

Coming To Terms With Discipleship – Dr. Charlie Bing

Synopsis:

This is a study of the terms used for disciples and discipleship. That is the first step in having a biblical understanding of what it means to be a disciple.

Discipleship affects every Christian. Not only are we to be disciples, but we are to make disciples of others. But what is a disciple?

The meaning of discipleship has taken on greater significance with the unabating interest in the debate over the relationship between salvation and sanctification fueled by the Lordship Salvation controversy. Many on both sides are being challenged in their assumptions about what a disciple is. There remains a great need for biblical clarification on the issue. This article will look briefly at the confusion over the concept of discipleship, then attempt to define it from the NT data.

I. A Call for Clarification

For decades a chorus of voices has been calling for a more precise definition of the biblical concept of discipleship while the Church goes on grappling with fulfilling her great commission to "make disciples." Christians have not lacked for books on how to be a disciple or how to make disciples of others. Too often these books are based on assumptions about what a disciple is while they take the meaning of discipleship for granted. Yet our understanding of biblical discipleship shapes our practice of evangelism, church growth, missions, and personal lifestyle.

A. Making Disciples

When *discipleship* became a buzz-word of zealous Christian groups, there were some who were not happy with how it was being used (or abused!). For example, in 1971, J. Dwight Pentecost introduced his book on discipleship with this note:

The subject of Discipleship is frequently discussed today. Men are called to become disciples without any definition of the concept, and without any clarification of the requirements the Lord makes of those who are His disciples. Hence no intelligent decision can be made concerning this important question.¹

Coming from a different perspective, but with the same concern, C. Peter Wagner wrote in 1973,

The biblical concept of "disciple" has become a key term in contemporary evangelical missiology. Faced with the fuzzy use of the term in much popular literature and preaching, a closer look at the New Testament meaning of the word, together with its implications for missions, is now overdue.²

Little progress seems to have been made since then, however. Books on how to make disciples and how to fulfill the Great Commission have proliferated while confusion remains over exactly what a disciple is. One example comes out of the Church Growth Movement and its founder, Donald A. McGavran. His preliminary understanding of what a disciple is had to be clarified because of confusion over the term. He later refined his definition of discipleship by breaking it down into three separate categories he called D1, D2, and D3, but some might say this only clouded the issue all the more.³

Another more recent example is the popular book *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker*, a book of methodology based on Jesus' training of the Twelve. To be sure, in the introduction Hull thought he defined a disciple clearly enough.⁴ But in his follow-up book, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, he finds it necessary to argue theologically for

a more precise definition of discipleship, stating, "The irony of the church is that we throw the word *disciple* around freely, but too often with no definition." ⁵

It is not my concern to evaluate these authors' views of discipleship at this point. I cite them only to show that a definition of the term cannot be taken for granted among today's Christians. This was confirmed to me by a recent visit to a Christian bookstore where only one of a half dozen books on disciple-making made an attempt to define clearly what a disciple is (and that attempt was *not* based on a biblical study!). This is in spite of the fact that, in comparing the books, one could discern several different assumptions about what a disciple is.

B. The Lordship Salvation Debate

The meaning of discipleship is most hotly debated and reaches its most crucial significance in the Lordship Salvation controversy. The recent debate on the meaning of discipleship has been led on the Lordship Salvation side by prominent preachers such as John F. MacArthur, Jr. and James Montgomery Boice. Both contend that *to be a Christian is to be a disciple*.⁶ The view that *discipleship is a commitment different from, but related to, one's salvation experience* is defended by Free Grace teachers such as Charles C. Ryrie and Zane C. Hodges.⁷ Recognizing the disparity in definitions of discipleship between the two sides, Homer Kent has declared, "A fresh look at this matter is long overdue."⁸

The Lordship debate has done more than any other to show that there are two very different views of discipleship in the evangelical church today. The debate is important, for clearly discipleship is a foundational concept of the Christian life which dictates all that we are to be and much of what we are to be doing. If discipleship is becoming a Christian, as Lordship Salvation teaches, then the church must preach a gospel of commitment, surrender, and sacrifice as conditions of salvation, for these are the conditions of discipleship. To do less is to lead people to a false assurance of salvation. On the other hand, if discipleship is a

commitment different from the salvation experience, as Free Grace proponents assert, then to teach a "costly" salvation is to pervert the Gospel.

