

## I. Excursus VII: Are All Believers Disciples?

Some affirm that only certain believers are disciples. Discipleship is said to be a status that certain believers chose to enter into at some point after their conversion, so that, within the larger class of believers, a smaller, elite group of believers are disciples.<sup>1</sup> Others affirm that, while there are such things as false believers (cf. John 2:23-3:3; 12:42; Acts 8:13) and false disciples (John 6:60, 66; 12:4),<sup>2</sup> and neither all believers nor all disciples are equally spiritually strong (cf. Acts 14:22; 18:23), the Bible nevertheless equates the categories of *believer* and *disciple*, so that all saved people, all believers, are disciples. This second position is the one taught in Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> For example: “A primary reason, Keswick tells us, why so little progress in sanctification is made by Christians, is that so many of them have never really faced and yielded to the conditions of Christian discipleship our Lord lays down” (pgs. 123-124, *So Great Salvation*, by Steven Barabas; cf. *A Critical Analysis of the Discipleship Motif in the Keswick Movement*, Randall L. Von Kanel. Th. D. Diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989.). Victorious Life writer Mark Trumbull, in his “tract called ‘Subdued,’” affirms that “not more than one in a thousand of converted men attain to ‘victory’—that is to say to the status of ‘disciples.’ The rest are satisfied to live on a lower plane” (“The Victorious Life,” B. B. Warfield, in *Perfectionism* vol. 2. Warfield demolishes Trumbull’s argument.). The Keswick and Victorious Life movements received their disjunction between believers and disciples from the Broadlands and Oxford Conventions led by Robert and Hannah Smith with the patronage of Lord and Lady Mount-Temple. After all, Lord Mount Temple was “not only a ‘believer,’ but a ‘disciple’” (pg. 149, *Memorials [of William Francis Cowper-Temple, Baron Mount-Temple]*, Georgina Cowper-Temple. London: Printed for private circulation, 1890; also pg. 44, *The Life that is Life Indeed: Reminiscences of the Broadlands Conferences*, Edna V. Jackson. London: James Nisbet & Co, 1910). “Reference was made [at the Oxford Convention] to the difference between a believer of doctrines and a disciple . . . [some] called believers, could not be counted among th[e] disciples. Christians are called to be Christ’s *disciples*,” and believers at Oxford who had not yet taken that second step were urged to “become disciples” by post-conversion consecration (pgs. 293-294, *Account of the Union Meeting for the Promotion of Scriptural Holiness, Held at Oxford, August 29 to September 7, 1874*. Chicago: Revell, 1874. Italics in original.). The Oxford appeal assumes that those who “believe [Christian] doctrines, but still . . . have their own separate interests and pursuits,” were saved by such an unrepentant and unsubmitive “faith”; believing doctrines is sufficient to make one a Christian. Such affirmations were natural for the Smiths, since they were both unregenerate, as were the Mount-Temples, and Mrs. Smith’s “conversion” testimony was simply assent to a certain set of doctrinal formulations.

<sup>2</sup> Note that Simon the sorcerer not only had a kind of belief, but he also assumed the mark of a disciple by getting baptized (Acts 8:13). Baptism is the outward mark of a disciple (Matthew 28:18-20), that is, of a believer (Mark 16:15-16). Nonetheless, he was still “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity” and was going to “perish” eternally unless he came to “repent” and was “forgiven” (Acts 8:20-23). Judas Iscariot is another example of a false disciple (Matthew 10:1, 4; John 12:4), and those “disciples” in Acts 19:1-7 were unregenerate until Paul preached the gospel to them and they were converted and baptized (contrast the practice with the already regenerate man Apollos, 18:25-28). The reality of professing believers who are still lost is presented throughout the Bible (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:34; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Titus 1:16; Hebrews 12:15; 2 Peter 2:1).

John 6:60-68 equates false believers with false disciples, and contrasts them with true believers or true disciples. The genuine people of God believe and are sure that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and cannot forsake Him, but false disciples can and do cease to follow Him.

