

Church and Discipleship: Marks of True Christian Discipleship (Matthew 28:18-20)

Introduction

True Christian discipleship is a lifelong commitment, which begins with a call from the Lord to follow Him, progresses with a persevering faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and consummates with a life lived in holiness.

A true disciple is first a learner, and then a follower with a lifelong relationship with the Master.

- Matthew 28:18-20
- The danger in today's churches is that making disciples by "teaching them to observe all things" is undermined.
- Dr. R.C. Sproul writes, "It's not the *profession* that gets you into the kingdom. It's the *possession*. We must *possess* what we *profess*." He refers, of course, to faith. A profession of faith alone will not save us, and neither will knowing the precise moment we came to faith. What saves us is the *possession* of faith.
- We need to recover true discipleship – discipleship that causes Christians to live lives of increasing holiness. The emphasis on growth needs to be directed at holiness rather than membership. True discipleship producing strong, committed Christians will present a clear witness to the world.

In today's churches, many call himself/herself a disciple of Christ, but sadly the outcome of the life is that after sometime, he/she fades away by living a life of compromise. Such people cannot be true disciples of Christ.

Following are few crucial marks of a true disciple of Christ:

Hear the Call and Be Transformed (John 1:35-42)

One must hear the personal call from Christ and be convinced that He is his Savior.

- This is being gripped by the Person and Power of Jesus Christ—Jesus told to Andrew and John (who were earlier John the Baptizer's disciples), "Come and see" and they went and saw (v 39).
- Andrew, Peter, and John realized that Christ is not any ordinary person, but the Messiah, the Anointed of God.
- That made the difference between the John the Baptizer and Christ (3:27-36).
- John the Baptizer's testimony concerning Christ was that He is able to give eternal life (3:36).
- This Christ transformed Peter, from Simon (which means "hot-tempered, volatile, and violent") to Cephas (which means "Peter" or "a stone").

Hold on to Christ and His Word (John 6:66-71; 8:31-32)

Christ, during His early ministry, faced many seeming believers, whose heart was not with Him:

- John 2:23-25—At a Passover feast, some people "believed" in Christ but He did not entrust Himself to them as He knew their real intentions.
- John 6:66—After the Bread of Life discourse, many of Jesus' disciples "turned back and no longer walked with Him."
- These were a kind of "discipleship" that is merely temporary and does not persevere to the end.

- Then Jesus immediately asks the Twelve, “Will you also go away?” (6:67).
- Peter immediately replies, “Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life” (vv 67-68).
- Jesus affirms this great truth in 8:31-32—True disciples of Jesus follow Him not just at the beginning, but also to the end.
- True disciples are marked not by sinless perfectionism but by abiding in the words, the teaching, of Christ. They do not just confess Jesus with their mouths, but they trust in Him with their hearts and prove it by seeking to do His will, repenting where they fall short, and returning again and again to Him to learn His way.

Retreat from the World and Ready to Give-up All (Luke 14:25-33)

True Christian discipleship calls for a commitment that is unparalleled in the world. Christ not only requires our love first but love most. It must transcend all earthly attachments. This is the lesson we learn from Luke 14:25-33.

- John Chrysostom comments that Jesus would not have us “think lightly of the honor due to parents.” His words only signify “that nothing ought to be to us more urgent than the affairs of the kingdom of heaven.”
- It can be hard to know how to honor one’s parents and follow Jesus, but let us remember that His will alone deserves our undivided submission.

John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, was told to quit preaching or he would be thrown in prison. The personal hardship did not concern him, but the fact that it would put his wife and family into utter poverty weighed greatly upon him. He wrote from prison, “*The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of the flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great mercies, but also because I would have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor family was like to meet with, should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I have besides. Oh, the thought of the hardship my blind one might go under would break my heart to pieces . . . But yet, recalling myself, thought I, I must venture all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you. Oh, I saw in this condition, I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children; yet thought I, I must do it. I must do it.*”

Conclusion

Luke 9:23-26, “And He said to them all, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whosoever desires to save his life will lose it: but whosoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what advantage is to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.”