

Titles of Christians (#15)
Disciples
John 8:31
Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

Some time back we studied the title of Christians, “The Sheep of Jesus Christ”; today we are going to study another title of Christians:

^{ESV} **John 8:31 – 32** So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31 – 32 ESV)

To “abide in” means to “live in”. Here the Lord Jesus says to the people who have believed in him that they are truly his disciples if they live in his word.

“Disciple” was the main title of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ

Now let’s look at this word “disciple”. In the New Testament, the followers of the Lord Jesus were called “disciples”; the word “disciple” (singular) appears 29 times in the New Testament, and the word “disciples” (plural) appears 239 times, together they appear a total of 268 times.

By contrast, the word “Christian” or “Christians” appears only 3 times in the New Testament. Here are the 3 passages:

^{ESV} **Acts 11:26** and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. (Acts 11:26 ESV)

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^{ESV} **Acts 26:28** And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” (Acts 26:28 ESV)

^{ESV} **1 Peter 4:16** Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. (1Pe 4:16 ESV)

Please take notice that in Acts 11:26 and Acts 26:28, it is the people of the world who called the disciples as “Christians”. From this we see that when the Lord Jesus started preaching the gospel, even the Lord himself in John 8:31-32 called those following him as his disciples; hence “disciple” was the main title for people who followed the Lord Jesus. Then after the Lord Jesus was resurrected and ascended to heaven, the apostles started to preach the gospel to all nations. Only then did the people in the world gradually refer to the followers of Jesus Christ as “Christians”. Today most people only know of the title “Christians” whereas very few people refer to the followers of Jesus Christ as “disciples”. As a result, people think that the title “disciples” is reserved for those who preach the Gospel. Some people even think that the title “disciples” refers only to the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ; of course all these notions are entirely wrong. According to the New Testament teaching, a person who believes wholeheartedly in Jesus Christ is already his disciple.

Disciples always follow the Lord Jesus Christ

In the four gospels we see that the disciples always followed the Lord Jesus Christ wherever he went; they received teaching from the Lord, and they observed and imitated the life of the Lord.

At that time the Lord Jesus was still on earth, and the disciples could follow him wherever he went to learn directly from him, but today the Lord is no longer present on earth, then how can we follow the Lord?

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^{ESV} **John 14:26** But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26 ESV)

The Lord Jesus said this to the disciples before he was arrested and crucified. It is the Holy Spirit who will lead us and remind us of everything the Lord Jesus has taught.

Please pay attention to the word “remembrance”; it means that we have to study the word of the Lord first, and then the Holy Spirit will remind us of how to apply it. If we do not study the word of the Lord, how can the Holy Spirit remind us?

Therefore we have to study the teaching of the Lord Jesus diligently. When we face a situation in which we don’t know what to do, then the Holy Spirit will remind us with the word of the Lord. It is in this way that we follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Relationship between slaves and master

^{NASB} **Matthew 10:24** “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master.” (Mat 10:24 NASB)

Christians are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Lord is our teacher. Here this passage compares the relationship between a disciple and his teacher to the relationship between a slave and his master, which means that we have to serve the Lord just like a slave serves his master.

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Indeed we are truly the slaves of the Lord Jesus, for when we commit sin, we become the slaves of sin. It is the precious blood of the Lord Jesus that redeemed us from the control of sin, and we were transferred from the power of sin to the power of the Lord Jesus. (Please refer to my Resurrection Day Sermon, *We Live for Him Who Died and Rose Again on Our Behalf*.)

In the relationship between the master and the slave, the most important thing is obedience; we have to obey the Lord Jesus Christ wholeheartedly.

^{NASB} **John 15:14 – 15** “You are My friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” (Joh 15:14-15 NASB)

Here the Lord says if we do what he commands us, we are his friends. He no longer calls us slaves because a slave doesn’t know what his master is doing; but the Lord has called us his friends, and he will tell us all the things he has heard from his Father Yahweh God. This grace is so great that I cannot comprehend it. When I first read this passage decades ago, my tears came down. I am very willing to be the Lord’s slave, yet the Lord doesn’t treat me as a slave but as his friend.

What should we do to imitate the Lord?

We are disciples of the Lord Jesus, we imitate the Lord; and we are also his slaves, so we serve him and obey him totally.

1. To abide in the word of God

Disciples

^{ESV} **John 8:31 – 32** So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31 – 32 ESV)

To “abide in” means to “live in”. Here the Lord Jesus says that if we live in his word, we are truly his disciples; then we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free. It means that we are free from the control of sin. Please take notice that if we are not free from the control of sin, we won’t be saved. Therefore to live in the word of the Lord Jesus is necessary for our salvation. It not simply that we go to church on Sundays to open the Bible to read a passage, and for the rest of the week we don’t even think about the word of the Lord Jesus. No, we live in the word of the Lord; we work, we eat, we sleep, we do everything in the word of the Lord Jesus. That means whatever things we do in our lives, we do according to the word of the Lord Jesus.

2. As the Lord has loved us, we also love one another

^{NASB} **John 13:34 – 35** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35 NASB)

How can we prove to the world that we are truly the disciples of the Lord Jesus? It is not by eloquent speech, nor by intelligent words, nor by high status or power, but by the love we have for one another.

It doesn’t simply mean that we are nice to one another, or help one another a little bit when someone is in need. No, we have to love one another in the same way the Lord Jesus loves us. The Lord died to save us, therefore we follow the Lord’s example; we are ready to die for one another when it is necessary.

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If we love one another in this way, then the world will see that we are truly the disciples of the Lord. That is the second point.

3. We bear much fruit and prove to be the disciples of the Lord Jesus

^{NASB} **John 15:8** My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (Joh 15:8 NASB)

Here the Lord Jesus says that when we bear much fruit, our Father Yahweh God is glorified, and this will prove that we are truly the Lord Jesus' disciples.

What does it mean to bear much fruit? People think that bearing much fruit means that we bring many people to believe in Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ. No, that is not the case.

The original Greek word for “fruit” is *καρπός* (*karpós*); it is singular, which means that it refers to only one fruit, not many fruits. Therefore “to bear much fruit” doesn’t mean that we will bring many people to believe in Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The word *καρπός* (fruit) refers to the fruit of the Spirit.

^{NASB} **Galatians 5:22 – 23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal 5:22-23 NASB)

The fruit of the Spirit has these 9 qualities: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. When our lives manifest these 9 qualities, that is the result of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. The people of the

world will see that we are different from those who don't believe in Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ, they will see that we are truly the disciples of the Lord Jesus.

4. We proclaim repentance for forgiveness of sin in the name of the Lord Jesus to all the nations

^{NASB} **Luke 24:46 – 48** and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. (Luk 24:46-48 NASB)

After the Lord Jesus was resurrected, he appeared before his disciples and told them to proclaim to all the nations that the Christ the savior had died for the sins of the whole world, and that he was resurrected on the third day. People who believe in Jesus Christ and repent of their sins would be forgiven of all their sins. That is Yahweh God's saving plan for the whole world, the good news for all people. The disciples are to bear witness to all these things and to proclaim this good news beginning from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

This is the fourth point, that we are to proclaim the gospel to all nations.

Conclusion

Now let's sum up everything. Christians are disciples of the Lord Jesus, and we serve the Lord just as slaves serve their masters:

- We abide in the word of God.
- We love one another in the same way as the Lord Jesus loves us.
- We bear the fruit of the Spirit.
- We proclaim the gospel to all nations.