This series is designed to add to our understanding of the concept of *disciple* and *discipleship* by examining the words themselves and the relevant passages in the NT. I will relate the discussion of discipleship to the current Lordship Salvation debate in particular. This first article examines the key words used to denote discipleship and some important passages where they are found.

II. Discipleship in the New Testament

We will find that *etymology* is of little help in understanding the theological implications of being a disciple. However, some issues of *usage* will be very important to our discussion.

A. The Words Used

1. Disciple

The word *disciple* translates the Greek noun *mathetes*, which is found 264 times in the Gospels and Acts. It is not found in the Epistles. The noun has the basic meaning of "a pupil, apprentice, adherent."⁹ The verb form, *matheteuo*, occurs four times in the Gospels and once in Acts. It means to "be or become a pupil or disciple."¹⁰

That the meaning of the word *disciple* is never explained in the NT indicates that the early readers understood it in relation to contemporary rabbinic or Greek practice. It was used of learners who associated themselves with a teacher, philosopher, or rabbi with the assumption that the pupil would become like his teacher ([Matt 10:25](#); [Luke 6:40](#)).¹¹ The greater the student's submission to his master, the greater the student's transformation and likelihood that he would

become the master's successor. The master's ultimate expectation was that each of his disciples would be proficient in his master's teaching.¹²

In the NT we find followers of various teachers called *disciples*. The Pharisees claimed to be disciples of Moses ([John 9:28](#)), because they were students and followers of the law which Moses gave ([John 1:17](#)). The Pharisees also had their own disciples (e.g., [Matt 22:16](#); [Mark 2:18](#)). Those who followed the teachings of John the Baptist were called his disciples (e.g., [Matt 9:14](#); [14:12](#); [Mark 2:18](#); [Luke 11:1](#); [John 3:25](#)). Most prevalent in the NT are those called disciples who identified themselves as followers or learners of Christ (e.g., [Matt 5:1](#); [John 4:1](#); [8:31](#); [9:27-28](#)), especially the twelve chosen as apostles (e.g., [Matt 10:1](#); [11:1](#); [20:17](#); [Luke 9:1](#)).

A disciple is one who puts himself in the position of a learner. In relation to those who learned from Jesus, this definition in and of itself does not distinguish between those who are unsaved, simply saved, or saved and having made a deeper commitment. These distinctions are the issue in the Lordship Salvation debate. The particular meaning of *disciple* in any passage must be determined by the context, as we will see in the discussions below.

2. Follow

The other word which speaks of discipleship in the NT is the verb usually translated "follow" (*akoloutheo*). It is used over sixty times in the Gospels in reference to following Christ. A parallel thought is expressed by the phrase "to come after" (*opiso elthein*) in relation to Christ (cf. [Matt 16:24](#); [Luke 9:23](#)).

Like the word *disciple*, these terms do not indicate the spiritual condition of the person in view. The Gospels speak both of those who follow Christ in general and of those who follow with more commitment. Large crowds followed Jesus (e.g., [Matt 4:25](#); [8:1](#); [12:15](#); [21:9](#); [Mark 10:32](#)), but there were also individuals

called to follow Him in a more intimate relationship (e.g., [Matt 9:9](#); [10:38](#); [16:24](#); [Mark 2:14](#); [8:34](#); [Luke 5:27](#); [9:23](#)).

However, Lordship Salvation proponents consider the invitation of Jesus to "follow Me" an invitation to salvation. They argue not from the meaning of the word, but from incidents where it is used. After citing several encounters where Christ said "follow Me," Boice concludes,

The command to follow Jesus was not understood by Him to be only a mere physical following or even an invitation to learn more about Him and then see if one wanted to be a permanent disciple or not. Jesus understood it as a turning from sin to salvation.¹³

This opinion is misinformed, because Jesus sometimes issued the invitation to follow Him to those who were clearly *already believers* (e.g., [Matt 8:21-22](#); [16:24](#); [John 12:26](#); [21:19,22](#)). Like the term *disciple*, the significance of *follow* or *come after* must be determined from the context.

