



Convert or Disciple?

A convert is not synonymous with a disciple. There is a clear distinction between the two. Every disciple is a convert first, but not every convert becomes a disciple. Most believers think they are disciples of Jesus because they are believers. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Discipleship and Conversion

- a) There is a huge difference between being a Christian convert and a disciple. I will explain this difference chapter. Every Christian is a convert but not every Christian is a disciple. Anyone can become a convert but not a disciple. We can do better evangelism through discipleship than the way it's done today.
- b) This is one of the reasons that our society is going in the wrong direction—there is a lack of discipleship.
- c) For instance, a disciple does not vote for a person, but for the Bible (biblical values and principles) A convert, on-the-other-hand, votes for people, emotions, charisma, looks, education, and skin color, etc.
 - i) God's Word has a lot to say about the issues we face today in all societies, but for us to have an impact on our societies, we must graduate to being disciples, instead of just converts.
- d) Through God's Word, we must develop a biblical worldview, approach, and perspective on all things and speak up.
 - i) We ought to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth—and one of the best ways to be effective in that is to study and continue in God's Word.
 - ii) We should develop a discipleship mentality, not a convert mentality.

“You can be a believer and a liberal, but you can't be a disciple and a liberal.” —

Andrew Wommack.

A sincere repeating of a sinner's prayer does not make you a disciple, but a convert or a believer in Jesus Christ. Being a disciple of Jesus is more than a "fire insurance policy prayer" of salvation. Salvation isn't just about getting our foot in the door.

I like to explain the difference between a disciple and a convert like this: a disciple is a mature Christian believer, while a convert is an immature Christian. Most importantly, I want to stress that I don't say all this to offend but draw out a distinction between the two.

The heart of the Lord is to make disciples.

God never commissioned us to go out and make converts, but to make disciples. A Disciple is a born-again person who observes all things that Jesus commanded.

Matthew 28:19-20 says, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

The NIV says, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The key points to these verses are:

- a) Make disciples.
The primary way we make disciples is through teaching. Teaching is the foundation of making disciples. It is one thing to proclaim the truth, it another thing to teach.
- b) Teach them to observe all things.
The discipleship process is where we teach believers to observe all things that pertain to the kingdom of God.

The word "Disciple" also means:

- i) A learner
- ii) A pupil
- iii) Imitator
- iv) To go on or continue on.
- v) It is in this word "disciple", that we get the word "discipline." So, a disciple is a disciplined follower of the Lord Jesus.

Below are some of the characteristics of a disciple:

A. Loves others

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. —
John 13:35

- a) One of the main characteristics of true disciples is that they love each other.
- b) Loving one another is a sign or proof that one is a disciple or a mature follower of the Lord Jesus.

B. Bears much fruit

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.
—John 15:8-9

- a) A disciple is one that bears fruit. Until we move on to the level of being disciples, we can't bear fruit.

C. Has fruit that remains

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” (Emphasis mine)—John 15:16

- a) It is one thing to bear fruit, but it is another thing altogether for that fruit to remain (stay). The fruit of the disciple **MUST REMAIN**. There is need of consistency. A disciple can be seen not only by the fruit they bear, but by their consistency as well.

D. Keeps a commitment to the Lord above anything else

- i) And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. —Matthew 10:36-37

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. —Luke 14:26-27

- i) A true disciple will be willing to give up all for the Lord.

ii) Choosing to follow Jesus is a costly decision. Many believers in Jesus aren't willing or ready to give up their father, mother, wife, children, brethren, sisters, and their own lives.

- This means they are not ready and cannot be disciples.

iii) Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you everything!

ii) But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, —John 2:24

i) Notice Jesus refused to commit His ministry to converts. They weren't disciples. They were immature and undependable.

ii) There has been huge damage done in and by the church by people who are converts, rather than disciples.

- There is more to ministry than being born again.
- We must disciple people and NOT just make converts.

iii) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. —1 Timothy 3:6

i) This means a novice could not qualify.

ii) A novice is defined by Strong's concordance as "newly planted that is (figuratively) a young convert".

iii) Although a young convert might be excited about things of God, he is not the best witness because of a lack of maturity and depth.

- Once persecution arises, they tend to buckle because of a lack of depth.

Your commitment to the Lord will be tested by this life. Everything you believe will come to a test, sooner or later.

E. Endures hardship

A believer or convert can live without suffering persecution, but a disciple can't escape persecution.

a) Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier—2 Timothy 2:1-4.

i) Paul was very careful and selective in his instructions as to who to commit these truths to.

ii) He never committed those things that were heard of him to anyone, but to the believers who were “able to teach” and were “faithful men.”

- These believers being described by Paul are exactly equivalent to the description of a disciple—mature, able to teach, and faithful.

iii) Additionally, a disciple is one who endures hardness like a soldier. A true disciple will not easily buckle while under persecution or pressure. He endures it. He doesn't give up whatever the circumstances may be.

b) Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

—2 Timothy 3:12

i) I'm convinced that believers or converts hardly live godly lives; it's the disciples who aspire to live godly lives.

F. Continues in the Word

You have to continue in the Word of God if you are going to be His disciple. This ought to be the main goal for every single Christian.

