

Being a True Disciple

1. BELIEVERS OR DISCIPLES?

- ◆ There is a distinct Biblical difference between a person who is a "Believer" and one who is a "Disciple". This could be phrased, there is a difference between being a "Child of God" (Grk. **teknon** G5043) and a "Son of God" (Grk. **huios** G5207). Immature Believers are like Children of God while mature Disciples are like Sons of God.
- ◆ A child of biological parents bears the nature of those parents. When that child grows to adulthood hopefully that child has grown up to bear the character of the parents. Biblically and spiritually speaking, a child is one **born** of God, a son is one **taught** of God. A child has **God's nature**; a son has this plus **God's character**.

2. THE TWO CALLS OF DISCIPLESHIP AND SALVATION

- ◆ There seems to be two calls in the ministry of Jesus. The people of Galilee were told to "repent and believe in the gospel," (Mk. 1: 15), but the fishermen were called to follow and be trained to "fish for men" (Mk. 1: 16-17). Two different groups, two different messages, two different expectations. This ofcourse doesn't mean there were two "levels" of believers or that their "salvation" was in any way "different".
- ◆ Jesus called the 12 disciples in particular (**mathetes**, meaning "pupil, disciple") to follow Him as a means of training and equipping them.
- ◆ "Believing" and "Salvation" are ofcourse closely linked. But when we over-emphasis the benefits of salvation and "conversion" above teaching Believers "to obey", we ignore the command of the Great Commission to "make disciples".
- ◆ The result of this is that relatively few believers ever come to spiritual maturity. So, based on the Biblical evidence, we have reason to say that there's a lot of difference between a Believer and a Disciple, as well as understanding the call to be a True Follower.
- ◆ The purpose of "making Disciples" is to teach Believers to have exclusive loyalty to Jesus Christ, and to be personally accountable for reflecting His character. "Accountability" (personal) has a far stronger meaning than mere "responsibility" (official).
- ◆ For this to happen one must begin by learning who Jesus is, according to His own teachings. So, only the teachings of Jesus Christ must be imparted to believers and not that of any group, denomination, or even the pet subject of the one doing the teaching.

3. THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF A DISCIPLE

- ◆ The Lord Jesus taught His disciples to make **the Kingdom of God** the first objective of their search in life (Matt. 6:31-33).
- ◆ The criterion for God's Kingdom revolves around doing what He wants done. If we want to function in His Kingdom as a True Disciple, we'll give up our own self-willed ways. The standard of determination for God's Kingdom is whether we do His will (Matt. 7:21).
- ◆ Jesus called men to fellowship with Him for the express purpose of **preparing them to carry out His mission** of reaching the world with the Gospel.

- ◆ Those who are "baptised" should then be taught "to obey"; this is when we can say a person has been truly "disciplined".
- ◆ **Baptising** and **teaching to obey** are given as the main aspects in "discipling" and this even applies to the discipling of nations (Matt. 28: 19-20).

4. KNOWING AND IMPARTING A "PERSON" NOT A BELIEF

- ◆ We cannot ask anyone to truly "follow" before they "know".
- ◆ The purpose in this is not merely to teach a belief or doctrine, but to impart a way of life from the master to the disciple. The goal being that the disciple become like his master (Matt. 10:25).
- ◆ The goal of the true Disciple is to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). Jesus said if we hold to His teaching, then we are really His disciples (Jhn 8:31).
- ◆ On the plus side, the disciples mentioned in Acts are "disciples **of the Lord**" (Acts 9:1). On the minus side, Paul warned the Ephesian elders about those who would **draw disciples after themselves** (Acts 20:30), this being the spirit of Absalom (2 Sam. 15: 6).
- ◆ The life of a true Disciple is one of submission to Christ. Jesus said that we cannot be His disciples unless we give up our lives and follow Him (Lk. 14: 27). We'll know a person is a Disciple by the ongoing transformation, personal holiness, compassionate service and servanthood, and the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (Gal. 5: 22-23).
- ◆ It's clear in Scripture that the purpose of Discipleship is to produce Sons, those who are mature in both **spirit and soul**. True Disciples are those who are undergoing the process of transformation into Sons, those who are prepared to inherit the Kingdom.
- ◆ The concept of Discipleship is directly linked to Sonship. Discipleship has as its intended goal, the reproducing of Sons who in turn properly reflect God the Father.
- ◆ On the highest level, God's Sons are to be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8: 29), who is the perfect reflection of His Heavenly Father (Jhn. 14: 9). On the earthly level, we find spiritual fathers discipling spiritual sons, who carry on the heart of their spiritual father (Phil. 2: 19).
- ◆ The task of teaching, training and imparting oneself to faithful men and women, who will in turn do the same (2 Tim. 2: 2), is central to the message of the Kingdom. It could even be said that where a church fails to consistently and diligently do this, it is not truly "the Church".
- ◆ True Biblical discipleship is a process, the purpose of which is to bring the Believer to spiritual maturity (Sonship) through being taught to obey Christ's commands. This takes place within accountable relationships. For true Biblical discipleship to function there must be **accountability**. Discipleship not only involves an *individual relationship* to Christ, but also *corporate relationship* to His Body, and accountability to His delegated authority, Elders.
- ◆ Note that spiritual maturity is not an end in itself. God's purpose for bringing us into maturity is in order that we might ultimately reign with Him throughout eternity (Rom. 8: 17 / 2 Tim. 2:1 2 / Rev. 5: 10).
- ◆ True Biblical discipleship is the moulding and shaping of a life until it resembles that of the Master. When we fail to do this we have failed to make Disciples in the New Testament understanding.

- ◆ A disciple is a learner-follower. In fact we can say that the essence of the Gospel is summed up in the two words spoken by the Lord Jesus: "*Follow me.*" So there seems to be four basic aspects to Discipleship: being a **Servant**, a **Son**, a **Steward**, and a **Witness**. True Discipleship is when all four are in harmony within us.

5. SOME TEXTS TO REFLECT ON

- ◆ Matthew 4: 19 5: 11-12 8: 22 10: 7-8 16: 25-26
- ◆ Mark 3: 35 8: 34-35 9: 35 10: 28-31 16: 15-16
- ◆ Luke 14: 33
- ◆ John 6: 27 8: 31-32 12: 26

Let's strive to produce disciples of Jesus Christ who measure up to Scripture.

In Christ the Lord,

Peter McArthur

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