the phrase "*follow me*" means to walk like or imitate Him. The twelve may have admired Him, but He called them to become like Him in their way of life.

You may have seen the child of your friend and noticed the parent-child similarities. They may physically resemble one another, but they also have similar mannerisms. As a result of your observations, you realize you could identify your friend's child because he/she looks like the parent. That is how Jesus wants us to be as His followers. He wants the world to be able to pick us out of a crowd because we look and act like Jesus.

Paul took the commission of **Matthew 28:18-20** to make disciples seriously. He stated in **1 Corinthians 11:1** (NKJV):

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

Paul was a rabbi who had studied under Gamaliel. The goal of a disciple is to become like his teacher, not just in his teachings but in every aspect of life. I have heard that some rabbis' disciples in Israel even follow their leader into the restroom to learn how he washes his hands so they can do likewise.

¹ Dreher, Rod. *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*. Sentinel, 2020, p. 189.

Paul did not imitate his first rabbi well. You will remember Gamaliel's advice to the council was to leave the followers of Jesus alone, for if they were not of God, they would fail; if they were of God, the Sanhedrin could not stop them (**Acts 5:33-42**). On the other hand, Paul persecuted believers like Stephen (**Acts 7**).

When Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, his life changed. He recognized his sins and the Savior. He immediately began learning to imitate Jesus and invited others to do the same.

America is starving for authentic followers of Jesus, not just admirers. We need to see real-life examples of Jesus. If churches are satisfied with "*nickels and noses*," they won't go deeper into making genuine disciples. As long as we are content with making a crowd of admirers and having money in the bank, we won't encourage self-denial following Jesus. We will often promote the opposite, self-indulgence, and turn Jesus into our servant rather than uphold Him as Lord. That is one of the reasons we are in our current crisis.

Through the years, Christians and their churches have had to decide if they will endure the ire of tyrants or compromise the truth. The Caesars persecuted the early church, Hitler, and the Communists persecuted the modern churches. The soft tyranny of the American regime has already violated our Constitutional rights and threatened Christian Americans. The many admirers gave in, and the few followers resisted. If we do not resist the soft tyranny, how will we stand against the hard? They are setting us up for more.

I identify with **Benjamin Franklin**, who said he always prepared himself for the worst. If it happened, he was ready. If it didn't, he was pleasantly surprised. I hope we regain our republic, but we may not. Recently I heard that **General Michael Flynn** has said we may have less than eighteen months to reclaim our liberties and Constitution. We will do that by being devoted followers of Jesus, not mere admirers. We will embrace His word and imitate Him. Our first Supreme Court Chief Justice, **John Jay**, once said:

The Bible will also [encourage] them with many explicit and consoling assurances of the Divine mercy to our fallen race, and with repeated invitations to accept the offers of pardon and reconciliation. . . . They, therefore, who enlist in His service, have the highest encouragement to fulfill the duties assigned to their respective stations; for most certain it is, that those of His followers who [participate in] His conquests will also participate in the transcendent glories and blessings of His Triumph.

It is easy to sing our admiration in songs like "*O How I Love Jesus*." It is something more to live out the sentiment as His followers. It is difficult for Christian Americans to suffer for what is right; we're not used to it. We have been the exception to the rule in our prosperity and reject self-denial and hardship. We prefer to "*go along to get along*" than the discomfort of standing up for what is right. No wonder our kids see through our shallow religious games and leave us.

God gives us many opportunities to grow in His grace and knowledge. We can live more Christ-affirming lives today than yesterday and even more tomorrow through our actions and words. Remember Jesus' promise in **John 16:33** (NKJV) when facing hardships.

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

Keep The Light of *Following Jesus* Burning!

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