As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.—John 8:30-32

a) Notice here in these verses that Jesus was speaking to those that had believed on Him (believers).

i) These people were already believers, but they weren't disciples yet, so, Jesus told them how to become disciples.

- b) A true disciple must continue in the Word. This is not a one-time thing, but a continual process.
 - i) A lack of consistency in the Word of God is a clear indication that one is not a disciple, but a convert.
- c) You are to continue until you know the truth so that the truth you now know makes you free.
 - i) The Truth will not just set you free but will make you free.
 - ii) Yet, furthermore, it is the truth that you know and have a revelation of that will make you free.
- d) Being a believer is not all there is to a relationship with God.
 - i) Conversion is not enough. Going to church for one hour a week will not cut it. You need discipline, quality, and quantity of time!
 - ii) You must continue in the Word that it begins to reshape your thinking, lifestyle, morality, philosophy, politics, opinions, values, and beliefs.
 - iii) A person that will believe contrary to the Word of God, holding opposing values to the Word for emotional reasons is not a disciple. A disciple will let the Word of God shape what they believe.
- e) Take time to mature, grow, and continue in the Word.
 - i) If you are not a disciple, you have little to no business representing God because all you will do is misrepresent Him.
 - ii) You will cause more harm and damage than good. You need to take time to mature, grow, and continue in the Word.
 - iii) A disciple must be mature and be able to represent God properly, accurately, while rightly dividing the Word of Truth.
- f) And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. —Acts 2:42
 - i) The apostles did not lead people into conversion. They disciplined them! They continued teaching and discipling with the apostles' doctrine

ii) And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. —Acts 5:42

iii) Paul taught everywhere in every church (1 Corinthians 4:17).

G. Receives directly from the Lord

a) God never intended things to be the way they are. He never intended only the fivefold ministry to be the only provision to the entire body of Christ. A continual dependence on the “super-dupers” is the reason we haven't evangelized the world yet.

i) This dependence is the reason that we have so many immature believers and not disciples.

ii) Believers should mature and become disciples to the point that they do not need the Pastor or Apostle to have their needs met. They should be able to hear and receive from God by themselves, and not be dependent on the church leadership and clergy.

iii) Ephesians 4:11 clearly states that the fivefold ministry is to equip, furnish, disciple, and perfect the saints to do the work of the ministry.

- It's not meant for the fivefold to do the work of the ministry. This has been a disservice to the body of Christ.

iv) The ultimate goal of preaching the gospel should be discipleship, not conversion.

- True, conversion is the first step towards discipleship, but we should go beyond that to discipleship.
- You can hardly find evidence to convict a convert for being a Christian, but you will find plenty of evidence to convict a disciple for being a Christian.
- The same way a person gives birth to a baby and doesn't throw away or abandon that baby but feeds, nurtures, and helps mature her, we should do the same with all the converts.

Steps to becoming a disciple:

a) Make Jesus your Lord and Christ

The first thing in becoming a disciple is your relationship with Jesus as your savior. Yet, there is more.

- You cannot be a disciple if you are not willing to make Jesus the absolute LORD and Master over everything in your life.
- He must be Lord over everything. You must make a total commitment to the LORD, if not you will continue to struggle in life. Becoming a disciple is the way to go to move forward.

Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. —Acts 2:36

- i) A believer is someone who has made Jesus their savior, but not the Lord of their daily life, while a disciple is one who has made Jesus both Savior and Lord.
 - Every believer should aspire to make Jesus the Lord of their life and should live accordingly.
- ii) When someone is your lord, he is your master. The word "lord" means One having power and authority over others; a ruler by preeminence to whom service and obedience are due.
- iii) The Lord ought to be the one calling the shots, not you.

b) Desire and hunger for the Word

- i) Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. —1 Peter 2:1-2
- ii) Many people have been born again for years, but they have been baby Christians ever since.
 - They have never grown or matured. Although they are counting the years they have been born again, they are Christian babies with an old age number.
 - If you aren't a disciple, it's best to stay away from ministry. You will end up doing more harm than good to the body of Christ and/or the unbelievers. What are you sharing or teaching that you don't know

about?

iii) I have heard many unbelievers that were turned off by certain Christians they encountered and mostly because these believers were immature believers.

- I remember a story about Mahatma Gandhi that he went to a Presbyterian church to give his life to the Lord Jesus Christ and he was turned away because of the color of his skin. He then said, "I would have been a Christian, if I had never met one."
- He further said, "I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."
- So, would you say that these believers were disciples? No, I wouldn't.

c) Discover your purpose, call, and giftings

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; —Ephesians 4:11-14

i) This a very crucial point of discipleship. This is where you learn to be faithful and discover your purpose, call, and gifting.

- Faithfulness precedes being a minister and being put in the ministry.
 - Before we are called in the ministry, we need to be faithful first.
 - 2 Timothy 2:1-2—God equips and enables the faithful.
 - 1 Corinthians 4:2—Faithfulness can be found.
 - 1 Timothy 1:12—Faithfulness can be counted. How many times one has been faithful?

ii) Considering a fivefold calling/ministry?