One occasion where "follow Me" is associated clearly with salvation is [John 10:27-28](#): "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." Both Boice and MacArthur cite this passage to argue that following Christ signifies the obedience that secures salvation.¹⁴

Two observations help us to understand the meaning of *follow* in this passage. First, it is used to describe what the subjects are doing, not to demand what they must do for salvation. It is a description of the visual response of the sheep to the Shepherd's voice.

Second, the interpretation of "follow Me" is rooted in the larger metaphor. John uses metaphors frequently to picture faith in Christ.¹⁵ Here the word *follow* pictures faith in Christ in that it focuses on the visible result of hearing. Faith itself is indicated by the sheep hearing Christ's voice. Hearing stands alone to represent faith in 10:3, 8, and 16. Hearing is also used elsewhere by John to speak of faith

(cf. 5:24-25; 8:43, 47). Given the pastoral metaphor, it is hard to picture faith in any other way than in the sheep following the trusted voice of the Shepherd.¹⁶ Lordship Salvation's interpretation of [John 10:27-28](#) not only ignores the metaphorical use of the term in this passage, it also neglects the context. In the verse immediately before v 27, Jesus rebukes the Jews, saying, "You do not believe, because you are not of my sheep." This contrast of the Jews' unbelief with the belief of Christ's sheep in the metaphor demonstrates that the focus of the discussion is on belief in Jesus as Messiah and Savior.

The Lordship argument that *follow* in [John 10:27-28](#) signifies an obedient lifestyle that brings salvation is an unfortunate misinterpretation. It does not prove that "follow Me" in the Gospels is an invitation to salvation. It only shows how crucial the context is in interpreting the term.

B. Discipleship in the Gospels

We will now see how the words *disciple* and *follow* are used in relation to those who learned from or followed the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels. They are used in a number of ways, which shows that those called *disciples* had varying degrees of the commitment to learn and submit.

1. Curious followers¹⁷

The broadest meaning of *disciple* in relation to Jesus Christ comes from those instances where the term may be used of the multitudes who followed Him. For example, in [Matt 5:1](#) it is unclear whether the multitude is identified synonymously with the disciples or the disciples are a smaller group within the multitude.

Likewise, in [Luke 6:13](#) Jesus chooses the twelve disciples from a larger group of followers also called disciples. In these settings Jesus is teaching and the multitude is willing to be taught, and thus in the general sense they could be called disciples ([Matt 5:2ff.](#); [Luke 6:20ff.](#)).

John 6 contributes an important truth about disciples. While the chapter begins with a distinction between the multitude and the disciples (cf. vv 2-3, 11, 22), we later learn that among the group of disciples are unbelievers. After Jesus' Bread of Life discourse, John tells us that "many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, 'This is a hard saying: Who can understand it?'" (v 60). In His answer to them Jesus said, "But there are some of you who do not believe," which John indicates included Judas Iscariot, who would betray Jesus later (v 64). When the text notes that "from that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more" (v 65), we are led to assume these unbelievers are a large part of the departing group. However, at least one unbeliever, Judas Iscariot, remains with the twelve disciples (v 67).

This interchange with Jesus in John 6 shows that the term *disciple* in its broadest sense can even refer to unbelievers. They merit the term because outwardly they are followers or learners of Christ, though they may only have the barest personal commitment to Him. In fact, their motivation seems little more than political (v 15), or to obtain free food (vv 26, 34), or simply to satisfy their curiosity.

In a comment on this passage, MacArthur admits in a footnote:

It is apparent that not every disciple is necessarily a true Christian (cf. [John 6:66](#)). The term disciple is sometimes used in Scripture in a general sense, to describe those who, like Judas, outwardly followed Christ.¹⁸

This admission deserves more than a footnote! This is especially true coming from one who goes on to rigidly espouse discipleship as a complete and total surrender to Jesus as Master of one's life—and equates this with salvation. MacArthur is acknowledging, though minimally, that the context must inform one's definition of discipleship. In a review of MacArthur's book, Kent supports MacArthur's view of

discipleship, but also agrees that the term is fluid, depending on the context. He concludes from [John 6:66](#) "the term itself merely means 'a follower.' The nature of that discipleship must be derived from the larger context." It is somewhat disconcerting when Kent then goes on to assert, without appeal to any specific context, that "Those who have separated discipleship from salvation have not done us any service."¹⁹

We see that even those of the Lordship Salvation persuasion agree that the term *disciple* is flexible enough to refer to unbelievers.

