

Discipleship Lesson 2: What's the Difference Between Disciples and Christians?

Mark 8:31-38

There's a story told about a preacher who challenged his congregation to become disciples. In response to this challenge, a woman said to him after worship, "I just want to be a Christian. I don't want to be a disciple. I like my life the way it is. I believe that Jesus died for my sins, and I'll be with Him when I die. Why do I have to be a disciple?!"

Many "Christians" operate with an unbiblical understanding that says you can be a Christian without being a disciple. If you asked them to tell you what a Christian is, they'd say something like: "A Christian is someone who trusts Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin and therefore will spend eternity with Him in Heaven."

There's a focus on the benefits we can receive from Jesus, but little to no acknowledgment of the need to make our wants and our will subject or second to God's and follow Jesus.

In fact, there's no recognition of the need to *actually follow Jesus*. But, a right definition of "Christian" begins with the includes the word "disciple": A Christian is a disciple who follows Jesus in order to learn how to be more like Him.

Read Mark 8:31-38

1. In verse 31, Jesus paints a picture of how He will carry out His mission. What does His immediate future hold?

2. Why do you think Jesus was so stern with Peter in verse 33?

3. Jesus outlines three requirements for anyone who wants to be His disciple:

a. Deny yourself: In the context of our self-fulfillment/self-actualizing/be-all-that-you-can-be culture, the word "deny" sounds strange to our ears.

Q: What does it mean to deny yourself?

b. Take up your cross: If you lived in Jesus' day and saw someone carrying a cross behind a Roman soldier, what would you think this person's future held?

Q: What does taking up a cross represent for a disciple today?

c. Follow me:

Q: Why does "follow me" come after two previous requirements?

4. According to verse 35, what is the payoff for those who take Jesus up on His offer?

See also: Revelation 2:11; Revelation 20:14; Revelation 21:8

Conclusion

To make disciples, we must first *be* one. This begs the question: Can you be a Christian without being a disciple? Put another way: Can we just "use" Jesus to get into Heaven when we die and not live for Him during our Earthly days?

The idea that this is acceptable is found nowhere in the New Testament. For Jesus, for Peter, for Paul, there wasn't any daylight between being a Christian and being a disciple; one necessitated the other, and there is no daylight between them today.