

False Discipleship

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When Jesus gave the great commission to His apostles, His directive was for them to "*Go therefore and make disciples*" (Matthew 28:19). A disciple is a term that specifically refers to the pupil of a teacher, but is more broadly taken to mean one who follows the teachings of another. Disciples of Christ are followers of the doctrine of Christ. A Christian is a disciple of Christ.

One way we can understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus is to understand that the New Testament speaks often of false disciples of Jesus. Sometimes they are referred to as false brethren (Galatians 2:4, 2 Corinthians 11:26), those who put on a deceptive image of being a believer in Jesus, but are not such. They are those who "sneak in" to deliver false ideas. Another type of false disciple is a deceived believer (2 Timothy 3:5). These are those who only have a form of godliness, but they are not recipients of the power of the Gospel to save.

According to Jude verses 3 and 4, we need to be able to identify those who are false disciples, and to examine ourselves to ensure we have not been deceived. There are three generic types of false disciples; those who are followers of a name other than Christ; those who are followers of a doctrine that is not of Christ; those who are followers of a church and not Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 1:11-13 Paul warned the believers in Corinth that they were becoming followers of a name other than Christ. He condemned them for claiming to be disciples of Peter, Apollos and even himself. Today we can see many churches with the name of apostles ("St. Paul's Church" or "St. Peter's Church" for example). This is a direct contradiction of what Paul was teaching. But there are also many believers who take the name of men for their discipleship. Followers of Luther or Calvin or Frances (Lutherans, Calvinists or Franciscans) are examples of believers who identify themselves as disciples of men and not Christians.

In 2 John 7-11 John warned believers that we are not to accept anyone who follows a doctrine that is not of Christ. Even things that were once right (such as the Law of Moses in Galatians 1:7-9) can become a false Gospel if it is not the Doctrine of Christ. Jesus gave a serious condemnation for following the doctrines of men in Matthew 15:8-9. Consider man made doctrines such as "saved by faith only", "once saved always saved", or "original sin" as a prime example of manmade doctrines that are not part of the doctrine of Christ.

In Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul spoke to the importance of the unity of believers. One key idea in that passage is that there is only one church. Yet many become followers of a church because of the denominational system that is popular today. Denominations like Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism are all man made and create their own doctrine and names. The church Jesus built does not have a name, nor does it have the ability to create its own doctrine. We cannot be followers of any church; we can only be disciples of Christ, and as disciples of Christ we are added to the church Jesus built.

If one is a follower of Christ, what does that look like to a self-examination? We can return to Ephesians 4:4-6 and see what it might manifest: One church – no name, no doctrine; One Spirit – manifested as the Word; One hope – an eternal inheritance; One Lord – only one head of the church; One faith – unity of our belief; One baptism – one way to be saved; One Father – above all, through all, in all. Such a comparison makes us able to seek true discipleship.