

Who Is A True Disciple Of Christ?

by Heath Rogers

This world is full of fakes and phonies. Everything from currency to cosmetics, from purses to perfume has been counterfeited and copied. Sometimes it is easy to tell the difference, but other times it is hard to tell the genuine article from a cheap imitation.

Unfortunately, this same problem is found among those who claim to be followers of Christ. There are a lot of people in this world who call themselves "Christians." However, not all of these people are the same. They have different values, beliefs and practices, yet they all claim to be following the same Lord. How can we identify a true follower of Christ?

In Mark chapter eight, Jesus called the people to Himself and helped them understand the price that must be paid in order to be His disciple. Those who are truly following Christ have paid this price, and thus can be identified by the characteristics that Jesus defined.

Jesus began by saying, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Mark 8:34).

1. Deny Themselves. The first step of discipleship is the hardest. Self-denial means learning to tell ourselves "No." If we are going to follow Christ, we must put His interests before our own. When He tells us to go one way, and we want to go another, we must tell ourselves "No" and follow the Lord's will for our lives.

2. Take Up Their Crosses. Some throughout history have misunderstood this instruction and have literally carried around large wooden crosses. Although Jesus had not been crucified yet, these people knew what a cross was. In the first century, the cross signified immense and shameful suffering. Jesus had already told them about His suffering and death (v. 31). He now tells them that discipleship will include its own suffering. To "take up my cross" means to willingly take on my share of suffering for the cause of Christ.

3. Follow the Teachings of Jesus. These disciples were able to literally follow Jesus as He traveled and preached. We can not do this today, but we can still follow His teachings and live as He lived. A true disciple of Jesus lives by His teachings. "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31).

4. Value Their Souls Above All Other Things. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it" (v. 35). What does Jesus mean? This instruction becomes clearer when we understand that Jesus is talking about two different kinds of life - **physical** and **spiritual**. The one who would seek to save his physical life by avoiding suffering for the cause of Christ will lose his spiritual life. However, the one who would lose his physical life by submitting to persecution for the cause of Christ will save his soul. Jesus shows the value of the soul by asking two rhetorical questions: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (vs. 36-37). Our soul is our most valuable possession, more valuable than the entire world. This is because in the end, our soul is the only thing that we will have.

5. Are Not Ashamed of Jesus or His Words. "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (v. 38). We are living in a world that is unfriendly towards

true disciples of Christ. Jesus said that this was because the world had rejected Him (John 15:18-20). Hostility from the world will pressure us to hide our faith in Christ. Jesus taught that if we are ashamed of Him and His teachings in this world, then He will be ashamed of us when He returns to judge this world.

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