

Discipleship – Part 2

2 Peter 1:16-19

The Apostle Peter was a devout disciple of Christ. And after the Lord Jesus returned to heaven, Peter devoted the remainder of His life and all His efforts to both being a disciple of Christ and making disciples of others. That is clearly the desire and the design of these letters that Peter wrote to these dear ones. And may we continue to do the same. Listen, and we'll begin with these words from 2 Peter 1.

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:16-19 (ESV))

And from John 8:31,

³¹ . . . Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. (John 8:31)

Last week, we said that we would devote the next two, perhaps three weeks to a study about “Discipleship”. And we will continue today with that study, though as I began to search these scriptures and also began to listen to some of the foremost preachers and commentators and to learn their thoughts on this subject of “discipleship”, I realized that the study may go a bit more than just a week or so more.

And while I am confessing, I would also like to mention that parts of this study about “discipleship” will be taken in large part from a message given by John Piper. I sometimes feel uncomfortable about borrowing from other bible teachers, especially “word for word” as I’ll do with some of this message today, but folks, I cannot say these words any more clearly than they have been said by John Piper, so I’ll just go ahead and use a lot of his words.

And may we remind ourselves as we begin to study about “true discipleship” that we are in a constant battle for the “truth” about what it is all about. As the Apostle Peter said here in verse 16,

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16 (ESV))

There are a lot of “myths” being put forward in today’s church, so in our pursuit to know what “real discipleship” is all about, we must not settle for anything short of “biblical truth”.

A thought as we begin . . . as I have studied about this ever so important matter of “discipleship”, I have found that just as with most all of the elements of our relationship with Christ, there is both a “being” part and a “doing” part. And here, Jesus wants you and me to both “be” His disciples and also to “do”, to go about our daily lives “doing” the good and kind things of Christ. And then to also diligently “make disciples” of other people. And while those two elements, the “being” and the “doing” often get all intertwined, it is essential that they both have their own importance and intentional focus.

The verse on which John Piper based his message and from which I will take many of these words was John 8:31. Listen again to those words!

³¹ . . . Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. (John 8:31)

This is our pursuit, the words, “You are truly my disciples”! What does it mean to “truly be a disciple” of the Lord Jesus, and what will it take for us to fully apprehend its intent for our lives?

As we study the words of this verse, we find that at least five questions arise that will help us to understand what it means to be a “disciple” of Christ.

1. The first is simply, “What is a true disciple of Jesus?” (You are truly my disciple.)
2. What is Jesus referring to by the phrase “my word”? (“If you abide in *my word*...”)
3. What does it mean to be “in” His word? (“If you abide *in* my word...”)
4. What does it mean to “abide” there? (“If you *abide* in my word...”)
5. What’s the relationship between abiding in his word and truly being his disciple? (“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.”)

We will begin studying these words today, but will not be able to complete them in the time that we have. We hope then to continue with them into next week.

Again, these words in verse 31,

"Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.'" (John 8:31)

One of the things that this phrase, "truly my disciples" implies is simply that there are disciples who really are not true disciples. The word "truly" means "really" — "really my disciples." In other words, there are real and there are unreal disciples. There are genuine disciples and there are pretenders. There is discipleship that is merely outward, and discipleship that goes all the way down to the bone.

And it goes further than that. The world is not just divided into two groups, disciples of Jesus and those who are not His disciples. It more accurately is divided into at least three groups. First, there are unbelieving people who make no pretense of following Jesus. They are easy to recognize. By their words and by their conduct, they deny Him. Next, there are people who say they follow Christ, but have only a surface connection with him, many, many of which sit in church pew every Sunday. And then thirdly, there are believing people who truly do follow Jesus, they are "true disciples".

Simply put, not all belief is real! Why did Jesus make that distinction, because it can be a disturbing thought? It can even make us squirm and ask ourselves the question which one we are. He brought it up because in the previous verse, verse 30, it says, "As He was saying these things, *many believed in Him.*" There had been a great response to what Jesus was teaching. And whenever there is a great response to anything some of those who are listening can believe for the moment, and perhaps be carried along by emotion and the crowd. If your friends are going forward, it's easy for you to go along with them, even if you wouldn't go on your own, you follow the crowd. In our work at French Camp, we often saw that take place. Some followed the crowd, but then quickly fell away.

