

DISCIPLES or CHRISTIANS?

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It may surprise you to know that Jesus never called anyone to be a Christian, rather his call was to be his disciple. In the book of Acts, people were not invited to be Christians, rather their call was to become Christ's disciples.

Take your concordance and look up the word "Christian(s)" and then look up the word "disciple(s)." You are in for a shock! Look in the book of Acts and compare the word "Christian" to the word "disciple," you'll get the point!

In the Scripture the word disciple and disciples are used a total of 273 times. In all the Bible the word Christian and Christians is used a total of 3 times (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16).

“And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the **disciples were called Christians** first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26).

Notice that they did not become Christians first and then decide if later they wanted to be disciples, no, they were disciples and later had the name Christian added to their description.

What is a disciple? The Greek word *mathetes* (disciple) means more in the New Testament than a mere pupil or learner. It means an adherent who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct (Lexical Aids to the NT, p.933).

Mathetes (disciple) implies relationship to a teacher. In the New Testament *mathetes* occurs ... some 250 times, almost always for those who follow Jesus. Acts has it in the absolute for a disciple of Jesus. In each instance we find attachment to a person. Jesus as the head of the group is expected to give the ruling. The destiny of the disciples is bound up with his. A unique aspect of New Testament discipleship is that his teaching has force only when there is first a commitment to his person (Theological Dict. of the NT, pgs 556-560).

In the New Testament, the words connected with discipleship are applied chiefly to the followers of Jesus and describe the life of faith to follow, follow after and imitate. Learning is no mere intellectual process by which one acquires teaching about Christ. It implies

acceptance of Christ Himself. Following Jesus as a disciple means the unconditional sacrifice of his whole life, for the whole of life (New International Dict. of NT Theology, vol. 1, pgs., 480-490).

In at least some cases it meant literal abandonment of home, business ties and possessions, but in every case readiness to put the claims of Jesus first, whatever the cost (New Bible Dict., p. 285).

The verb “to follow” occurs about eighty times in the gospels, and exclusively describes the relationship between the earthly Jesus and His companions. It became a synonym for disciple (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia, pgs., 129-130).

Jesus charged his followers to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). The mission was not to win loose adherents... Instead, Jesus said to his disciples that they were to teach those who believe “to obey everything” he had commanded them (Matt. 28:20). Jesus defined the goal of discipling when he said, “A student (*mathetes*) is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). Likeness, not simply knowledge, was the goal of Jewish discipleship. And likeness to Jesus himself is the goal God has for you and me (Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2) (Expository Dict. of Bible Words, pgs., 226-227).

Jesus said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his

own life--he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

Conclusion and Objections: The real objection (to the Scriptures that emphasize discipleship) is that to be a Christian requires no effort (it is by grace). To be a “disciple” requires real sacrifice and commitment. The truth is, that the redemption of Christ required no effort on our part, it is perfect and requires no effort from us. But Christ’s call is for our whole and absolute life. He did not call some to be Christians and some to be disciples, they were to be the same. Jesus saves us by his blood, but his rights over us are absolute... He is King, Lord and Saviour.

Jesus call requires a change of heart. This change of heart, is a change of direction and is *toward* God (See Acts 20:21), and *away from*

Satan. This turn was toward discipleship. As one turned, God offered by grace, through Jesus blood the gift of righteousness (forgiveness). Christ did not offer his benefits without taking his Person. The call was toward God and Christ, this is discipleship, a call and allegiance to Him, but not to his benefits without taking his Person.

1. Discipleship implies the readiness to put the claims of Jesus first, whatever the cost. True or False.

Answer: True. “And the conditions for being a follower of Mine are that you must make a continual practice of surrendering all that you are and have ... “ (Luke 14:33, LDB).

2. Just sitting in church every Sunday and agreeing with what is said doesn't make you a Christian. True or False.

Answer: True. “Then Jesus said ... ‘If you continue to obey and live by what I teach, then you truly are My followers.’” (John 8:31,LDB)

3. Jesus commission to the church was to:
a. make disciples. b. get people to repeat a prayer after the preacher.

Answer: a. make disciples. Jesus said, “So I want you to go now to everyone in every nation and teach them (disciple them) to continue to study and take careful note of all that I have taught you. Then baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit all who believe and accept what you taught them. And you must teach them that

they must obey everything that I have commanded you. And listen! I will always be with you, even to the very end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:19-20, LDB)

4. In the process of discipling others, what will happen? a. they will continue to live the same old life as before. b. people will be converted (that is, believe, change directions toward God) and be baptized.

Answer: b. people will be converted (that is, believe, change directions toward God) and be baptized. Jesus said, “So I want you to go now to everyone in every nation and teach them (disciple them) to continue to study and take careful note of all that I have taught you. Then baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit all who

believe and accept what you taught them.”
(Matthew 28:19, LDB)

**5. What were Christians originally called?
a. good people. b. Baptist. c. disciples,
the Lord’s followers.**

Answer: c. disciples, the Lord’s followers.

“Then for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the people of that church, and they taught a large number of people there. In fact, the first place (disciples) the Lord’s followers were called Christians was in Antioch.” (Acts 11:26, LDB)

6. People say, “Salvation is by grace, so I don’t have to be a disciple.” The truth is that the sacrifice that provided salvation was perfect and needs no human effort. But Jesus call was always for our whole

and absolute life. He has rights over us as our King, Lord and Savior. True or False

Answer: True. “That’s why Christ died and rose to live again. It was so that He might be our Lord and Ruler in all circumstances ...”
(Romans 14:9,LDB)

7. To become a follower of Jesus requires a change of heart. This change of heart is a change of direction and is toward God and away from Satan. In this turn God offers through Jesus blood, by His grace, the gift of righteousness (forgiveness). True or False

Answer: True Jesus said to Paul, “You are to open their eyes to the truth, so they may turn from living in Satan’s darkness to living in God’s Light, and so they may turn from

allowing Satan to rule their lives to allowing God to rule. They must do this in order to receive forgiveness of their sins and a share in the inheritance that will be theirs together with all others who are made holy by believing in Me.” (Acts 26:18, LDB)

“So now turn from your sinning (repentance – a change of heart that turns to God and away from sin) and be converted (to go a new direction). This is absolutely necessary so that the record of your sins may be blotted out ...” (Acts 3:19, LDB)

Have you had this change of heart? Do you have this change of mind? If not, now turn to God in prayer. “So you see, ‘Everyone who calls on Him and acknowledges Him as Lord (his Sovereign Ruler) will be saved.’” (Romans 10:13, LDB)

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Your letters of encouragement are welcomed.