

Following and Discipleship

In the NT, “follow” normally translates ἀκολουθέω from α and κέλευθος *keleuthos* road, so to be in the same way, to accompany, to follow.

In the NASB “follow” translates several words or combinations of words. Sometimes the adverb “after” ὀπίσω used with a word for walking or moving gives the idea of following.

The simple verb occurs 90 times in the NT. It occurs with five prefixed prepositions in 16 passages.

The word is noticeably rare in the epistles occurring once in 1 Corinthians, three times in 1 Tim, once in 2 Timothy, once in 1 Peter, and three times in 2 Peter. However, the four gospels have a total of 86 occurrences.

The first occurrence is Matthew 4:20. Jesus sees Simon and Andrew fishing and calls them to “come after me” δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου. The two leave their nets and **followed** Him.

The second occurrence is 4:22. A short distance from Simon and Andrew, Jesus sees Jacob and John mending nets. He calls them (4:21), and they too immediately leave boats and their father and **followed** Jesus.

Many crowds followed Jesus as He went about preaching and healing (Mt. 4:25). This was around Galilee. The crowds were from Syria, Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the other side of the Jordan. (also 8:1).

Jesus explained that if one followed Him, it wasn’t an easy life, for He didn’t have a home or palace to stay. He and His disciples likely spent their nights in the countryside (Mt. 8:19-20). It was traditional for people to sleep in their long heavy cloaks/garments (Deut. 24:13).

Jesus told others that they were to follow Him and leave the details of their life behind (Mt. 8:21-22).

Jesus explained that being His disciple made enemies of one’s own family because He required His disciples to leave everything and follow Him (Mt. 10:34-38).

After the rich ruler left because he had many possessions and he allowed them to get in the way of following Jesus, Peter asked Jesus about themselves, for they had left everything to follow Jesus (Mt. 19:21, 27-29).

Jesus promised that if they followed Him, they would not walk in darkness (Jh. 8:12). Later, He explains that “follow” is not a metaphor, for they could only do this while Jesus was among them (Jh. 12:35-36).

Jesus does seem to use “follow” metaphorically of Peter dying the same type of death Jesus died (Jh. 21:19-22).

Even in Acts (5x) it refers to literally following after an individual: Peter following an angel, groups following Paul from the synagogue.

Timothy followed Paul teaching (1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 3:10). A widow should follow good works (1 Tim. 5:10). Sins may follow after a man (5:24).

Peter tells us that we can follow the example Jesus left of suffering without retaliation (1 Pet. 2:21).

Peter did not follow after well devised myths in dealing with people. He stuck to the truth (2 Pet. 1:16).

Peter warned that many believers would follow the unrighteous teaching of unbelievers who would pervert God's truth (2 Pet. 2:2, 15).

With this is the nature of being disciple or students.

The noun "disciple" μαθητής occurs 261 times. Mt-72. Mk-46, Lk-37, Jh-78, Acts-28.

It never occurs in the epistles. The teacher - disciple relationship ends. No one becomes another's disciple. In fact Paul warns of becoming a disciple to himself or others such as Apollos or Peter (1 Cor. 1 & 3). He does not use a "disciple" term

Paul uses the verb μανθάνω "to learn" of people having learned truth, whether from Him or others (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 4:6; 14:31). The verb does not indicate a "discipleship" situation (1 Tim. 2:11; 5:4). Even Christ learned obedience from His suffering (Heb. 5:8).

The disciple - teacher relationship doesn't work today because there is not strict hierarchy in the Church. We all work together and all benefit from the work of others. Paul was helped by Pheobe (Rom. 16:1-2).