

Discipleship

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Repentance and the new birth result in discipleship. Discipleship means that the Christian is totally surrendered to Jesus and follows His teachings. Examples of discipleship can be found in the Gospels. When Christ said to Peter, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," there was action. "And they straightway left their nets, and followed him." Jesus then saw two brothers, James and John, mending nets and called them. "They immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him" (Matthew 4:18-22). Jesus passed "Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him" (9:9). According to Luke, Jesus said to him "Follow me. And he left, and rose up, and followed him" (Luke 5:27-28). The call to follow was marked by a willing response and immediate action.

Jesus once stated, "Think not that I come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." "On earth," in this statement, refers to men in general. The lack of peace would come about because men would not all respond to His call to follow. He next stated that any one who loved another person more than Him was not worthy of Him, "and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:38-39). Jesus later told his disciples, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:24-25). Thus discipleship is an all important and necessary part of redemption.

When a man asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life, He said, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments," and He enumerated some of them. Then the man responded, "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" Jesus then said, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me." This grieved the man and he did not follow because he was wealthy. In response to his action, Jesus pointed out to his disciples that it was hard for those with riches to enter the kingdom. When told this, the disciples thought this was a hard saying, and wondered if they could ever enter the kingdom. Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:16-26; cf. Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30). God's grace can produce seemingly impossible changes in us.

Once Jesus was approached by three men requesting to follow Him. Jesus' response to them gives some indication of what is involved in discipleship. One was quick to say, "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." Jesus told him to consider the cost, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Another received a call to follow but responded, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." He would follow later after doing something else first, but Jesus responded, "Let the dead bury their own: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." Another had a similar response, "I will follow thee: but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." There can be no delay. As Jesus noted, "No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Discipleship can be a hard way. One must count the cost and not look back after taking up the cross (Luke 9:57-62).

Jesus noted that the example of sheep could help us to understand discipleship. When the "porter openeth; and the sheep hear his

voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. . . . The sheep follow him. . . . A stranger will they not follow." Later Jesus explained, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life: and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:1-30).

Those who follow will change their walk and be free of sin. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). He noted, "If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light" (Luke 11:36). He also once told some believers, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." When questioned about this, Jesus said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." The disciple is not a slave of sin, but a son of God who loves to do his Father's will (John 8:31-36).

In John 15, Jesus explains how fruit bearing relates to discipleship. "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." Then He explains, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. . . . If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love " (John 15:5, 8-10).

Discipleship is a narrow and hard way that is quite different from what many picture Christianity to be. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few that be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14; cf. Luke 13:23-24).

Lordship of Christ

Discipleship means coming under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Today the use of the term "Lord" is common and popular, but Jesus points out some aspects of it in the Sermon on the Mount that are little understood. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven." He will tell some who claimed to do many things in His name, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Jesus asked a question that needs to be answered by many today. "Why call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Following this question, He told a parable concerning the importance of keeping God's Word. Jesus stated, "Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them . . . is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock." When the floods came, his house stood. But "he that heareth, and doeth them not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth." When the stream broke against it, it immediately fell (Luke 6:47-49; cf. Matthew 7:24-27). There is no way to answer Jesus' question about not following His teachings. Those who follow what Jesus taught have a firm foundation and assurance of eternal life.

Repentance, Faith, New Birth, and Discipleship

Repentance, faith, the new birth, and discipleship are all necessary conditions for salvation. It would be wrong to believe that only one of these conditions was necessary for eternal life. All these are necessary conditions, and they are interrelated. The fact that these are interrelated is obvious. The sinner must repent in order to believe. Yet he must have some faith in order to repent; otherwise he could not. Repentance means he has changed from his rebellion against God. This change in mind and spirit involves being born again. Being born again, the Christian will become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Although repentance, faith, the new birth and discipleship are distinctive concepts, they work together to bring about salvation. They cannot be separated into a series of steps. They are not four steps to be taken one at a time; they are to occur simultaneously.

But today many believe the only necessary condition for salvation is an intellectual assent of faith in Jesus. They misinterpret Paul's statement, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9; cf. Romans 3:28). They elevate this statement above all others and believe there is no need of repentance, the rebirth, or discipleship. Salvation is by faith alone, they say. But salvation is by grace alone. It is by God's grace that we repent, believe Christ, are born again, and become disciples of Christ.

Those who misunderstand Paul's writings on "justification by faith" fail to consider the struggle the early church had over keeping the Mosaic Law. Jesus explained that "the law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached" (Luke 16:16). The Law has served its purpose and, as He taught in the Sermon on the Mount, was fulfilled (Matthew 5:17-18). The good news of the kingdom of God replaces it. John also notes this change and

makes a sharp distinction between the two: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17 NASV).

Paul explained the purpose of the law and grace in Romans. The law established a standard of holiness no man could keep so that "all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified." The law brought knowledge of sin and not justification. But man can now be "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:19, 20, 31; see 3:9-31).

Many of the New Testament epistles were written to show that it was not necessary for Christians to keep the Mosaic Law to be saved. We must keep this in mind today when studying these books. The emphasis in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews on justification by faith is concerned with the relation of the Old Covenant to the New Covenant (Romans 3:21; 9:30-32; Galatians 3:10-14; 23-24; Hebrews 8:13; 9:15; 10:1; Acts 13:38-39). This emphasis on faith does not mean that repentance, the new birth, and discipleship are not required. Often when these books speak of faith, these other teachings are considered an aspect of faith or necessary results of faith.

If the reader has any doubt that the Christian is not to sin, he should study Romans 6. This book written about "justification by faith" has some of the strongest teachings that the Christian is to "walk in newness of life" and not have any part of sin. And he should also study Paul's epistle to the Ephesians and see there is a place for good works because Christians "are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

Come and Follow The redemption brought by Jesus Christ is available to all who will believe, repent, obey, and follow Him as disciples.

These are all important and necessary for eternal life. No person should think that faith alone will suffice. Faith alone will not nullify Jesus' teachings on repentance, the new birth, and discipleship.

Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). This promise still stands today. Searchers will find that repentance, the new birth, and discipleship are all made possible because of God's grace. All should remember too that "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). Many fail to "enter . . . in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because straight is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14, cf. Luke 13:23-24). God is ready to justify (to declare the sinner righteous before God) all who will come to Jesus by His grace.