

# DISCIPLE

## Christ follower

### Key question

What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ?

### Key text

## Matthew 28:19-20

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

### Key definition

## Christian disciple

A Christian disciple is a person who follows Christ so as to be like Him.

### Introduction

1. Jesus chose 12 disciples who shared a special relationship with Him.
2. These disciples were called to go into the world and make other disciples. Matt.28:19-20.
3. The early church identified all Christians as disciples.
4. What was expected of a disciple?
5. How were disciples formed?

### A. The meaning of the term in the New Testament.

1. The Greek word for “disciple”
  - a. The Greek noun MATHETES is found 264 times in the Gospels and Acts, but not at all in the Epistles. The verb form occurs 4 times.
    - 1) The basic meaning is “student” or “apprentice.”
    - 2) The word is used of those who followed the Pharisees, (Matt.22:16, Mk.2:18)
    - 3) In the NT it is most often used of those who followed Christ, especially the 12 closest to Him (Matt.10:1, 11:1, 20:17, Lk.9:1)

- b. The Greek word for “follow” is AKOLOUTHEO and is use over 60 times in the Gospels of those who followed Christ.
- 1) It is associated with saving faith. Jn.10:27-28 “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”
  - 2) It is also used as a call to those who are already believers. Matt.8:21-22; 16:24; John 12:26; 21:19,22
- c. An important point to note is that both of these terms emphasize what a person is doing as apposed to who they are by nature. In other words, a Child of God (by identity) can also be called a Disciple of Christ (by actions). The two expressions describe two different ways of looking at a Christian.

<i><b>Child of God</b></i>	<i><b>Disciple of Christ</b></i>
Legal identity	Behavioral posture
Static, unchangeable	Dynamic, changeable
Initiated at the point of saving faith and continues uninterrupted as long as a person is “in Christ” by faith.	Initiated (often) before saving faith and visible after saving faith as the believer is led by the Spirit.

2. The use of the terms in the Gospels.
  - a. They are used of **Curious** followers as in Lk.6:13, Matt.5:2ff, Lk.6:20ff, Jn.6:66
  - b. They are used of **Convinced** followers as in Jn.19:38, 12:42-43
  - c. They are used of **Committed** followers as in Matt.10:1, Lk.6:13, Jn.8:31, Matt.16:24-27; Mk.8:34-38; Lk.9:23-26; and 14:26-33
  - d. There are a number of requirements for those who would be in the “Committed” category. These challenges are given to those who already are believers in a broader sense.
    - 1) Deny himself
    - 2) Take up his cross
    - 3) Follow Christ
    - 4) Lose his life
    - 5) Not be ashamed of Christ
    - 6) Hate his family and his own life
3. The use of the term in Acts.
  - a. In Acts the term “disciple” seems to be synonymous with Christian in general as in 6:1-2, 7; 14:20, 22, 28; 15:10; 19:10
  - b. In can be said that if a “believer” did not submit to water baptism, and open identification with Christ and His church, he would not be recognized as Christians by the Christian community.
4. The use of the term in the Epistles.

- a. Although the word “disciple” does not appear in the Epistles there are other terms that convey the same idea – “imitate”, “imitator”. When Paul exhorts his readers to “imitate me” (e.g., I Cor.4:16; 11:1; cf. Phil.3:17; II Thess.3:7, 9), he desires a committed response to *him* as he is committed to and so imitates *Christ* (I Cor.1:1; cf I Thess.1:6)
- b. The Epistles repeated exhortations to believers concerning the need to follow Christ implies that some were not doing so as they should.

### B. Three key passages dealing with discipleship.

1. **Matthew 10:32-39** “<sup>32</sup> Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. <sup>33</sup> But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. <sup>34</sup> Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I came to *set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; <sup>36</sup> and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household.* <sup>37</sup> He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>38</sup> And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me <sup>39</sup> He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.”
  - a. Jesus is addressing those who confess him before the Father.
  - b. Jesus is challenging them to realize that following him will mean a radical change in many areas of life.
  - c. The question is this – Is Jesus describing the qualifications for entering the community of faith or is he describing the calling of those who are in that community and the “end game” of their story as they lose themselves in him?
2. **Matthew 16:24-27** “<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and *will then recompense every man according to his deeds.*”
  - a. It is important to understand this passage as referring to those who are followers of Christ. It deals with discipleship not justification (salvation from condemnation).
  - b. The recompense (vs.27) is best understood in the context of the judgment of believers in I Cor.3:10-15 not the judgment of the lost in Rev.20:11-15.
3. **Luke 14:25-35** “<sup>25</sup> Now great multitudes were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. <sup>28</sup> For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not

able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup> saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' <sup>31</sup> Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand {men} to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. <sup>34</sup> Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? <sup>35</sup> It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

### **C. What does it mean to "make disciples?"**

1. We must recognize that every Christian is a disciple in the broadest sense. He or she is identified as a follower of Christ. Disciples are not a class of "good" Christians who have achieved a level of maturity that sets them apart from "ordinary" believers.
2. Discipleship is a dynamic term. Believers can be faithful or good disciples or they may on occasion be best described as disobedient or poor disciples.
3. "Making disciples" Matt.28:19-20 is the process of teaching, shepherding, and training believers to be growing in their faithfulness to their calling as new creatures "in Christ."
  - a. "Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." – The rite of initiation is the first formal step in being a Christ follower. A believer shows his faith by submitting to water baptism. This separates disciples from those who are not in the eyes of man.
  - c. "Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" – Disciples are called to receive and reflect the full teaching of the Kingdom as expressed by Jesus through His Apostles. This is a process that goes on throughout a person's life and is summarized in Eph.4:11-16.
4. Eph.4:11-16 indicates that the making of a disciple involves a number of principles.
  - a. Spiritual formation is a community project.
  - b. Numerous leaders with varying gifts make differing contributions to a person's spiritual formation.
  - c. The goal is a mature community that is conformed to the image of Christ in the unity of the faith and characterized by love.
  - d. Speaking the truth in love is the means by which this community is formed.
  - e. Each member of the Christian community (Body of Christ) has a role to play in the formation and expression of the image of Christ.