



## **What is a true Disciple**

*Matthew 28: 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

What does ‘disciple’ mean? A quick study of the word that is translated into English as “disciple” yields some good information that will provide a base for studying what Jesus meant and how he applied the word.

The word in Greek is transliterated mathetes (literally, the learning one) and is derived from the verb manthano which means “to learn”.

It occurs about 264 times in the Gospels and Acts. It means ‘One who learns instruction from another’ or a disciple is likened to an apprentice who learns from his master tradesman. He can also be likened to an imitator of his teacher.

Gleaning the information from the Greek words one finds that a disciple is a person that not only gains knowledge from the teacher but also acts upon it. It is sad to say that this basic definition already disqualifies many so-called disciples of Christ. Many people know much about what Jesus taught but never put it into action.

So in essence, a disciple is one that learns from the Teacher and then acts upon it. This is very important. It is written in Matthew 23 (Jesus speaking): 8 *“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.*

We need to understand, a disciple follows and a disciple learns from the Teacher. The disciple never replaces the one true Teacher, or takes the role of the teacher. Jesus remains our Teacher and our Lord. We never must assume the role of Teacher, but remain a follower in the service of our King and His Kingdom.

The theme “to follow” is the key to being a successful disciple. In Matthew 4 we read: *Jesus Calls His First Disciples - 18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.*

Jesus came and called to the two brothers and they followed. This is simply how we become a disciple. We heed the calling of our Lord Jesus.

Matthew 28 is the mandate for all believers – firstly to become a true disciple and then to disciple others. How do we disciple? Simple - follow the example of Jesus. The 12 disciples (later to be called Apostles for being special messengers) were constantly in His Presence, learning, watching, training and so grew into maturity and unity because of the example of Jesus. The names of the first 12 disciples of Jesus were Peter, James (the son of Zebedee), John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James (the son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot. (Matthew 10:1-4 and Luke 6:12-16)

What has the Lord’s intent been since the birth of the Church? Discipleship! Not only to become a disciple (follower of Jesus) but to lead others to become a disciple of the Lord.

It is very important to understand that in essence we are ALL disciples, regardless of our calling and regardless of our mandate. If you have been called to shepherd a flock, great, but you remain a disciple. If you have called to be missionary, wonderful, but you remain a disciple.

Let us understand you never stop being a disciple because Jesus remains your master and Lord. Our first duty and calling is to be a disciple. Therefore one who keeps on following the Lord and keeps on learning and acting upon what we learn.

As we will also show in this study, there is no such thing as the clergy and laity. We are all disciples. We have all been called to follow and to learn from the Lord. Yes, we may have different callings, but as disciples we are all called collectively to build the Kingdom of God.

Now, from the outset, it is important to remember:

- You do not become a disciple because of your theology training education. You are a disciple because you chose to follow Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.
- You are a disciple because you have accepted Jesus and follow Jesus, and you will never cease fundamentally to be a disciple
- A disciple follows only Jesus and the teachings and commandments of Jesus

Again, it must be emphasised that you are a disciple of the Lord once you accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. You do not become a disciple once you have gone to Bible School or have obtained a degree in theology. If you believe and you follow Jesus, then you are a disciple.

Now, we have mentioned the importance of FOLLOWING.

So then, what is the condition to follow Jesus?

1. **OBEDIENCE REQUIRED:** *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed,” (John 8:31).* Not only is a follower of Christ to merely listen to the commands of God but to abide in His Word. The word translated as abide is also translated continue, dwell, remain, stand. This means that a disciple hears the word of the Lord, aligns himself with it, and then continues to stay in agreement with it. A true disciple is one that listens to the commands of Jesus and invests himself fully in the words of the Lord.

This is very important, for as we shall see later in this study, a disciple follows not a religion, or the ways of man, or the doctrines of man, or the traditions of a church or of a denomination, but a disciple follows Jesus only who is the Truth, Way and Life. In Matthew 6 we are reminded that we must first seek His Kingdom. This is what a disciple does – first seeking the Kingdom of God in obedience above all else.

2. **GOD IS ABOVE ALL AND RULES OUR LIVES ABOVE ALL:** A true disciple not only abides in the word of Christ but has a different perspective on his relationships with family and Jesus himself. In reference to the family Jesus said, *“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple,” (Luke 14:26).* On another occasion Jesus said in *Matthew 10:34-38: 34 Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to part asunder a man from his father, and a daughter from her mother, and a [newly married wife from her mother-in-law -36 And a man’s foes will be they of his own household. 37 He who loves [and takes more pleasure in] father or*

*mother more than [in] Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves [and takes more pleasure in] son or daughter more than [in] Me is not worthy of Me; 38 And he who does not take up his cross and follow Me [cleave steadfastly to Me, conforming wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying also] is not worthy of Me.*

Jesus is quite clear from these statements that a disciple of His must not value any other relationship higher than their relationship with Him. If we value anything higher than Jesus then we walk in idolatry, for God should be worshipped and followed above all else. If any other human relationship takes pre-eminence than that person is not a true disciple. As Jesus said they are, “not worthy of me.”

Consider also the following words: *Luke 14:33: 33 So then, any of you who does not forsake (renounce, surrender claim to, give up, say good-bye to) all that he has cannot be My disciple.* In this small statement, Jesus obliterates the idea that there is anything that a person could hold onto while pursuing Christ. As the Apostles did, leaving their nets, their financial security, their families, everything, and so do all that follow Christ. It says in Matthew 6:24 that a man cannot serve two masters. A disciple therefore leaves behind everything to follow the Master.

Jesus did command that everyone that is to be a devoted disciple of His to put all relationships and possessions in second place to Him, but that is not all that is to be left behind. The disciple's own life is not to be held higher than Jesus Christ. *“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it,” (Matthew 16:25).*

3. **DENY YOURSELF:** Probably the most important teaching that Jesus gave upon what it takes to be a disciple is written in *Luke 14:27: 27 Whoever does not persevere and carry his own cross and come after (follow) Me cannot be My disciple.* This calls for dying with Christ -- dying to the old attitudes of envy and strife and jealousy and anger and selfishness and pride; and turning to follow Jesus in newness of life. When we make disciples we bid people to come and die to their old, destructive ways and to live for Jesus, who loved them and gave himself for them.

A true disciple is therefore one who has died to the self, who love others, who strive to be like the Master, who places God first and who strives to be a humble servant of the Kingdom.

4. **TRUST AND FAITH:** A true disciple is one who trusts and has faith in God. Faith is to believe God can, and trust is to believe God will act on His Word. A true disciple seeks the Lord's guidance day and night, always willing to lay down the self to gain the glory of God.

5. BE A FOLLOWER: A believer should be a follower. A believer should be a disciple. A disciple should be a follower and a doer of God's Word, commandments, and teachings. A disciple walks in love, carries his cross, denies the self, lives for others, walks in Spirit and Truth, obeys, is faithful and strives every day to manifest God's glory and holiness by turning away from wickedness and evil. A disciple follows God's direction and guidance. A disciple is submitted unto God, seeking a path of manifested sanctification and glorification.\_
  
6. BE LED BY THE SPIRIT: *John 3: 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit[b] gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'* In order for us to be an effective disciple of God, we need to be led by the Spirit, for the Lord calls us to be worshippers in Spirit and Truth. We can do nothing without the Holy Spirit, who imparts wisdom, knowledge, counsel, understanding and strength to the disciple to fulfil the Great Commission.