The Greek noun translated *disciple* appears 269 times in 253 verses in the New Testament,<sup>3</sup> while related words that shed further light on the nature of a disciple appear a number of additional times.<sup>4</sup> Generally, a *disciple* is a learner (Mark 9:31; Luke 11:1)<sup>5</sup> or follower, and a disciple of Christ is one who follows the Lord Jesus and follows or keeps His commandments (cf. Matthew 21:6; 26:19).<sup>6</sup> Scripture thus repeatedly records that Christ’s “disciples follow him” (Mark 6:1; Matthew 8:23; Luke 22:39; John 18:15; 21:20). While, as is expected, not all of the 269 references to disciples specifically define the word, very strong exegetical evidence from many passages establish that one becomes a true disciple of Christ at the same moment that one becomes a true believer, so that discipleship begins at regeneration, and all the people of God, not some elite minority, are identified as disciples in Scripture. No verse in Scripture teaches that believers become disciples at a post-conversion crisis or that only some of the regenerate are disciples. Rather, it was the “disciples [who] were called Christians” (Acts 11:26). Disciples are Christians, and Christians are disciples.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Μαθητής appears in Matthew 5:1; 8:21, 23, 25; 9:10–11, 14, 19, 37; 10:1, 24–25, 42–11:2; 12:1–2, 49; 13:10, 36; 14:12, 15, 19, 22, 26; 15:2, 12, 23, 32–33, 36; 16:5, 13, 20–21, 24; 17:6, 10, 13, 16, 19; 18:1; 19:10, 13, 23, 25; 20:17; 21:1, 6, 20; 22:16; 23:1; 24:1, 3; 26:1, 8, 17–19, 26, 35–36, 40, 45, 56; 27:64; 28:7–9, 13, 16; Mark 2:15–16, 18, 23; 3:7, 9; 4:34; 5:31; 6:1, 29, 35, 41, 45; 7:2, 5, 17; 8:1, 4, 6, 10, 14, 27, 33–34; 9:14, 18, 28, 31; 10:10, 13, 23–24, 46; 11:1, 14; 12:43; 13:1; 14:12–14, 16, 32; 16:7; Luke 5:30, 33; 6:1, 13, 17, 20, 40; 7:11, 18–19; 8:9, 22; 9:1, 14, 16, 18, 40, 43, 54; 10:23; 11:1; 12:1, 22; 14:26–27, 33; 16:1; 17:1, 22; 18:15; 19:29, 37, 39; 20:45; 22:11, 39, 45; John 1:35, 37; 2:2, 11–12, 17, 22; 3:22, 25; 4:1–2, 8, 27, 31, 33; 6:3, 8, 11–12, 16, 22, 24, 60–61, 66; 7:3; 8:31; 9:2, 27–28; 11:7–8, 12, 54; 12:4, 16; 13:5, 22–23, 35; 15:8; 16:17, 29; 18:1–2, 15–17, 19, 25; 19:26–27, 38; 20:2–4, 8, 10, 18–20, 25–26, 30; 21:1–2, 4, 7–8, 12, 14, 20, 23–24; Acts 1:15; 6:1–2, 7; 9:1, 10, 19, 25–26, 38; 11:26, 29; 13:52; 14:20, 22, 28; 15:10; 16:1; 18:23, 27; 19:1, 9, 30; 20:1, 7, 30; 21:4, 16.

<sup>4</sup> The verb μαθητεύω appears four times (Matthew 13:52; 27:57; 28:19; Acts 14:21), and the nouns μαθήτρια and συμμαθητής appear once each (Acts 9:36; John 11:16).

<sup>5</sup> See BDAG, Liddell-Scott, & Louw-Nida.

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, a disciple of John the Baptist would follow him and his commands, Matthew 9:14; 11:2; 14:12; Luke 7:18–19; a disciple of the Pharisees would follow them and their commands, Matthew 22:15–16; cf. Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; and a disciple of other false teachers would follow them and their commands, Acts 20:30. John sought to have those who followed him, who were his disciples, become followers or disciples of Christ, John 1:35–39; 3:26–30. The Lord Jesus organized His church before Pentecost in Acts 2 (Matthew 16:18; 18:17) out of those of John’s disciples who had been saved and immersed by the Baptist, and then became His disciples. Christ’s congregation of immersed saints practiced the ordinances of baptism (John 3:22; 4:1–2) and the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26–29; cf. Matthew 26:30 & Hebrews 2:12) before the descent of the Spirit in Acts 2.

