

# BIBLICAL FOLLOWERSHIP

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God's Word speaks at least as much about followership as leadership. Every missionary must be a biblical follower to be effective for the Lord. Obviously, mission organizations are not specifically addressed in the Bible, but the Lord is surely honored when we apply His principles of being a good follower.

## What Followership Does Not Mean

1. It does not mean that we are inferior. See 1 Corinthians 15:28 for an example of Jesus and His Father.
2. It does not mean that we lack insight, good ideas, skills, gifts, etc. Notice Joseph with Pharaoh, and Timothy with Paul.
3. It does not mean that we must give blind, unthinking obedience, without open communication and feedback. Daniel provided a fine example of followership, yet he did not give unthinking obedience to Darius (Daniel 6:10). Even Abraham pleaded with God, going back six times to plead for Sodom (Genesis 18:16- 33). See Exodus 32:9-14.

## Commands to Followers in Christian Situations

1. Obey leaders. Hebrews 13:17. This doesn't mean obeying only when we agree, or feel like obeying.
2. Submit to them. Hebrews 13:17. Submission differs from obedience; it implies a positive heart attitude. We may obey because we have to, but submission is a choice to joyfully put ourselves under the authority of another. Submission is obeying on the outside and the inside.
3. Respect them. 1 Thessalonians 5:12. The Greek word means "to appreciate, respect, know the worth of." This must be communicated to leaders.
4. Hold them in highest regard. 1 Thessalonians 5:13. We are to esteem our leaders without measure, in love. This must also be communicated, by work and action.
5. Imitate them. We are to imitate their faith (Hebrews 13:7), and their conduct (2 Thessalonians 3:7,9). See Philippians 4:9.
6. Pray for them. 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 2 Corinthians 1:11. We must uphold them in prayer, even if we don't like them.

## Other General Commands That Apply to Followers

Being effective followers requires that we apply general biblical principles of interpersonal relations to our relationship with our leaders. Each of the commands below are found in contexts of relating to authority.

1. Slander no one. Titus 3:2. Leaders are easy targets of gossip and criticism.
2. Be peaceable and considerate. Titus 3:2. These two qualities in followers makes a leader's task much more "survivable."
3. Show true humility toward all men. Titus 3:2. "All men" includes leaders!
4. Obey and submit as unto Christ. This refers to our heart attitudes. It was given to servants, but applies to us also. See Ephesians 6:5,6 and Colossians 3:22-24.

## Handling Conflicts with Leaders

Being a good follower does not mean that we can never disagree with our leaders. It may actually be wrong to remain silent or refuse to discuss our point of view with a leader. Leaders need feedback. Here are some practical steps to follow when a conflict arises.

1. Ask yourself why you disagree. Spend some time thinking through the conflict, and especially examine your own thoughts, feelings, attitudes and motivation. List your reasons.
2. Talk it over with God first. Don't gossip, or criticize your leader to others. Read through Colossians 3:12-14, and ask God to enable you to apply these principles. Confess any resentment, and ask for a right attitude. Ask God to give your leader a receptive attitude. Ask Him for the ability to state your case clearly, and with an open mind to hear your leader's point of view.
3. Go to the leader, and discuss the situation. Be sure the place and time are right for good conflict resolution. It's almost always better to discuss it in private.
4. Try to communicate your respect, esteem, love and your desire to submit. Let the leader know you want to understand his or her point of view also.
5. Let the leader know you could be wrong, but you disagree and want to discuss it with him or her. You can honestly state that you could be wrong even if it's only a small possibility in your judgment. This admission helps develop an atmosphere of open dialogue.
6. Tell the leader you really want to understand his or her point of view, and ask him or her to explain the situation so you can better understand. As the leader explains, keep quiet until he or she stops talking. Don't interrupt, even if you disagree strongly. Demonstrate non-verbally that you really are listening. Then ask any questions you have to further clarify the situation and his or her reasons.
7. Present the facts, as you see them, as objectively as possible. Bring in new information the leader may not be aware of. Most leaders respond better to a statement of objective facts than to an emotional outburst. If the leader interrupts you to disagree, consider gently asking him or her to let you present your side before discussing it.

8. Give him or her an opportunity to respond, again without interrupting or arguing. Really listen, and be open to change your point of view.
9. If possible, help the leader find creative alternatives. Try to work together to discover a solution which both of you will be happy with.
10. If the leader doesn't agree or change his decision, decide whether to appeal. If you do decide to appeal, advise him or her and proceed, without animosity if possible. Otherwise, decide to accept the decision as from the Lord, and obey as unto Him. Be very careful about discussing it with others.

### Other Helpful Guidelines for Followers

1. Let your leaders know you are praying for them (if you are).
2. Request feedback on your work and your attitudes. Invite confrontation often! This brings greater freedom in your relationship, and helps each of you to be less defensive when conflicts arise.
3. Ask them how you can make their job easier. Most mission leaders live and work in very difficult conditions, and typically experience more stress than those who are following. Strive to become like Onesiphorus was to Paul, often refreshing him, not ashamed of him, and helping him in many ways (2 Timothy 1:16-18).
4. Support your leaders before others. If others are slandering a leader, refuse to participate in their sin by agreeing and adding negative comments of your own. Ephesians 4:29-32 applies to our relationships with our leaders also!
5. Share openly your plans, problems, growth, and ideas with your leaders. Let them in on your personal life and your work as much as is appropriate. Obviously some leaders are better listeners and are more interested than others. But don't give up too quickly if you don't receive the response you desire.
6. Encourage them often about positive qualities you see in them, through notes and/or comments. Everyone needs encouragement, and leaders sometimes are the most needy. Our motive should be to truly be an encourager, not to try to get them on our side.
7. Express gratitude for specific things they do, for the good job they are doing, or for the sacrifice they are making to serve God in that task. Most leaders receive far more criticism than thanks. The Lord can use you in a very powerful ministry in your leaders' lives and work, if you will take a little time and effort to give them positive feedback when it's due. See Proverbs 3:27 and Hebrews 3:13.