

### Study # 3

#### Cruciformity in “Following” Jesus

Five Greek words used for “following Jesus” all mean to “follow **His example**”.

##### A. ακολουθεω (*akoloutheo* — #190)

Of the several Greek words that are translated as “follow” in the New Testament, *ακολουθεω* is the most common, occurring about 90 times. It means “*to follow; follow as a disciple; imitate.*”<sup>1</sup> Note Spiros Zodhiates’ explanation of the meaning and implications of this verb:

The first thing in following Jesus is a cleaving to Him in believing trust and obedience. Those cleaving to Him must also follow His leading and act according to His example . . . Hence constant stress is laid by the Lord Jesus upon the need of self-denial and fellowship of the Cross. . . sharing in His sufferings not only inwardly, but outwardly if necessary . . . a life resembling His and a self denying sharing of His cross. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the *Amplified Bible* translation of Matthew 16:24 shows that following Jesus means being conformed to the paradigm of the Cross:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone desires to be My disciple, let him deny himself—that is disregard, lose sight of and forget his own interests and take up his cross and follow me [cleave steadily to Me, **conform wholly to my example in living and if need be in dying also**] . . . .” (Matt. 16:24)

##### B. επακολουθεω (*epakoloutheo* — #1872)

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<sup>1</sup>Zondervan, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1972), 12.

<sup>2</sup>Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, Inc., 1994), 112.

This Greek word, used by Peter, is an intensive form of *ακολουθεω* and means “. . . follow diligently, . . . pursue . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Christ suffered for you, leaving you **an example**, that you should **follow [follow diligently, pursue]**\* in his steps. . . . When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:21b-23) \*Added from Zodhiates.

Notice that the passage above clearly states that a **purpose of Christ’s suffering was to leave us an example to follow in our daily lives**. Our appreciation for His suffering for us can be measured by how diligent we are in the **pursuit** of fulfilling His purpose—that we be conformed to His example, conformed to the paradigm of the Cross.

### **C. μιμεομαι** (*mimeomai* — #3401)

From the root from which we get “mimic”, this verb means “to imitate, follow as an example.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the related noun *μιμητης* (*mimetes* #3402) means “follower, imitator”. The English translations of these Greek words are emphasized below:

For you yourselves know how you ought **to follow our example** . . . . We did this . . . in order to make ourselves a model for you **to follow**. (2 Thess. 3:7,9)

Remember your leaders . . . . Consider the outcome of their way of life and **imitate (follow)**—KJV) their faith. (Heb. 13:7)

Be **imitators (followers)** — KJV) of God, therefore, as dearly loved children. (Eph. 5:1)

. . . in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you **to imitate** me. (**be ye followers** of—KJV) (1 Cor. 4:15b, 16)

**Follow my example, as I follow the example** of Christ. (**Be ye followers** of me, even as I also am of Christ.—KJV) (1 Cor.11:1)

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<sup>3</sup>Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 612.

<sup>4</sup>Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 986.

You became **imitators (followers** — KJV) of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, . . . (1 Thess. 1:6)

**D. διωκω** (*dioko*—#1377)

“To follow or press hard after, to pursue with earnestness and diligence in order to obtain, . . .”<sup>5</sup> The aggressive—sometimes violent—actions implied by this verb are revealed by its use to express Paul’s relentless pursuit and imprisonment of Christians; in these cases, *διωκω* is translated by the verb “persecute”. Readers are encouraged to picture themselves as football players pursuing an opponent frantically carrying the ball towards the readers’ goal line—until he is tackled violently:

**Follow [διωκω—pursue earnestly and lay hold of ]** the way of love . . . (1Cor 14:1a)

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but **I press on [διωκω—follow after (KJV)]** to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me . . . I **press on [διωκω]** toward the goal **to win** the prize . . . . (Phil. 3:12, 14)

As previously stated, the context of these last two verses in Philippians includes Paul’s declaration of his passion to be “conformed to His death” (v. 10). Later in verse 17, Paul commands us to follow his example in this earnest pursuit. **Thus, we are to pursue the aspects of the paradigm of the Cross with a relentless determination to lay hold of them and live them out in our daily lives.**

**E. μαθητης** (*mathetes* — #3101 “disciple”)

A “disciple” was not only a pupil, but . . . they [disciples] are spoken of as **imitators of their teacher**<sup>6</sup> . Accordingly, the following verses show Jesus commanding and exhorting His disciples to follow Him by becoming like Him.

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<sup>5</sup>Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 474.

<sup>6</sup>W. E. Vine, Merril F. Unger, William White, Jr., *Vine’s Complete Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 171.

A student (*μαθητης*) is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be **like his teacher**. (Luke 6:40)

. . . **showing yourselves to be my disciples** . . . . love one another as I have loved you. (John 15:8,12)

Accordingly, by recognizing the true meaning of “disciple”, Jesus commands us in the “Great Commission”, to make **imitators of Jesus** of all nations (Matt. 28:19). Of course, we must first become disciples ourselves by submitting to His training to live out the paradigm of the Cross in all situations of our life.

In all that we do, we must realize that we are always following something—either the example of Jesus or some other ideal or pattern. Each denomination emphasizes its own concept of Jesus and of what it means to be a Christian; thus, many Christians end up following and being conformed to an image that only partially reflects the true nature of Christ.

I have decided to follow Jesus . . .  
No turning back, no turning back!

The world behind me, the cross before me . . .  
No turning back, no turning back!<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Anonymous, Zondervan Music Publishers, 1963.