<sup>7</sup> In Acts 11:26, χρηματίσαι τε πρῶτον ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τοὺς μαθητὰς Χριστιανούς explicitly equates the category *Christian* and *disciple*. Μαθητὰς functions as the subject of the infinitive χρηματίσαι, and Χριστιανούς is a predicate accusative in the construction (cf. pgs. 190–197, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Wallace). Since this syntactical pattern is “similar [in function] to the nominative subject and predicate nominative construction, following the same principles for distinguishing [the subject and predicate words]” (pg. 190, *ibid.*), and the equivalent subject-predicate nominative construction is a convertible, not a subset proposition, because μαθητὰς is articular and Χριστιανούς is a proper noun (pgs. 40–46, *ibid.*), the two categories *disciple* and *Christian* are explicitly equated as convertible terms. The “construction indicates an identical exchange . . . both nouns have an identical

Disciples are not an elite order of especially consecrated believers because disciples are too often sadly lacking in consecration. Disciples can be chastened as those of “little faith” (Matthew 8:23-27) and can fail to have the kind of faith that is associated with God’s powerful working (Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:18-19). They can act in pride (Mark 9:31-34). They can require Christ’s correction (Matthew 19:13-14; 26:8-10) and rebuke (Luke 9:54-55), because they make Him “much displeased” (Mark 10:13-14). Disciples can fear to boldly confess Christ (John 19:38) although their faith does not stay perpetually hidden (19:39-40). Disciples can sleep instead of pray, give in to temptation and fear, and fail to unflinchingly stand for Christ (Matthew 26:40, 45, 56; Luke 22:45-46; John 18:15-27), although their faith does not fail and their repentant return to their Redeemer is as certain as are the answers to Christ’s prayers for His own as High Priest (Luke 22:32) since Christ powerfully works in them through His Word to bring them back to Himself when they sin (22:60-62). Disciples can fail to grasp spiritual truth as they ought (Mark 7:18-19; 8:16-21; 9:32; John 4:31-35; 9:2-3; 11:11-13; 12:16) and even fail to pursue understanding as they ought when they fail to grasp it (Luke 9:45). While disciples—since they are believers and are therefore the recipients of a new heart—are going to be different from the unregenerate, they are not an elite subcategory of especially consecrated Christian. No text indicates that a special post-conversion act of consecration makes a believer into the higher category of disciple, nor that a certain amount of sin makes a disciple lose his status and return to a lower subcategory of believer. Rather, all believers, with both their Spirit-wrought change and their remaining indwelling sin, are identified as disciples.

Furthermore, disciples are never distinguished from the regenerate who are at a lower plane, but are regularly distinguished from hell-bound lost people. Disciples are contrasted with publicans and sinners (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17) from perishing multitudes (Matthew 9:35-38; Luke 19:36-38) and from the persecuting ungodly, (Matthew 10:22-27). Disciples are those who have been given spiritual truth and enter the kingdom of heaven, in contrast with the lost, who do not do so (Matthew 13:10-12; Mark 4:33-34; Luke 8:9-11). Disciples will feast with Christ in the consummation (Mark 2:18-19). Disciples inherit the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20) and their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20-24). Disciples are Christ’s spiritual brethren (Matthew 12:49-50; 28:7-10) and those who recognize Jesus as the Christ (Matthew 16:14-16, 20). Disciples are Christ’s little ones (Matthew 10:42); His little children (John 13:33) who cannot

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referent. The mathematical formulas of  $A=B$ ,  $B=A$  are applicable in such instances. . . . There is complete interchange between the two [nouns]” (pg. 41, *ibid.*). *Disciple = Christian*, and *Christian = disciple*.