So Jesus didn't assume that all who responded had "real belief". And again, the same can be said for all those who come forward at an "altar call" in our churches today, or all those who come forward in a Billy Graham Crusade. They may really want to believe, and to some degree actually believe, but for some reason, their faith is not "really real". Billy Graham has often spoken about that, that he accepts that perhaps only one half of those who have come forward have truly given their hearts to Christ.

What Jesus does is give a test that we also can use to see if we are "real". And note in these words that if our faith is not really real, then this test is designed to help us make our faith "real", to create faith where it is missing.

In John 20:31, we read,

"These words are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31)

By this was meant that this Gospel was written not just to awaken faith in unbelievers, but also to wake up people who think they are disciples but aren't, and to help those who are real disciples confirm their faith and to make their faith even stronger.

You and I are surely in one of these three categories. And we must let Jesus diagnose for us which we are, and then move on toward being a True Disciple.

So then, what is a true disciple? What does Jesus mean by saying in verse 31, "you are truly my disciples"? May we understand here that for Jesus, a person that is a "true disciple" is the same as being a "true Christian" or a "true believer." Those meanings should never be separated in our minds.

A common misconception that is held within a lot of churches is that a person first becomes a Christian and then they move on to become a disciple. That is not the way Jesus thought. A "true disciple" is not a second stage in the Christian life, first a believer, and then later you attain the level of disciple.

One evidence for saying this is to notice the words he uses here in verse 31: "Jesus said to the Jews who *had believed in him*, 'If you abide in my word, you *are* truly my disciples.'" He did not say to these professing believers, "If you abide in my word, *you will become* truly my disciples." In other words, he did not teach that being a true disciple was a later stage after simple belief. No. He said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples."

So there is no thought here about "true discipleship" being a second stage of Christian maturity. True disciple means true believer or true Christian or true follower, and it takes place immediately upon being saved.

May we pause for a moment and rehearse to ourselves what this really means. If we are a true believer, a true Christian, a true disciple, that means that we are truly forgiven for our sins. We know that we are sinners in need of Savior and that Jesus alone is that Savior. We are not just "wanna-bes" who walked down an aisle.

Our forgiveness and our redemption is very, very real. It is not something that will become real later on as we grow and mature in Christ. It is absolutely real now, right from the beginning.

In John 3:36 we read, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. That's what it means to be a "true disciple". To be saved from sin. Rescued from the wrath of God. And already in the enjoyment of eternal life.

The next question that arises is, what is Jesus speaking about in using the phrase "my word"? "If you abide in *my word*, you are truly my disciples." "Word" here is in a singular form, "my word," not "my words." Jesus is here speaking of the "sum of all that He is, not just all that He has said, but the sum total of all that He is, all that He has said and all that He has ever taught", the "sum total". But what does that mean?

I must confess that I don't really know. But I do believe that it has to do with the beginning words in John chapter 1, that declare that Jesus is "the Word", the "living Word" of God.

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-4, 14 (ESV))

Jesus is the "Word", the "speaking voice" of "God the Trinity", the "speaking voice" who spoke all creation into existence, the "speaking voice" that at every moment calls out into all the heavens and the earth declaring the glory of God!

Again, do I understand it, and do I even understand these words that I am saying to you now. No! But I do know that they are true! Jesus is the Almighty Word of God! And He truly is the sum "total" of everything that He has ever done and everything that He has ever said that He is. In John 6:35, He said, "I am the bread of life". And in John 8:12, He said, "I am the light of the world". In John 10:11 He said, "I am the good shepherd". In John 10:38, He said "I am in the Father". And in John 11:28, He said, "I am the resurrection and the life". And it goes on and on, He is the "sum total" of all that He is and all that He has done and everything He has said about Himself.

And when you take all His words together, you will see that they have only one focus and that is on Jesus himself. And that is what you and I must do, have one focus, one dedication, and that on Christ alone!

I'll need to stop here for today, but please take these thoughts with you and absorb them into your understanding.

Being a disciple is not about how you and I can be better people, a better husband, a better wife, a better Dad or Mom, or even about being a better Christian. That does take place yes, but being a disciple of the Lord Jesus is all about Him, all about Jesus, who He is and what He does and what He is about, learning about Him, because He truly is the "sum total" of all that is worthwhile in this life and in all eternity.

A disciple of Christ must have only one love, one devotion, one consecration, one focus in life, and that is upon Him, upon Jesus Christ, and Him alone.

Listen as we close! Jesus said,

²⁸ "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. ³⁰ "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30 (NASB))