

**Articles and Sermons :: Shunning Popularity by Everard J. McBain Jr.****Shunning Popularity by Everard J. McBain Jr. - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2013/11/12 11:07**

John 6:66

As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

It's human nature and the nature of self to want to be popular. To want to be known and admired by as many people as possible. From school days even to adulthood. And now with the wonders of Social Networking, this desire is magnified tenfold. Everybody wants to have as many "Likes, Friends, or Followers", depending on which social network platform you're talking about, as possible. This phenomena has also had a great influence on the church and ministry. We want to have a large group that follows us. We also take it a step further, and measure the validity or genuineness of a ministry by how large it is. We envy large ministries, and feel inferior when we compare our work for the Lord when we compare it to what we perceive to be a large ministry. I too have fallen prey to this pitfall. You share something on one of the popular social networks, and you're always checking to see if there are any responses or reactions or comments. And if there are none, you feel disappointed. Because you're thinking if you don't see a reaction, or your following growing, then you're not being effective for God.

Background:

A supreme example on what our priorities should be, is our Lord Jesus Christ. We have an account of how He deals with popularity in the book of John 6. The Lord had approximately three years of earthly ministry. That is from the time He was baptized by John, to the time He was crucified. These three years of ministry are divided by most scholars in these three designations. The first year was the year of Inauguration. That is the year when Jesus was introduced to the world by his ministry and preaching. The second year is referred to as The Year of Popularity. This is the year when Jesus had a huge following, because of the signs and wonders he performed. The crowds followed Him everywhere. The last year is referred to as The Year of Opposition. That is, when people started to oppose Jesus and He was not in the spotlight as before.

The account to which John 6:66 refers, for me is the turning point of Christ ministry. That defining moment when He moved out of The Year of Popularity, and into The Year of Opposition.

Christ Shuns Position:

Christ as we said before, was at the height of His ministry. He had done many amazing miracles prior to this, and had astonished the people with the authority of His preaching and teaching. Multitudes followed Him everywhere He went. The bible tells us in v.2:

A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.

He had captivated everyone. The whole of Galilee was a buzz with talk about this Nazarene. Who was He? Could He be the one who it was spoken of in the Law and the Prophets? Many were convinced, others were still unsure. In John 6:1-14 Jesus performs a miracle that settles it in the minds of all the multitudes. He feeds 5,000 people with five loaves, and two fishes. The miracle was such a great event, we hear the conclusion that the multitudes come to in v.14:

Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

We no longer have any doubt, He is the one. He not only heals our sicknesses, but He provides an abundance of food and we are filled. The bible tells us that they all came to the conclusion,

Surely this is the Prophet who is come into the world.

They were so convinced, that they were prepared, to immediately take Jesus, and appoint Him king. A king to lead them

in the overthrow of their oppressors Rome. A king who would provide for their needs, and heals their every ill. The honest ones among us, would readily admit, that we would in all humility accept such an appointment. You did the work of God in healing and providing for the needs of people, and they recognized your contribution and want to acknowledge your work by making you their ruler. What's wrong with that? Maybe nothing, maybe something. Who knows? What we do know, is that the Lord Jesus Christ turned such an appointment down. We read in v. 15

So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

An opportunity to be elevated to a position of leadership. To be ruler over a nation. Christ's response to the proposition, is to withdraw Himself from the crowds, even from His disciples, up to a secluded mountain by Himself alone. God help me. I am so far removed from my Lord. He is of such greater character than I. Jesus retreats, pulls Himself away from all the multitude who were clamoring to make Him their leader. He goes into a secluded place by Himself. This was not in an effort to hide Himself from the people, but rather to spend time in communion with His Father. We can conclude this, because Jesus often retreated by Himself into the mountain to pray. So on this occasion, Christ's response to the proposition of leadership that came in response to His miracles, was to come away from it all, and go meet with His Father in secret.

He was not interested in what man wanted Him to do, He was only interested in working the works of His Father. How many of us at a moment of decision like that, could pull ourselves away from the adoration of the multitude, and come aside in secret to meet with our Father? God help me.

Christ Shuns Popularity:

Many of us, if we manage to gather a decent enough following, would do everything in our power to preserve that following. We would be very careful to be as "politically correct" in our own Christian way to ensure that we don't do anything to fragment that decent following. We tend to try our best to make sure that people would always like us, and not be upset with us. I know of some people whose entire existence is ordered around what people think of them and if people like them. They need the approval of as many people as possible, and if just one is in disapproval, their entire life is devastated. Again Christ demonstrates that His ways are not our ways. Because when He is faced with a situation where He has the approval of multitudes, He ups and does something that will most certainly cause Him to lose their approval.

The multitudes did some searching and found Christ. Christ's greeting to them was v.26:

Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."

