

Can You Be a Christian Without Being a Disciple?

We have a discipleship problem not in spite of the gospel we have been proclaiming, but because of it. We have been proclaiming a gospel that says you can get all the benefits of a Christian without having to be a disciple. Is this the gospel Jesus' proclaimed? We will explore Jesus' disciple-making gospel of the kingdom as summed up in Mark 1:14-15 along with other New Testaments references.

Greg Ogden retired from professional church leadership in 2012 and now lives out his passion of speaking, teaching, and writing about the disciple-making mission of the church. Most recently Greg served as Executive Pastor of Discipleship at Christ Church of Oak Brook, Illinois in the Chicago western suburbs. From 1998-2002, Greg held the position of Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Fuller Theological Seminary and Associate Professor of Lay Equipping and Discipleship. Prior to coming to Fuller, Greg enjoyed 24 years in pastoral ministry. He is the author of six books including *Essential Guide to Becoming a Disciple* (Intervarsity Press, 2016); *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Intervarsity Press, 2016); *The Essential Commandment: A Guide to Loving God and Others* (InterVarsity Press, 2011); *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ, 3rd Edition* (InterVarsity Press, 2019). Dr. Ogden is a principal partner in a new ministry entitled the Global Discipleship Initiative (GDI). GDI trains, coaches, and inspires pastors and Christian leaders to establish indigenous, multiplying, disciple-making networks, both nationally and internationally. (globaldi.org).

I. Our Theological Challenge: What is the gospel that leads to discipleship?

A. Is there a distinction biblically between Christian and disciple? Can you be a Christian without being a disciple?

1. How many of you can say in the humble confidence of your heart that you are a true disciple of Jesus?
2. How many of you can say in the humble confidence of your heart that you are a true Christian?

B. A woman approaches her pastor after worship:

“Pastor, I just want to be a Christian. I don’t want to be a disciple. I like my life the way it is. I believe that Jesus died for my sins, and I will be with him when I die. Why do I have to be a disciple?”

Observations:

1. What distinction does she make?
2. Why doesn’t she want to be a disciple?
3. What is her definition of a Christian?
4. According to her understanding of a Christian, does her question seem to make sense?

II. What are the terms in which we have been communicating the gospel?

Transactional Gospel

- A. We have accrued an eternal debt because of our sin.
- B. Jesus' death on the cross paid that debt. Jesus' resurrection demonstrated that this was successful.
- C. If we accept Jesus, his payment cancels our debt.
- D. We are given a receipt on which is stamped, PAID IN FULL.

You are good to go. In other words, we have a non-discipleship gospel.

III. What was the gospel that Jesus preached that leads to discipleship? (Mark 1:14-15)

- A. The time has come or is fulfilled?

To what time does Jesus refer?

- B. The Kingdom of God has come or is near

- 1. How did people understand the expected kingdom?
- 2. How does Jesus reinterpret the kingdom?
- 3. How does Jesus' gospel of the kingdom transform the gospel described above?

- C. How do you get into the kingdom? REPENT!

- 1. Repent is an interruptive reality
- 2. "The true Christian nostril is to be continually attentive to the inner cesspool."—C. S. Lewis

D. Believe the good news!

1. Through the door of repentance, we enter the land of lavish grace.
2. Live in, luxuriate in, wallow in...your new identity as a child of the Father.

IV. How do we answer the woman: why do I have to be a disciple?

Suggested Readings:

Bill Hull and Ben Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel: What Jesus Preached We Must Follow* (HIM Publications, 2018)

Greg Ogden, *An Essential Guide to Becoming a Christian* (InterVarsity Press, 2016), Chapter 2.