2. Convinced followers

Those disciples who decided to remain with Jesus in John 6 include the Twelve. Acting as spokesman, Peter confesses their faith in Jesus as the Messiah ([John 6:66-69](#)). His statement springs more from a logical and settled conclusion than a vow of personal devotion. These men, except Judas, were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Savior. At this point in the text, however, we see no deep commitment.

Sometimes we note in the Gospels those who were undoubtedly believers in Jesus Christ, but who were reserved in their commitment to Him. Though obviously committed as well as saved, some, like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, never followed Christ in the sense of leaving their homes and families. John also mentions rulers of the Jews who avoided a full commitment to Jesus Christ as Master:

Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God ([John 12:42-43](#)).

While some might argue circularly that because the rulers did not confess Christ publicly they never truly believed, this would ignore the context and the details of the text itself. Verse 42 begins with a strong adversative (*homos mentoi*) showing

that from among the Jewish nation and leadership which did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah (vv 37-41), there were *individual exceptions who truly believed*. If they were not true believers in Christ, John's contrast is muted and meaningless.²⁰ John clearly declares that they "believed in Him."

Apparently, Joseph of Arimathea is one of the rulers who believed. John describes him as "a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews" ([John 19:38](#)).

Joseph's request for the body of Jesus and the subsequent public burial certainly ended his secrecy. Following Joseph's example, Nicodemus joins him in Christ's burial. It is said of Nicodemus that it was he "who first came to Jesus by night" (v 38). Though John does not call Nicodemus a believer or a disciple, we get the sense from John 3 and this notation that he was in the same category as Joseph—a secret disciple finally gone public.

Jesus even offered a degree of commendation to those who had less than a full commitment to follow Him as Master. At one point, the Twelve rebuked a man casting out demons in Jesus' name because, they said, "he does not follow us" ([Mark 9:38](#)), or "he does not follow with us" ([Luke 9:49](#)). Though not a follower in the fullest sense, the man was declared by Jesus to be "on our side" ([Mark 9:40](#)), or "for us" ([Luke 9:50](#)), and Jesus implied that he would receive a reward ([Mark 9:41](#)). In some instances, Jesus was unsettlingly inclusive about who was considered a follower!

3. Committed followers

The preponderance of references to disciples in the Gospels speaks of those who have submitted to Jesus Christ as Master of their lives. They are committed to following Jesus as their Lord and Teacher in the same sense in which others devotedly followed Moses, the Pharisees, or John the Baptist. In this sense the term *disciples* is used most frequently in the Gospels to speak of the smaller group

of twelve apostles chosen by Christ (e.g., [Matt 10:1](#); [Luke 6:13](#)). In addition to the Twelve, however, a larger group of seventy is also called *disciples* ([Luke 10:1](#), [17,23](#)). They too appear as those committed to Jesus in a special way since they are sent out by the Lord to preach the Gospel.

The commitment involved in this deeper relationship is seen in the various conditions that Jesus attached to discipleship as His ministry progressed. He said that true disciples, or "disciples indeed" (*alethos mathetai*), are those who "abide in My word" ([John 8:31](#)). While a fuller interpretation of this condition will be offered in the third article in this series, it is enough to note here that this condition was stated to those whom the text says had *already* believed in Christ ([John 8:30-31](#)). The word "abide" (from *meno*) denotes the more intimate relationship that Christ desires of those who believe in Him (cf. [John 14:21](#), [23-24](#); [15:4-10](#)).

As Jesus began to teach the significance of His work on the Cross, He also expounded other stringent conditions for those who would continue as disciples in the deeper sense. In these conditions ([Matt 16:24-27](#); [Mark 8:34-38](#); [Luke 9:23-26](#); and [14:26-33](#)), Jesus said a disciple must:

- Deny himself
- Take up his cross
- Follow Christ
- Lose his life
- Not be ashamed of Christ
- Hate his family and his own life.

The nature of these commitments and the fact that they were directed primarily to those who were already His close followers argue that they are conditions not of salvation, but of a deeper relationship to Jesus as Lord and Master.²¹ They represent a progression in the revelation of God's will which must be accepted if a believer

would continue on the path of discipleship. By these conditions, discipleship becomes something which is very costly to the Christian.