- God will call you to the fivefold ministry even though you are still a convert or a baby Christian believer, but He will not separate you to

that work and office of the ministry until you have become a disciple.

- A convert cannot edify, perfect, nor equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Only a disciple can do that, not a just convert or believer.

d) Study to show thyself approved unto God

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. —2 Timothy 2:15

- i) The word study here is not referring to acquire knowledge through reading, but rather is talking about “make haste, to exert oneself, endeavor” (Thayer’s Greek English).
- ii) Until we graduate from being converts to disciples, we cannot be able to rightly divide the word of truth. It is a characteristic of an immature believer to wrongly divide the Word of Truth.
 - Notice that it all starts with one making haste or being diligent to show ourselves approved unto God. This happens as we continue in the Word of God (John 8:30-33).

e) Know the truth and be made free

As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
—John 8:30-32

- i) Are you free from bondage? If you are not, you are probably not a disciple, at least not yet.
 - Most people commonly say that the truth shall set you free, but that is not a true statement.
 - How many people do you know that know the truth, yet they aren’t free? I bet you can name many that can tell you the truth and quote it word for word.
 - It is because it is the truth that you continue in that will make you free.
- ii) When we continue in the Word, we get a revelation of the truth and that truth that we now know **MAKES** us free. Only disciples will become truly free.

f) Continue in the Word

As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. —John 8:30-32

i) Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

—Psalm 119:105

- If we need light and good vision, we need the Word of God. We can't see our path without light, God's Word is that light.

ii) The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. —Psalm 119:130

- If we want understanding, it comes from the Word of God. A lack of understanding is a sign of the absence of the Word of God because it is that which brings light and understanding.

iii) But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. —James 1:22-25

- Be a doer and continue therein
- Some of the key determinations of whether we are converts believers or disciples lies in whether we are doers of the Word, not on how much we know and the head knowledge we possess.
 - One of the ways we do the Word is by believing on the Lord Jesus (John 6:28-29)
- These verses further emphasize the need to not just look into the Word but continue in it. We can't just do it one time.
 - If we are going to mature and become disciples and doers of the Word, we ought to continue in it. The key is in continuing. We just should not stop.

g) Take heed to the Word of God

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. —Psalm 119:9-11

- i) Disciples have a desire to take heed (apply themselves) to the Word of God which in return cleanses their ways. So, we can safely say that if the Word of God has not cleansed our way, it is because we have not taken heed to it.

h) Renew your mind

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. — Romans 12:1-2

- i) If you have not aligned your thinking according to God's Word, nor allowed the Word of God to shape, change, or get in the way of what you believe, most likely you aren't a disciple.
- ii) You ought to let the Word of God change your opinions, beliefs, values, philosophy, and outlook on life.
 - If we do not renew our minds, we will stay conformed to this world and we will miss out on knowing the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.
 - A true disciple will be transformed by the renewing of his mind by the Word of God.

Without being born again, you cannot become a disciple. Without making Jesus the Lord of your daily life and without the desire for the Word of God, there is no growth. Without knowing the Word of God, there is no freedom. Without continuing in the Word of God there is no maturity and stability. And, without taking heed and acting on it, there are no results and no fruit.

Additional Points About Discipleship

A. Example of True Discipleship: Jesus Feeding Thousands

And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed: Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? He saith unto them, how many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, five, and two fishes. And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men. And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people.

—Mark 6:35-45 and Matthew 14:13-23

- a) Jesus demonstrated and proved that discipleship is the way to meet the needs of the people.
 - i) Multiplication of the bread happened in the hands of the disciples as they passed it out to the multitude, not while in the hands of Jesus.
 - ii) If we are going to make a huge difference, this is the best way to go to evangelize the world effectively.
- b) Jesus also spent twice as much time teaching as he spent preaching.
 - i) Teaching explains truths and how to walk in it.
 - ii) Teaching is more than just proclaiming the truth.

B. Exceptions to Discipleship in the Word

There are only two exceptions to discipleship in the Scriptures and they are an exception, not the general rule.

- i) Man on the cross (Luke 23:42-43)
 - The man on the cross had no time to be discipled. He was on a death penalty.
- ii) Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8)
 - In the situation of the Ethiopian eunuch, Phillip was sent by the

Lord to minister salvation to this man and then was removed from him.

- This eunuch was not disciplined, but usually this is not the case.

C. More to Discipleship

As much as teaching is the primary way to disciple people, there is more to it than that. These verses show that in addition to teaching, one must set an example for others in doctrine, longsuffering, manner of life, purpose, faith, charity, patience, afflictions and persecutions, purity, in word, in spirit to follow to disciple them.

- a) 2 Timothy 3:10-11 "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me."
 - i) Notice that Paul said that Timothy had fully, not partially known his doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions.
 - ii) All these portrays more of a person's whole life rather than just teaching.
- b) 2 Timothy 4:2 "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."
- c) 1 Timothy 4:12-13 "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."

I remember a time when most churches had Sunday schools that disciplined believers. Discipleship is a missing ingredient in the body of Christ that would bring about the level of maturity that is missing in the body.