come into condemnation (13:33) are disciples (13:35), believers (14:1) who will have heavenly mansions (14:2-3) with the Lord Jesus. Disciples are those who bear fruit (John 15:8) and consequently are not burned eternally in the fires of hell (15:6). Disciples (John 16:7) are believers (John 16:27) and are therefore those who are promised the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 16:7-17; 14:16-18; cf. 20:19-22). Christian “brethren” are “disciples” (Acts 6:1-3; 9:17, 26-30; 14:28-15:1). Disciples are those who are not unsaved, but are “obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). When Paul preached the gospel message that “by [Christ] all that believe are justified from all things, from which [they] could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39), those who “believed” received “eternal life” (13:48) and thus became “disciples” (13:50; cf. 14:1, 21-23). People who have had God “purif[y] their hearts by faith . . . disciples . . . through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . shall be saved” (15:9-11). When people heard the gospel, they either became “disciples” or they rejected the Savior and “believed not” (Acts 19:9). Disciples (Acts 9:1) are those who are of the Christian “way” (9:2). Saul received a commission to persecute Christ’s disciples (9:1-2), and he consequently persecuted all believers, all who “call on [Christ’s] name” (9:14; cf. 9:19, 21, 25-27). Scripture clearly and regularly equates the categories of *believer* and *disciple*, promises those who are in these categories the same eternal felicity, and warns of eternal damnation for all who do not become disciples or believers.

The act of making disciples is expressed with the Greek verb *matheteuo*.<sup>8</sup> Making disciples (Matthew 28:19) takes place by preaching the gospel and having people come to repent (Luke 24:47) and believe (Mark 16:15-16), and thus receive the remission of sins (Luke 24:47; Mark 16:16; John 20:23), after which the believers or disciples should be baptized (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16). The response to the preaching of the gospel is

<sup>8</sup> Discussing the verb μαθητεύω, BDAG comments:  
μαθητεύω (s. μαθητής) . . . **1. to be a pupil**, with implication of being an adherent of the teacher  
a. intr., *be or become a pupil or disciple* (Plut., Mor. 832b; 837c; Ps.-Callisth. 2, 4, 4 τινί; Iambl., Vi. Pyth. 23, 104 μ. τῷ Πυθαγόρῃ; schol. on Apollon. Rhod. Proleg. A a) τινί (Orig., C. Cels. 2, 9, 60) *of someone* (Ἰωσήφ) ἐμαθήτευσεν τῷ Ἰησοῦ *Joseph had become a disciple of Jesus* Mt 27:57 v.l. [the word appears in the TR but not the critical Greek text]. Likew. as  
b. pass. dep. (Just., A I, 15, 6; Hippol., Ref. 1, 2, 16) μαθητεύομαι *become a disciple* τινί: (Ἰ.) ἐμαθητεύθη τῷ Ἰησοῦ Mt 27:57. γραμματεὺς μαθητευθεὶς τῇ βασιλείᾳ τ. οὐρανῶν *a scribe who has become a disciple of the kdm. of heaven or who has been trained for the kdm.* Mt 13:52 (γραμματεὺς 2b). Abs. I Eph 3:1. μᾶλλον μαθητεύομαι *I am becoming a disciple more and more* I Ro 5:1. This gave rise to a new active form (B-D-F §148, 3; Rob. 800)  
**2. to cause one to be a pupil, teach**, trans. (AscIs 3:18 καὶ μαθητεύσουσιν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη καὶ πᾶσαν γλῶσσαν εἰς τὴν ἀν[ά]στασιν τοῦ ἀγαπ[η]τοῦ; Just., D. 53, 1 Χριστὸς . . . ἐμαθήτευσεν αὐτούς) *make a disciple of, teach* τινά *someone* Mt 28:19. ἱκανοὺς *make a number of disciples* Ac 14:21. Abs. ἅ μαθητεύοντες ἐντέλλεσθε *what you command when you are instructing or winning disciples* I Ro 3:1.—ὁμῖν μαθητευθήναι *become your disciples, be instructed by you* I Eph 10:1 (cp. pres. subst. ptc. οἱ μαθητεύομενοι = οἱ μαθηταί Did., Gen. 69, 24; 245, 17; aor. ptc. αἱ δὲ τοῦ θεοῦ Χριστῷ μαθητευθεῖσαι ἐκκλησίαι Orig., C. Cels. 3, 29, 24; Πολύκαρπος . . . ὑπὸ ἀποστόλων μαθητευθεῖς Iren. 3, 3, 4 [Harv. II 12, 4]).—DELG s.v. μανθάνω. M-M. EDNT. TW. Sv.

people becoming disciples by the new birth (Acts 14:21), for one is discipled “unto the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 13:52). As with the noun *mathetes*, the verb *matheteuo* indicates that one becomes a disciple by becoming a believer.<sup>9</sup> No text teaches or implies that disciples are an elite subcategory within a larger group of Christians.