C. Discipleship in Acts

In Acts the term *disciples* seems to be equated with Christians in general (6:1-2, 7; 14:20, 22, 28; 15:10; 19:10), especially in 11:26 where we read, "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Acts has no explicit mention of the deeper commitment or the conditions of discipleship found in the Gospels. Lordship Salvation proponents argue from this that there *is* no difference between a disciple and a Christian; believing in Christ encompasses the commitment to surrender all of one's life to Jesus as Lord and Master and to follow Him in sacrifice and obedience.²²

We must agree that Acts assumes Christians are disciples. *Disciple* is one of several terms used to refer to Christians and is thus used more technically than in the Gospels. However, the background for Acts cannot be divorced from the Gospels. Whatever conditions for discipleship the Gospel authors recorded must give form to Luke's view of discipleship, especially those recorded by Luke himself. Furthermore, the bridge between discipleship in the Gospels and in Acts is composed of the final missionary commissions of Christ ([Matt 28:19-20](#); [Mark 16:15](#); [Luke 24:46-48](#)). Acts records the fulfillment of these commissions as the Gospel is carried beyond Jerusalem to the remotest parts of the world ([Acts 1:8](#)). To develop this connection, a slight digression is necessary. Discipleship in Acts must be understood in light of Jesus' commission to "make disciples" in [Matt 28:19-20](#):

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Since Acts records the disciples' obedience to this command, it is necessary to understand what Jesus means by "make disciples." Is He equating discipleship with

salvation, as Lordship Salvation teaches? Gentry insists that [Matt 28:19](#) is simply a "fuller account" of the commission in [Mark 16:15](#), which says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." He says, "The preaching of the gospel summarized in Mark is the making of disciples in Matthew." ²³

But we must take issue with Gentry's equating of the two commissions. If "preach the gospel" in Mark is a summary of Matthew's "make disciples," then preaching the Gospel includes baptizing and teaching obedience as elements that define the Gospel. However, it is clear that Paul did not consider baptism and obedience to "all things" which Christ commanded part of the saving Gospel (cf. [1 Cor 1:17](#); [15:1-4](#); [Eph 2:8-9](#)), and we would agree. The parallel between the two commissions is found in the participle *proeuthentes*, translated in both passages as "go." In both places it should be understood as "having gone or "as you go," which denotes a presupposed or simultaneous activity.²⁴ For Mark, the main activity is denoted by the finite verb "preach" (*keryxate*), but in Matthew by the finite verb "make disciples" (*matheteusate*). Matthew's "go" equals Mark's "go...preach the gospel" as the first step in making disciples.²⁵ While Mark's commission stops with gospel proclamation, Matthew speaks optimally in making discipleship the ultimate goal, which harmonizes with his emphasis on discipleship in his Gospel.²⁶ The other participles in Matthew, "baptizing" and "teaching," tell *how* to "make disciples." After the Gospel is believed, baptism is the first step of obedient discipleship, and teaching obedience to the commands of Christ is the means by which believers develop as disciples.

In light of the commission in [Matt 28:19-20](#), it is natural that Christians should be called disciples in Acts, since Acts is the historical account of the fulfillment of that commission. As a historian writing selectively, Luke describes the early Christians in general as committed followers of Christ who continued in His teaching. He does not concern himself with the few believers who may not have associated with the Church. In Acts the early converts were

enthusiastic in their commitment to Christ with but few exceptions.²⁷ For example, Luke notes how new believers do not hesitate to obey the Lord in baptism (cf. 2:41; 8:13, 36; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:14-15, 33-34; 18:8; 19:5). His historical perception of the early believers was that of a new community following the Christian Way with diligence and the marks of true discipleship as enunciated by Jesus: They continued in the Word ([Acts 2:42](#); cf. [John 8:31](#)), showed love for one another ([Acts 2:42](#) and [4:32](#); cf. [John 13:34-35](#)), and were willing to deny themselves worldly gain ([Acts 2:45](#) and [4:32-35](#); cf. [Luke 9:24-25](#)). Furthermore, the stringent conditions of discipleship preached by Christ were not preached by the Apostles in Acts. Indeed, it wasn't necessary, for these early believers were generally viewed as committed to Christ in discipleship. Calenburg notes,

The sermons of Acts seemed to reaffirm the distinction between conversion by faith in Christ and committed discipleship. The general use of the term "disciple" for all believers and the practice of many new converts implied [that] committed discipleship to Christ was the common and expected response to His will as taught by the Apostles.²⁸

That the first Christians were committed as disciples is no surprise in light of the hostile Jewish environment. For a Jew to become a publicly confessed Christian was *ipso facto* to bear the cross of Christ's suffering through certain persecution, ostracism, or even death.

