

“Follow me”: Religious Reality over Facebook Phantasm

According to an explanation provided by Facebook, “When you follow someone or a Page [on Facebook, or other social medium, like Twitter], you may see updates from that person or Page in your News Feed.” It means that the Follower is *immediately* informed of the affairs of the Followed (e.g. a private individual, public figure, organization), including the latter’s interests, life events, locations/travels, endeavors, aspirations, opinions, and other such information.

The act of following on social media, however, has no *substantive* bearing upon one’s life, either in thought, word, or deed. Following on social media does not carry with it *any incumbent real life consequences*. For example, if a Facebook Friend posts that he is attending an event, there is no necessary corollary that a Follower *must also* attend that event. Even if a Follower *does* decide to alter his life in conformity to the information provided by the Followed Friend and attends the event, it is only by virtue of the Follower’s whim. It is not dependent upon the previously freely-made choice of following; following on social media carries no obligations.

Contrarily, Christ’s command to his disciples, “Follow me,” is substantive, carries obligations, and involves the whole person without reservation. The command is significant enough that the same story in which Christ says, “Follow me,” is recorded similarly in all four Gospels. The Synoptic accounts share most of these details explicitly; John’s conforms with them by implying the details in his narrative. In the story, located within the first five chapters of all four books, Jesus encounters the fishermen brothers Simon Peter and Andrew at the beginning of his ministry in Galilee, after his own baptism and forty-day withdrawal into the

desert. The details of this short but poignant story convey the same message about what it means to follow Jesus. In all four accounts, the disciples-to-be are engaged with their mundane task of catching fish, likely for their livelihood. For simple fishermen, the last thing they would do is abandon their lives/livelihood because this would likely mean financial ruin; yet, this is exactly what occurs.

In Matthew 4:18–20 and Mark 1:16–18, Jesus simply calls to Simon and Andrew to follow him, and they do. In these accounts, Jesus gives his command to follow him; the text specifically indicates that the disciples did so “immediately,” or “suddenly” in Armenian translation, implying a total, unexpected break from the perceived correct order of reality. Simon and Andrew followed Jesus so completely that they abandoned their previous lives totally. It was a corollary action to their choice to follow Jesus to abandon their previous lives of meager certainty as fishermen for new uncertain lives as disciples, fishers of men. Mark and Matthew demonstrate that following Christ must include a complementary real life consequence, and that these two disciples recognized that fact and willingly fulfilled this responsibility. In Luke 5:1–11, Jesus’ command to follow him is preceded by Jesus aiding Simon and Andrew to catch many fish, after which they likewise abandon “everything” (nets, boats, *and fish*) to follow Jesus. John 1:35–42 implies the abandonment by simply saying, *four times*, that the disciples just followed, and stayed, with him.

In all four accounts, the command and corresponding action described in the Armenian translation *strongly* indicate that following Jesus is more than isolated moments of accumulating information on a ‘News Feed.’ The Armenian uses the word “to come”/“գալ” paired with “after”/“զկհ” for Jesus’ command, i.e. “Come after me.” It uses the word “to go”/“գնալ” (John uses another word for “to go,” “երթալ”) to describe the disciples’ resulting incumbent

action. In other words, the choice of following Jesus cannot be acted upon according to the whim of the follower. While a free choice, it carries indispensable responsibility that must be **totally** fulfilled *along* with the privilege of being Christ's disciple.

Christianity takes to its furthest logical conclusion the dictum: my house, my rules. The choice to live as a Christian, i.e. in Christ's 'house,' must be chosen. Once chosen, however, there are requisite responsibilities/rules which accompany it, namely to be like Christ himself. There are no such incumbent responsibilities in following on social media. In light of the modern trend of "following on social media," the Church can simply return to the sources, once again emphasizing the incumbency of the real life consequences of coming after Christ. We can choose to follow him willingly, but we must always prepare and rejuvenate ourselves for the privileged responsibilities that accompany that God-given choice.