

# WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

## INTRODUCTION

Even though this varies between Bible translations, in the Greek language the word disciple (mathetes) comes across about 270 times. This is huge when compared to the word Christian, that was used only 3 times, and always in connection to suffering or mockery, or the word believer, that as a noun appears just one time.

So, why such a big difference? Is the meaning of this word relevant for us today? You will be surprised.

The Lord Jesus used only this word to refer to those who follow Him. Luke, the writer of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts of the Apostles, used as well only this word to refer to what we now call Christians. Furthermore, when the Lord gave us the Great Commission in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 28, He sent us to make **disciples** of all nations, not Christians nor believers.

What is then the real meaning of this word, and why does it matter to us?

## IN THE TIMES OF JESUS

### a) Rabbis

The Lord was known in His times as a rabbi. In the Jewish culture, even till today, as much as in the Arabic cultures and other Asian religions, there are many masters or rabbis. In the times when the New Testament was written, a person was considered a rabbi when he had at least 10 followers. There were different schools (doctrinal teachings) among the Pharisees. In the times of the Lord Jesus, for example, there were two big ones led by two rabbis: Hillel and Shammai.

Besides, there were different sorts of teachers. The ones with more authority were able to interpret the Torah, and those with less authority could only teach someone else's interpretation. That explains the reaction people had when Jesus first taught:

*And it happened, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His doctrine. For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.  
Matthew 7:28-29*

### b) Disciples

Disciples were in those times followers of a particular master. They were very different from a student, in our modern days. Different even to an intern. Modern students need only the knowledge their teachers have in a particular field of expertise, to be used by them for their own agenda. For example, a student of engineering will need to study math, but not in order to become a math teacher. They need to master that skill in order to attain their own degree.

Next to that, a student does not really care about the personal lifestyle of their teacher. As long as they get the lesson delivered on time and properly, the students are satisfied. An intern, even though his training is more practical, still shares the characteristics of a limited interest in his trainer's skills. Just practical, but not personal.

So, what about a disciple? A disciple is interested in the teachings and skills of his master, but specially his lifestyle. He does not only want to learn what the master teaches, but also to live by those teachings just as his master lives. He wants to become like his master, and his master's agenda will become his own agenda.

That explains as well many of Jesus' claims about the requirements for being His disciple:

*And great crowds went with Him. And He turned and said to them, If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and 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, he cannot be My disciple.  
Luke 14:25-27*

*And another of His disciples said to him, Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said to him, Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead.  
Matthew 8:21-22*

*And calling near the crowd with His disciples, He said to them, Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever will save his life shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, he shall save it.  
Mark 8:34-35*

## A DISCIPLE OF JESUS

Seeing what is explained above, to say someone is “a disciple” means nothing, unless it is explained who he or she is a disciple **of**. Then, being a **disciple of Jesus** would mean not only learning His teachings, believing in them, and living by them, but mainly getting to know Him, trusting in Him, and making His agenda and goals our own.

Being a disciple of Jesus means that we want His Lordship above His blessings, that we are willing to make a life-long commitment to follow Him no matter the cost. It means that there will not be anything making us quit representing Him and announcing His Kingdom and His Name, privately and publicly.

To be a disciple of Jesus has to do first with knowing Him as much as obeying Him.

### a) The problem of terms and definitions

In our days, that Christianity has spread throughout nations and cultures, and that has been modified and changed in all sort of directions, a problem has arisen concerning the words used across different religious groups.

The problem is mainly that all Christian-based religions and cults, with all their variations and divisions, use exactly the same words, but give a different meaning to them. When we speak of discipleship, every denomination will use that word and quote Bible verses that teach about it, but mean something different.

### b) Disciples of Christian groups

One of the greatest deceptions comes when denominations disciple people not unto Christ, but unto their own systems and traditions. To have traditions and systems is not wrong on itself, if they are purely biblical and facilitate discipleship and mutual servanthood. People should never be a means to hold those systems and traditions in existence.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO?

## ARE YOU A DISCIPLE OF JESUS?

Due to how Christianity works today, we have many Christians that are not disciples of Jesus. They love him, they are faithful believers, but they do not live the way He would live. So before we move on, this question is the most important one: are you a disciple of Jesus?

The Lord said the following:

*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and 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, he cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he may have enough to finish it; lest perhaps, after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all those seeing begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not first sit down and consult whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So then, everyone of you who does not forsake all he has, he cannot be My disciple.  
Luke 14:26-33*

Then, there is a price to pay, and some thinking to do before becoming a disciple of Jesus. Unfortunately, many of the modern denominations only preach blessings and try make the gospel attractive to the lost, instead of

presenting it correctly (more on evangelism in further lessons). Many converts, therefore, become Christians in order to be happy, instead of renouncing to their happiness in order to follow Jesus.

So, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Am I following Jesus? If yes, what in my life looks like His life and the life of His first followers?
2. Is there anything in my life that I am not willing to stop or give away for Jesus? Relationships, hobbies, religious practices, reputation, or others? If there is something, why is it that I am not capable of doing that?

If you have someone to discuss these questions with, be encouraged to do so.