Christians are called disciples in Acts, because as Luke sees it, these early believers are committed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is every indication that as a whole, these believers were meeting the conditions for true discipleship found in the Gospels.

D. Discipleship in the Epistles

The assumption that Christians were committed disciples in Acts harmonizes with the absence of the word *disciple* in the Epistles. Conceptually, the idea of discipleship is communicated through the noun "imitator" (*mimetes*) and the verb

"imitate" (*mimeomai*).²⁹ Calenburg concludes that "The factors involved in such imitation were similar to the conditions of discipleship, namely, observation, attachment, motivation, submission to authority, and obedience."³⁰

When Paul exhorts his readers to "imitate me" (e.g., [1 Cor 4:16](#); [11:1](#); cf. [Phil 3:17](#); [2 Thess 3:7, 9](#)), he desires a committed response to *him* as he is committed to and so imitates *Christ* ([1 Cor 11:1](#); cf. [1 Thess 1:6](#)). Imitation is therefore the commitment of a believer to follow Christ as a disciple. Bauder observes,

"Imitation" in the NT is consequently not conceived as the reproduction of a given pattern. It is... an attitude of thanks in response to the salvation that has been given to us (cf. H. Conzelmann, Epheser, 83). The summons to discipleship can only be fulfilled, when a man is grasped by Christ and undergoes the transformation which existence under the Lordship of Christ involves.³¹

To imitate Jesus or Paul is to follow them so as to reproduce their character and behavior. This "Christlikeness" is the goal of discipleship.

The Epistles, by implicitly equating discipleship with imitation, affirm that discipleship is the commitment of believers to obey and submit to the authority of Christ. However, since the Epistles never teach that salvation is procured through imitation of Jesus Christ, neither is it procured through discipleship, which is the same thing.

III. Conclusion

We have found in our study on the meaning of discipleship that in the NT *disciple* is a somewhat fluid term. It is used of those who obviously had never believed in Christ, of believers with limited commitment, and of believers with the fullest commitment. The ultimate determination of its meaning in any given passage must be the context. Sometimes, as in Acts, consideration of the context involves the perspective of the whole book.

To be a disciple in the broadest sense is to be a follower or learner of Jesus Christ. In the narrower sense used by Christ later in His ministry, it meant to be fully committed to follow and learn from Him in a life of self-denial and obedience to His Word. This latter idea is the most relevant to the Lordship Salvation debate and to our practice as Christians. The stringent conditions Christ attached to this sense of discipleship should not be made conditions of salvation, but should move us who are Christians further into God's will.

We cannot ignore the degrees of discipleship presented in the NT. Whether as a minimal commitment or full surrender, discipleship denotes a direction or *an orientation* more than a *state*. It is a journey, not an arrival. Anywhere on one's journey *toward* Christ, one can be called a disciple. Though all disciples find themselves at different points on the journey, the committed disciple is seen as well on the way with his destination clearly in view.

Therefore, we must regard with suspicion those who make absolute statements about what a disciple is or those who make the simplistic charge that the Free Grace position teaches two classes of Christians: ordinary Christians and super-Christians.³² Though sometimes used to refer to Christians in general (as explained in relation to Acts), the majority of uses by the Lord Jesus indicates that full-fledged discipleship is when a believer fully submits to Christ's Word and Christ's will in all areas of life. Lordship Salvation not only confuses discipleship with salvation, but also confuses entry-level discipleship with the ultimate goal of committed discipleship.

Only when we recognize what a disciple is in the NT can we effectively fulfill our Lord's commission to make disciples and become fully committed disciples ourselves.

Footnotes:

¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Design for Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 11.

² C. Peter Wagner, "What Is 'Making Disciples?'" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 9 (Fall 1973): 285.

