

Light In The Darkness
“False Followers”

John 6:22-36

From the beginning of his existence, mankind has attempted to approach God on his own terms. The sin nature is so strong and so deceiving people actually think they can manipulate their Creator for their own selfish purposes. The ministry of Jesus Christ exposed this fallacy at every turn. John 6 is one of those portions of Scripture that repudiates the idea people can approach God with contempt that is driven by a rebellious and sinful condition.

Jesus was a very popular individual in Israel’s history. He was seen as a supernatural miracle worker and highly moral teacher. While the people respected His teaching, they were more interested in His supernatural power. When the gospels refer to the masses as disciples, they are indicating there were a lot of people who truly followed Jesus and desired to learn from Him. But when He demanded faith and belief in His word, many of these superficial followers walked away.

John 6:22-34 reveals several characteristics of false followers. These are seen within the narrative leading up to Jesus’ great sermon on “The Bread of Life” (*John 6:30-59*) that He taught in the Capernaum synagogue. Jesus’ conversation with these “follower wannabes” reveals their true motive for following Him.

John 6:22-34 shows us at least six different characteristics of “false followers.”

There is probably no other place in the New Testament that focuses more specifically on the issue of false disciples than John 6. For us to understand that context, we have to go to the end of the chapter and read the contrast of true and false followers.

(cf. John 6:60-71)

1) False followers are attracted by the crowds. (John 6:22-24)

There was a sweeping popularity about Jesus. He attracted thousands of people during His ministry. People came for all kinds of reasons, but because He was the talk of entire nation, He probably attracted a lot of curiosity seekers. No one did what He did; no one spoke like He spoke. He was truly respected by the people.

People come to Christ for all kinds of reasons today: *“If I go to church, then maybe God will be happy with me and I can get out of the mess I’ve created for myself.”* or *“I’ll go to this church because there are a lot of people that go there, so I can just go sit in the pew and leave and no one is the wiser.”* or the notion that Jesus needs to be added to a person’s life for *“the sake of their marriage and children.”* They find a church and attend when they can, but Jesus never becomes their life — in other words, He never truly becomes Lord and Savior.

2) False followers are fascinated by the supernatural. (John 6:25-26)

The crowds of people came together because of the prospect and promises there would be the miraculous and there would be the supernatural. The crowds were looking to get outside the mundane things of life. Promises were being made and kept by Jesus, and it was that prospect they sought for themselves. There was no inclination of truly believing Him to be the only One who could meet their deepest spiritual need of salvation from sin.

It was the prospect and the promise of the supernatural that drew the crowd. People said He could heal and cast out demons, and He did. The ability to operate in the supernatural drew thousands of people to Christ. This still works today. People are drawn to the prospect and promise of the supernatural even though the people promising it can't and never deliver it. People are even attracted to something that *might* be supernatural.

3) False followers are focused on earthly benefits. (John 6:27-29)

Immediately after miraculously creating food and feeding twenty to twenty-five thousand people, they tried to make Him king by force. They saw Him as the one they would literally push into the role of Messiah and Deliverer.

It was not about spiritual reality. It was not about salvation. Their long-cherished messianic idea was the Messiah would be a Deliverer, a temporal, physical deliverer. They envisioned He would re-create well-being and fulfill the promises to David and Abraham of a rich prosperous nation, void of difficulty and without enemies in their midst.

The true work of God is resurrecting the spiritually dead to life through faith. Believing in Him is the result of God's work in one's life. This resurrection to life is not to result in desiring more from God in order to satisfy the temporary and fleeting physically or emotionally felt need.

4) False followers seek personal prosperity and fulfillment. (John 6:30-33)

The question asked of Jesus in v.30 was not one that sought authentication of His supernatural ability; He had already done that. Unbelief is never satisfied. It continually seeks for those things that can only be seen in the physical world. Even in that, there is never enough.

John Calvin comments, ***“There is no doubt that they despise all the miracles they had already seen because Christ does not meet their wishes, and they do not find He is what they imagined.”*** (Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, Part One: John Calvin)

5) False followers make demands on God. (John 6:34)

This request is not what it seems. One might think these disciples are asking for a relationship with Christ. The truth is quite the opposite. The bread Jesus is referring to is Himself. He is the bread that gives zoe — spiritual life. But that is not what these people are asking for.

These disciples believed Jesus came from God, and they believed He had divine power. They had seen Him perform many miracles. All of this is happening in Capernaum where Jesus did many miraculous things, including raising the dead daughter of the leader of the town's synagogue. They wanted His power. They wanted His power so they could work the works of God the way He did — but not for the same purpose. The answer is no. Jesus' response to that desire is seen in v. 29 — the work to do is to believe Him whom the Father has sent. He is saying the only miracle power they will experience is faith. The miracle power is to believe. That tells you what is most important to the Father and to Christ.

6) False followers do not find their satisfaction in the person of Jesus Christ. (John 6:35-36)

False disciples do not find in Jesus what they expect. Jesus makes it clear who He is and what He offers. It has nothing to do with having abundance of whatever we want in this life. This is why so many people walk away (**vv. 66**).

There are people who are building their spiritual house on sand, and the houses collapse even before the judgment storm comes. Defectors are true apostates. Like Judas, they are false disciples who are incredibly self-deceived. As John writes in his letters to the churches, ***“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.” (1 John 2:19)***

However, there are some true disciples. Peter's response at the end of Jesus' sermon speaks for all who truly love and follow Jesus (**John 6:66-69**) — to which Jesus follows up with the truth of false disciples pointing to Judas (**John 6:70-71**).

The Lord Jesus knows those who are His, and He knows those who are not. The Christianity of the New Testament has no room for self-centered, “me first” — “gotta get mine” attitudes. Jesus said, ***“...If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.” (Matthew 16:24-27)***

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Application Questions

1. *What does this passage teach us about Jesus?*

2. *What does this passage say about me and my relationship with Christ?*

3. *How does this truth change my approach to the Gospel?*

4. *How does this truth change my approach to obeying the rest of the New Testament?*