

**Transformed Disciples: Lesson 1**  
***Discipleship: The Aim of God's People Today***

I. **Begin this** study with a reading of ***Matthew 28:16-20***

A. In context, these were some of the last words that Jesus would speak to His Disciples before ascending into heaven in *Acts 1:9*

B. After the past three years of teaching and correction, Jesus's ministry on Earth had come to a close. With His resurrection from the grave God's plan was fulfilled. At the point of Matthew 26, as everything had reached its culmination, Jesus prepared to send those whom he had trained out into the world to accomplish His will:

C. It is with that in mind that the reader approaches these final verses of Matthew's Gospel: *What did Jesus say? 28:16-20*

II. **Notice that** the command of Jesus to His Disciples, was that they would go out in turn and also *make Disciples*:

A. Discipleship is the emphasis of these verses:

1. Certainly there is instruction that follows: That in order to be a disciple, one must be baptized, that they must be taught the commands that Jesus left--
2. But that which has prominence, the end goal of these actions, is that those who preached the gospel would convince someone to be a disciple of Christ:

B. The great importance of Discipleship in these verses can be seen in the way in which it gives meaning to the rest of the great commission.

1. What does it accomplish if one is baptized-- in the exact manner and for the exact reasons prescribed by scripture-- if that individual has not committed their heart and mind to being a Disciple?
  - a) They have done nothing more than to wash away dirt
2. What does it accomplish if one learns scripture from cover to cover, knowing in great detail the commands that God has given throughout the Old and New covenants-- if they are not a Disciple?
  - a) They have accomplished nothing more than accumulating knowledge to puff themselves up

III. **We emphasize** the importance of the command to go out and Disciple, because of the implication it has for those who wish to follow God in this present life:

A. If the goal of the 1st century was Discipleship, then that means it must be that which I strive for today.

B. Do not mistake the following for a disregard to details, or a indifferent attitude towards authority:

1. Jesus did not call those whom He had trained to go out, and rally men and women to assemble in nice brick buildings with certain names on the front. He did not urge them to present men and women with a checklist of rituals, routines, and traditions that form an unwritten creed book.

2. In short, He did not tell His trained men to go out and form a denomination.

C. Are there rules and commands that He has given? *Absolutely!*

1. But all of the commands that Jesus wanted taught mean little if they are not performed out of the motivation that comes from being His disciple:

a) This principle is illustrated in the book of Isaiah when in the context of Judah's coming judgment he prophesied their judgment would come "*...Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote*" -*Isaiah 29:13* -- a verse that Jesus would use in *Matthew 15:8-9* to describe the Pharisee's approach to faithfulness

IV. **If one accepts** that becoming a Disciple of Jesus is of central importance to pleasing Him, then one must be familiar with what it means to *be* a disciple.

A. I have no doubt that many are familiar with a basic definition disciple: It is so synonymous with the New Testament that a basic dictionary will associate it with being a follower of Christ, or a member of the 12:

B. But as far as the definition of the word as applied to people in the Gospels, it means "pupil" or a "learner"

1. And yet as we pointed out in our first lesson on Holiness, knowing the basic definition of a word is not the same as putting it in its proper context and application in which it was used.

V. **So we ask**, what was it that came to the minds of His audience when Jesus called people to be Disciples?

- A. The word for Disciple is found in the New Testament only in the Gospels, as well as the book of Acts: It is word that has a very frequent use, appearing over 250 times.
- B. With very few exceptions, those appearances are used to refer to those who had attached themselves to Jesus as their master, and it is always used in that context when found in the book of Acts.
- C. But for those who sought to be disciples of the Lord, it went beyond a desire to be His student:
  1. A *student's* goal is simply to gain knowledge from a teacher.
    - a) We certainly must seek to grow in knowledge as is commanded, but a student and a disciple are two different things.
  2. Some may think of a disciple as being a *practitioner* , placing emphasis on the actions that come with learning: Someone who wants to do things the way Jesus did them: They admire His methods of teaching and use them as their own:
    - a) Again, we should by all means seek to learn and do what Jesus did, but this still isn't a disciple
  3. Some may even think of a Disciple as a level of maturity to be attained: They've read books, commentaries, maybe even taken classes: Now they've arrived-- And yet this is certainly not a disciple:

VI. **Let us take a moment** to examine the historical context of "Discipleship" among those of Jesus's day:

- A. Ray Vander Laan describes the relationship between a rabbi and his disciples as follows:
  1. The very few students who made this commitment sought permission to study with a famous rabbi, often leaving home to travel with him for a long period of time
  2. There was much more to these disciples than that which is called a student:
    - a) A student wants to know what the teacher knows in order to get a grade, to complete the class, or even out of respect for the teacher
    - b) A disciples wants to be like the teacher: to become what the teacher is:

3. Disciples were passionately devoted to their rabbi, and noted everything he did or said: It was a very intense relationship and a very personal system of education.
  4. As the rabbi lived and taught his understanding of scripture, his disciples listened and watched and imitated so as to become like him.
- B. A disciple doesn't want to know what the rabbi knows, or do what he does, or simply be in his presences: He wants to do all of these things so that he may become who the rabbi is: *This is the sole focus of the disciple: To become who the rabbi is*
- C. In reference to the disciple as used in the Gospels and Acts, the TDNT has this to say: it *“always implies the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole life of the one described as ‘disciple’“ (4.441)*
1. It goes on to say that *“the control of the ‘disciple’ by the man to whom they have committed themselves extends in the NT to the inner life...“ (p 442)*

VII. **Those who heard** the Lord’s call to become His disciples, understood that He called them to a commitment beyond learning phrases or philosophy; It was a call that extended beyond actions. It was a call to live their lives in the pursuit of becoming exactly like the Lord:

- A. We have mentioned that Disciple is only found in the first five books of the NT: But consider how this thought, of trying to become exactly like Jesus goes on to shape the teaching found in the rest of the New Testament:
1. While Disciple is not found elsewhere, another very similar word is used repeatedly by Paul and other writers in their instruction: Follower, or Imitator:
    - a) In 1 Cor. 4:16, He urges the brethren to *“be imitators of me”*, a command that had its basis in who he was imitating: in 1 Cor. 11:1 *“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ”*
    - b) In Phil 3:17, he urges them to *“join in following my example”*-- literally that would read as *“co-imitators”*
  2. In every command and pattern handed down, it carries authority because in imitating the men who wrote them, we are imitating Christ:

VIII. **So what then** is a disciple?

A. *“A disciple is someone who is on the path to becoming like Jesus by the grace of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. As the disciple becomes more like Jesus, they find their identity in Jesus and image Him by worshipping God with all their lives, living in gospel community with other disciples, and going on the mission to make more disciples of Jesus”.* -Greg Qualls

IX. **The Challenge** of this study has been to ask the question, “when I claim to be a disciple of Jesus, what exactly am I saying?”

A. The question that I may have to ask next is: “Am I willing to be the kind of Disciple that Jesus has called me to be?”

I. In the coming weeks we are going to develop this thought further as we look at more lessons on Discipleship:

a) Next week we will ask the question: “How does Discipleship change me?”