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**“Disciples and Christians”**

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Nobody can choose between being a Christian **or** being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Some people have said that they will take Jesus as their Savior and maybe later be one of His disciples, but such an option is not available for a Christian is by definition a disciple of Jesus:

Acts 11:26 *“and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and* ***the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch****.”*

There are people today who are disciples of Mohammed or of Buddha or of many other religious leaders. But being a disciple of Jesus is very different from being a disciple of any other leaders. Christianity is unique among the religions of the world. A person may decide on his own initiative that he is going to study the teachings of Christianity and decide on his own to be a follower of Jesus but that does not make him a Christian. One world leader recently stated that he had studied the teachings of Jesus and decided to be a follower of Him, but his lifestyle contradicts that devotion. Christianity is not a philosophy. One does not just learn the rules and then play the game. A person becomes a Christian by a sovereign work of God causing that person to be born spiritually so that he can then believe that Jesus is Who the Bible teaches, and he can trust and obey Him and be His disciple.

One could be self-deceived into thinking that he was a disciple of Jesus when he actually had not been born again and had not made the commitment required by Jesus: *“As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore.”*(John 6:66) In this verse, Jesus made clear some of His requirements and some people who had previously said that they were His disciples decided that the cost was too high and they left Him. A true disciple will never leave the service of Jesus Christ and will also be active in discipling others as did His first disciples: *“And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,”* (Acts 14:21)

A person who has been born again will persist in his relationship to Jesus to the end of his life and will even be willing to give up his life rather than deny that he is a disciple of Jesus. All the Apostles except John where martyred for their belief in Jesus and many Christians since then have also lost their lives for being His true disciples. The act of denying Jesus is very serious and has eternal consequences: *“But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.”(Matt 10:33)*

So we need to see the requirements of Jesus for His disciples:

**Mark 8:34-38**

*And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. (35) "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. (36) "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? (37) "For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (38) "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."*

Mark records Jesus telling His disciples of the true mission of the Messiah as planned by God in Mark 8:30-33. Jesus then summoned the crowd to be with Him and His disciples as He informed them of the requirements to be His disciple. This instruction of Jesus is for all Christians anywhere and for all time. There are two clear requirements to be a disciple of Jesus Christ: put aside any goals of life that only involve our lives on earth and place Jesus first above all else. Jesus states that His disciples will renounce self as the center of their world vision and choose Jesus and His goals. Taking up a cross clearly means to die to self-centeredness. The cross was a Roman method of execution well known by all Christians in Rome. All those listening to Jesus knew that He was telling them that they must die to themselves and be totally devoted to Jesus.

Jesus continues to clarify His meaning that if a person desires above all else to keep himself the center of his life mission then he will lose his eternal life. But whoever will give up his life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel will save his eternal life. “For the sake of the gospel” means a devotion to the gospel message. Jesus continues to drive home His point by stating that even if a person were to gain the entire world but forfeit his soul then he has given up his eternal life with God. Indeed what will a man give in exchange for his soul? This is the question that everyone needs to ask himself. Jesus ends this section as recorded by Mark by clearly stating that if anyone is ashamed of Jesus and His teachings then He will be ashamed of him at the final judgment, as also stated by Paul:

2Thess 1:6-8 *“For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”*

The discipleship requirement could not be more clearly stated but many refuse to accept it and think that they can serve both God and man:

* Matt 6:24-25 *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”*
* Matt 6:33 *“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*

The Gospels clearly state the requirements for being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Everyone claiming to be a Christian should carefully examine his life to make sure that he is such a disciple.