

## Biblical Discipleship

Mark's narrative contains an interesting encounter Jesus had with a religious scholar about the most important commandment. The conversation was insightful because of Jesus' response to really good observation made by the religious leader. While the religious leader knew the right answer to the question, Jesus remarked that he was not yet a part of the kingdom of God. Mark 12:28-34 For many Christians the logical deduction would be, "He knows the right answers about Christianity; he must be a Christian." How often do we as Christians make the mistake of having biblical knowledge the same as being a Christ follower?

One can know all manner of information about the Christian life and even aspire to live a good and moral life and still not be a Christ follower. Mark records another encounter earlier in his narrative that Jesus had with a wealthy young man who fits into this category.

*Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"*

*So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'*

*And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth."*

*Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."*

*But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

Mark 10:17-22 (NKJV)

I believe the Bible gives us a very clear look at what it means to be a follower of Christ. The passage is found in Luke's gospel narrative.

*Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "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 14:25-27 (NKJV)

The crux of the qualification Jesus gives for discipleship is relationship with him. He places great emphasis on such relationship by saying that one must love him and put relationship with him above every other relationship he has, even those of his family. Being a disciple of Jesus means other things in living life, but it begins with the understanding that one chooses to love Jesus in the same way he has been loved by him. John 15:12

### Defining Biblical Discipleship

There are many good biblically sound definitions of discipleship. Listed below are some that can be useful in helping one better understand what is meant by being a disciple of Jesus.

- *Discipleship is a lifelong journey of obedience to Christ which transforms a person's values and behavior, and results in ministry in one's home, church, and the world.<sup>i</sup>*
- *True discipleship is about a lifestyle, not simply about stored up Bible knowledge...Discipleship is about being and reproducing zealots for Christ. Discipleship, in other words, is about passionately pursuing the lifestyle and mission of Jesus Christ.<sup>ii</sup>*
- *As Jesus disciple I am learning from him how to live my life as he would live my life if he were I.<sup>iii</sup>*

I would like to suggest one other definition that I have been using for several years. *Discipleship is the expression of the Lord Jesus in one's life. It refers to the process of sanctification and continuing spiritual transformation.*

In addition to these definitions, these are some Scriptures<sup>iv</sup> that speak decisively to what biblical discipleship means:

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

*Philippians 2:12-13 (NKJV)*

*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.*

*Colossians 2:6-7 (NKJV)*

*He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*

*1 John 2:4-6 (NKJV)*

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;*

*Ephesians 4:11-13 (NKJV)*

*My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,*

*Ephesians 4:19 (NKJV)*

*Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."*

*Matthew 4:19 (NKJV)*

*Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

*Matthew 5:48 (NKJV)*

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

*II Corinthians 3:18 (NKJV)*

*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”*

*John 14:21 (NKJV)*

My purpose for including the above definitions and biblical passages is to help the reader better understand discipleship is not merely an aspect of being a Christian; it is the totality of being a Christ follower. It is the big umbrella under which all activities and ministries of the church exist.

Discipleship is a biblical assumption of one deciding to be a Christ follower. It is the beginning of a faith journey, not its destination.

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<sup>i</sup> This definition has been used by LifeWay Christian Resources, the Publishing Agency of the Southern Baptist Convention.

<sup>ii</sup> *From Growing True Disciples* by George Barna

<sup>iii</sup> This explanation of discipleship was given by Dallas Willard in his book, *The Great Omission*.

<sup>iv</sup> It goes without saying that there are many other meaningful biblical passages not listed here