³ See Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 170; or read an analysis of McGavran's view of discipleship in C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981), 130-33.

⁴ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1990; originally published at Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1984), 9-12.

⁵ Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1988), 54-60.

⁶ See John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 29-30, 196-98; James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 13-23.

⁷ Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), 77-91; *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas, TX: Redencin Viva, 1981), 35-45; *Absolutely Free!* (Dallas, TX: Redencin Viva, 1989), 67-76; Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing The Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 178-79; *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 101-14.

⁸ Homer A. Kent, "Review Article: The Gospel According to Jesus," *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (1989): 75.

⁹ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, compiled by Walter Bauer, trans. and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. "mathetes," 486-87.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, s.v. "matheteuo," 486. This is the intransitive meaning.

¹¹ See also K. H. Rengstorff, s.v. "mathetes," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 4:415-41; and Richard D. Calenburg, "The New Testament Doctrine of Discipleship" (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 20-40.

¹² Shmuel Safrai, "Master and Disciple," *Jerusalem Perspective* 3 (November-December 1990): 5, 13.

¹³ Boice, *Discipleship*, 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 166-67; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 178.

¹⁵ For example, "come" ([John 5:40](#); [6:35,37,44,65](#); [7:37](#)); "enter" (10:9); "eat" (6:51-58); "drink" (4:14; 6:53-56; 7:37); "accept" (1:12; 5:34). See George Allen Turner, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19 (Fall 1976)272-73.

¹⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, eds. R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 343-44. He contrasts the metaphorical use of *follow*, which he takes as equivalent to *believe*, with its meaning of discipleship in other passages in John. Essentially the same view is taken by Zane C. Hodges in *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1981), 43-45.

¹⁷ This convenient outline of *Curious, Convinced, Committed* I credit to Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost, who has greatly influenced my understanding of discipleship.

¹⁸ MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 196, n. 2.

¹⁹ Kent, "Review Article," 75.

²⁰ Among those who agree that these rulers actually believed are Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 1:487; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 605; J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 2:452; Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 5:232.

²¹ This assertion and an explanation of these conditions will be the substance of the third article in this series.

²² MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 196; Kenneth L. Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring 1976): 49-79; Charles Price, *Real Christians* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1987), 54.

²³ Gentry, "The Great Option," 70; See also Boice, *Discipleship*, 159-169; Kent, "Review Article," 75.

²⁴ Robert D. Culver, "What Is the Church's Commission?: Some Exegetical Issues in [Matthew 28:16-20](#)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 July-September 1968): 243-53; D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol.8, 595.

²⁵ So William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 999; Wagner, "Making Disciples," 286-87.

²⁶ Sheridan explains the emphasis on discipleship in Matthew from this Gospel's purpose: For Matthew, the comprehensive charge to his followers by Jesus is 'to make disciples of all nations.' Teaching others to observe what Jesus had taught

them is the way to achieve this. In a sense, Matthew's gospel is a manual for discipleship, and we may expect to find in the lengthy discourses to the disciples not just instruction for the twelve limited to their historical mission but essentially what they are to pass on in their efforts to make disciples." Mark Sheridan, "Disciples and Discipleship in Matthew and Luke," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 3 (October 1973): 240-41. See also Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel* (Leiden, The Netherlands: F. J. Brill, 1988), 221-22; Wolfgang Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Matthaus-Evangeliums*, 3d. auflage (Munehen: Kosel-Verlag, 1964), 21ff. Trilling begins his Matthean theology with this commission and its emphasis on discipleship.

²⁷ Exceptions would be Ananias and Sapphira ([Acts 5:1-11](#)), Simon the sorcerer (8:13ff.), and the Ephesian sorcerers (19:10-19). Even so, the latter two accounts lead us to believe that these believers would probably continue in Christ's teachings.

²⁸ Calenburg, "Discipleship," 238-39. See also 197-200.

²⁹ So W. Michaelis, s.v. "mimeomai," in TDNT 4:673; W. Bauder, s.v. "mimeomai," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (NIDNTT) 1:492.

³⁰ Calenburg, "Discipleship," 239.

³¹ Bauder, *Ibid.*

³² For example, see Dallas Willard, "Discipleship: For Super-Christians Only?" *Christianity Today* 24 (October 10, 1980), 24 25,27.