Christ said, look I know you're not seeking me because you believe in my miracles, but because you want something. You ate, and were filled. You're following me for what you can get. Christ knew their hearts, and was not afraid to speak the truth without fear of favor. He used their carnal desire for a full belly, to teach them the doctrine of Him being the true Bread that came down from Heaven. They were seeking earthly bread, with earthly desires. Christ reminded them that their efforts should not be for bread that perishes, but for food that endures onto eternal life. He at this time began to teach the multitudes, that the bread Moses gave the children of Israel, was not the real bread from heaven. Christ Himself was the true bread from Heaven that the Father had given to men.

John6:35-40.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

The bible tells us, that this new teaching caused the people to grumble among themselves about Jesus. We see the multitude beginning to turn now. This is the same multitude who just a few verses before, wanted to make Him king. Now after He speaks the truth to them, they are grumbling about Him. Now again, if we have a following, and there is a grumble among them, we would do our best to see how we can sort out that grumbling. Not Jesus. Jesus seems to look for the bi

ggest canister of gasoline, to throw on the budding flame. He goes even further into the teaching.

He not only tells them that He came down from heaven, but He also tells them that no one can come to Him, unless the Father who sent Him draws them. He tells them that their fathers ate mana in the wilderness, and died. The one who eats of the true bread that came down from heaven, which was Jesus, would never die. He rounds it off in v.51:

I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.

The bible tells us, where as before they were grumbling, now they started to argue. They could not understand and accept what Jesus said about eating His flesh and drinking his blood. It almost seems that Jesus deliberately put it the way He did, so that it would be hidden from them. Christ was literally referring to His flesh and blood being offered as an atoning sacrifice for sin. But they did not understand. In reality could not understand because it was hidden from them. No man could come to Him, Christ said, unless the Father draw him.

This new doctrine though, had the effect of causing the multitudes, including many of His disciples, to turn back, return to their former way of life, and follow Christ no more. From this point on, He would not receive praise, but opposition from the same multitude who would have made Him king because He fed them. Christ deliberately presented them with truth, that causes Him to lose His popularity.

How many of us, would at the high point of our ministry, in terms of following and numbers, commit what in the opinion of many would be ministerial suicide. Speak a truth that would cause the majority of those that follow us, to cease following us. Christ was not concerned about numbers or popularity or position. We who seek and look for large followings and numbers, may we be rebuked and instructed by what we see in our Lord Jesus. Not interested in popularity or large numbers, but only concerned about doing the will of the Father, even if it's just us and God alone.

#### Christ Seeks The Father's Will

Christ was only interested in doing His Father's will. He didn't care if He was alone and no one followed Him. As long as He was in the center of The Father's will, that was sufficient for Him.

John 6:38-40

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.

The reality is, that numbers and large followings are not good indicators to determine the genuine article. Christ explained that His concern was to do the Father's will which was to not lose anything that was given to Him. By this He was referring to those whom God had given the grace to believe in Him. Remember He said earlier on in the chapter v.37.

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

All that the Father gives me will come to me—and the one who comes to me. He's talking about believers. The father is giving to His Son believers. The Church. The one that comes, the believer, the one whom God draws to Christ will come to Him and Christ will in no wise cast out. So it's not about large numbers, it's about individual numbers. Each and every believer that God gives the grace to come to Christ, Christ will receive and not turn away. Oh what a blessing.

We who are in ministry, should not look to the multitude, but to the individual. The one who would come to Christ. That one whom God would grant the grace to receive the bread from heaven and believe on His name. That is each individual. It may be one, or one hundred and one, each individual is still the focus of the Savior.

This is demonstrated powerfully when Christ turns to the twelve, and asks them the piercing question v.67.

So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"

Peter's words are demonstrative of The one whom God draws to Christ. The one whom Christ will receive and will in no wise cast out.

Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

The multitude heard the teaching of Christ giving His flesh, and were offended and turned away from Him and followed Him no more. Peter, Heard the same teaching, but Peter is a picture of the one whom The Father will draw to Christ. His response to the teaching was, "We have believed, and have come to know, that You are the Holy One of God. Because God had given him the grace. God had drawn him to Christ. And so it is with each individual whom The Father would draw. They would be enabled to come to Christ. Christ would receive them, and would in no wise turn them away.

So if in the course of your work for God, you are granted the opportunity to minister to just one. If we are used to reach just one. To minister to just one. That is one whom the Father will draw to Christ, whom Christ would receive and whom Christ would grant eternal life. Your popularity, position, large following, will never, can never, be compared with such a great privilege. God help us to always keep our priorities as our Savior Jesus Christ, and not look to multitudes, or for large followings. But let us pray that we can be used to share God's truth with just one. And may that one be such an one, whom the Lord would draw to Christ, and whom Christ would readily receive and not cast out.

from: <http://globalmicaiah.org/2013/02/shunning-popularity/>