

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

The Disciple's Identity

"Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23)

Before we begin to look at portraits of discipleship, we must first understand what a disciple is.

What Is A Disciple?

The word "disciple" is translated from the Greek word **mathetes** which means "a learner or pupil." However, this word involves more than our modern idea of a pupil or student. The Biblical concept of discipleship emphasizes the teacher-student relationship. A disciple is a devoted supporter and follower of his teacher. He accepts the views of his teacher and adopts his teacher's way of life.

What Are The Demands Of Discipleship?

Although Jesus has many followers, He makes it clear that not everyone who follows Him is a true disciple.

"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has **cannot be My disciple**" (Luke 14:33, emphasis mine – HR).

"Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine'" (John 8:31, NASV).

Only those who meet certain conditions or requirements are recognized by the Lord as being His true disciples. What are these conditions? How can we know whether or not we are truly disciples of Christ?

1. We Must Deny Self

We know that self-denial is an important quality to have. There are times when we must deny ourselves of things in order to

Jesus is not the only person in the Bible who had disciples. John the Baptist had disciples (Matt. 9:14), the Pharisees had disciples (Matt. 22:16), and some of the Jews claimed to be disciples of Moses (John 9:28). However, as **Christians**, we are concerned with being a **disciple** of Jesus Christ.

If I am going to be a true disciple of Christ, **I must** put Christ at the center of my life and on the throne of **my heart**.

achieve certain goals or to avoid certain problems. However, Jesus did not tell us that we must practice self-denial. He said that we must deny self, and there is a difference between the two.

The Lord's instructions regarding discipleship are found twice in the gospel of Luke. A comparison between these passages will shed some light on what Jesus meant when He said "let him deny himself."

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-27).

"Hating" our family members is worded as, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me," in Matthew 10:37. Jesus is not teaching us to hate others. He is saying that our love for Him must be greater than our love for any other person or thing.

The first requirement of discipleship is that we remove from our heart everything and everyone that hinders total obedience unto Christ. No one is to come between us and our loyalty to Christ, including ourselves.

Denying self is accomplished when we put the will of Christ in the place of self (Gal. 2:20). If I am going to be a true disciple of Christ, I must put Christ at the center of my life and on the throne of my heart. I must always choose to do those things that please Him, not myself (2 Cor. 5:9).

2. We Must Be Willing To Suffer For Christ

The second requirement given by the Lord is that we take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23). Many people have shown their misunderstanding of this statement by carrying around large, wooden crosses. This is not what the Lord meant by this statement. The cross was not a religious symbol when Jesus spoke these words. It was not worn as a piece of jewelry or hung on the wall as a decoration. In Jesus' day the cross was a much feared instrument of suffering and death. Jesus told His disciples He was going to suffer and die (Luke 9:22); then He said that if one desired to come after Him, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Him (v. 23).

Jesus was up front with those who desired to be His disciples. This was not a glamorous position He was offering them. It was not a means of climbing the social ladder or achieving greatness in the eyes of men. Discipleship was (and still is) about following Jesus, and the path that Jesus was walking was leading Him to His death. Unless we are willing to walk the path He walked, and bear the suffering that comes with it (2 Tim. 3:12), we cannot be His disciples.

3. We Must Learn From Christ

The third thing Jesus says to do to is “follow Me” (Luke 9:23). This was done literally by those who lived at that time, but how can we follow Jesus today?

Although there is a literal aspect to His command, what Jesus means is for men to follow His teachings (John 8:31). Remember, discipleship primarily denotes one who learns. In the Great Commission, Jesus sent His apostles out to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...**” (Matt. 28:19-20, emphasis mine – HR). In His Great Invitation, Jesus says, “Take My yoke upon you and **learn from Me**” (Matt. 11:29, emphasis mine – HR).

The way we follow Christ today is by following His teachings. “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). There is no way that one can truly be a disciple of Christ without following His teachings.

4. We Must Bear Fruit

“By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8, NASV). The illustration of the vine and branches emphasizes the importance of bearing or producing fruit. As we abide in the teachings of Christ, we are expected to bear much fruit. The production of this fruit is proof we are the Lord’s disciples. Without the fruit, there is no proof of discipleship and the Lord removes us and burns us in the fire! – vv. 4-6.

What is this fruit we are to produce? Steady progress in spiritual growth (2 Pet. 1:5-8), good deeds (Matt. 25:34-46, Eph. 2:10), and increased talents (Matt. 25:14-30), to mention a few.

5. We Must Love Our Brethren

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

Before Jesus left His disciples, He commanded that they love one another as He loved them. In doing this, they would prove to others they were really His disciples.

This requirement is one of the most challenging because it involves our attitude towards other people. No one is a “lone disciple.” Disciples are to worship together (Heb. 10:25) and work together in the gospel (Phil. 4:3). Different things can happen that will threaten the

peace and unity of the local church. This is why disciples are told to “put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Col 3:14).

Jesus is no longer here in the flesh, but our love for Him is to be shown by the way that we love other disciples (1 John 4:12, 20-21). When we are seen biting and devouring one another (Gal. 5:14-15), the world has a hard time believing that we are truly disciples of Christ.

6. We Must Be Committed To Following Christ

Perhaps the one thing that is lacking in discipleship today is a failure to make a commitment to follow Christ in every aspect of one’s life. Being a disciple is not something we do once and it is taken care of for the rest of our life. The Lord emphasized a “daily” commitment (Luke 9:23). We are faced with choices every day in which we have to deny self and do what Christ would have us to do.

We are to count the cost before becoming a disciple (Luke 14:28). Once we have made this decision, we are not to look back, but keep moving forward (Luke 9:62).

Conclusion

If we are going to make a serious claim to being a disciple of Christ, we must do so on His terms, not on our own. Are we really a disciple of Christ? Have we put Him first in every part of our lives, and committed ourselves to following His teachings until the end?

Questions

1. What is a disciple? _____

2. Is everyone who claims to follow Jesus a true disciple? _____
3. What does it mean to deny self? _____

4. What does Jesus mean when He required us to “hate” our loved ones (compare Luke 14:26 with Matt. 10:37)? _____

5. How does Paul view his life in Christ (Gal. 2:20)? _____

6. Who should a disciple of Christ seek to please (2 Cor. 5:9)? _____
7. What does Jesus mean when He spoke of taking up one’s cross (Luke 9:23)? _____

8. What promise is found in 2 Timothy 3:12? _____

9. How are we to follow Christ today (John 8:31)? _____

10. What were the apostles to do after they had made disciples (Matt. 28:20)? _____

11. What does it mean to call Jesus "Lord" (Luke 6:46)? _____

12. What is expected from those who abide in the teachings of Christ (John 15:8)? _____

13. What new commandment does Jesus give His disciples (John 13:34-35)? _____

14. How do we show our love for God (1 John 4:12, 20-21)? _____

15. What role does love play in our relationship with other disciples (Col. 3:14)? _____

16. What does Jesus want us to do before we commit ourselves to following Him (Luke 14:28)? _____

17. Describe the kind of commitment we must make in order to be true disciples of Christ (Luke 9:57-62). _____