John 8:30-32 indicates that disciples are those who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. The discourse of John 8 takes place in the Jerusalem temple (v. 2, 20, 59), where Christ debates and refutes the Pharisees in front of a watching audience. In 8:12-13 Christ addresses “the Pharisees” and they reply. He then responds in v. 14-18, they answer Him in v. 19, and He responds in v. 19, making it clear that they are lost in their sins (v. 19). This interaction between the Pharisees and the Lord continues in v. 20-29. Although now called “the Jews” (v. 22), Christ still debates the same Pharisaic opponents, for v. 21 (“then said Jesus again unto them”) indicates He still speaks to the Pharisees of v. 13. Verse 24 (“therefore”) also shows the interaction continues through v. 29. It is very apparent that these Pharisees are lost (v. 21, 23, 24); indeed, they will be responsible for Christ’s crucifixion (v. 28). As the Lord preaches to and answers the Pharisees, many of those listening to His public disputation with them savingly believe on Him (v. 30-32).<sup>10</sup> The Lord then tells those who have now believed on Him that their initial justifying faith will evidence itself in perseverance (v. 31-32). In v. 33, the Pharisees (“they,” as in v. 27) challenge Christ’s address to His new disciples. The speakers in v. 33 are not the new converts—their words are nowhere recorded in the chapter—rather, the public disputation with the Pharisees found in the rest of John eight is continued from v. 33 through the end of the chapter. Thus, John chapter eight records a conversation between Christ and the Pharisees with others looking on and listening in. Some of the onlookers believed on the Savior and received His exhortation in v. 30-32, the only break in the dialogue, and one which occurs without a record of the response of those addressed. Christ said to those who had “believed,” “ye . . . are my disciples” (John

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<sup>9</sup> The like is true of the related nouns *μαθήτρια* and *συμμαθητής*. However, these words appear only in Acts 9:36 and John 11:16 and consequently make only a rather limited contribution to the question of the equation of the category of believer and disciple. The verb *μανθάνω*, “to learn,” is naturally employed with frequency for Christian growth (Philippians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 14:31) and for the acquisition of other sorts of information (Acts 23:27), but it likewise indicates that one becomes a “learner” or disciple of Christ at the moment of conversion (Matthew 11:26; John 6:45), and makes no division between Christians who learn of Christ and a supposed category of Christians who do not learn of Him.

<sup>10</sup> The perfect tense form of “believe” in v. 31 (*πεπιστευκότας*) demonstrates that the aorist “believed” (*ἐπίστευσαν*) in v. 30 denotes saving faith in many of those hearing Christ speak. Those who “believed” or received what Christ said in v. 30 as true were the same group as those who savingly believed in v. 31-32. The perfect tense of *πιστεύω* is never used for spurious “faith” in unsaved people (John 3:18; 6:69; 8:31; 11:27; 16:27; 20:29; Acts 15:5; 16:34; 18:27; 19:18; 21:20, 25; 1 Corinthians 9:17; Galatians 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:12; Titus 3:8; 1 John 4:16; 5:10).

8:31). The identification of the categories *believer* and *disciple* is explicit.<sup>11</sup> The specification that those the Lord Jesus addressed would evidence their status as true converts<sup>12</sup> by perseverance<sup>13</sup> does not undermine the His identification of believers as disciples. Christ does not say that those who believe would “become” disciples by continuing in His Word, but that those who “are” currently disciples because they have truly believed will evidence their regeneration by perseverance—they “are” saved people “if” they continue.<sup>14</sup> The “if . . . then” clause is an evidence/inference construction, so “the relation the protasis<sup>15</sup> [has] to the apodosis<sup>16</sup> is that of ground, or evidence . . . for example, ‘If she has a ring on her left hand, then she’s married.’ Notice that the protasis is not the cause of the apodosis. In fact, it is often just the opposite.”<sup>17</sup> Those who had become the Lord’s disciples at the moment they believed in Christ would persevere; if someone did not do so, he never was a true convert.<sup>18</sup>

Mark 8:34-38<sup>19</sup> teaches that one who does not become a disciple of Christ will be eternally damned. In v. 34,<sup>20</sup> denial of self and taking up the cross is a representation of

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<sup>11</sup> Note further that John records in the following chapter that one who wished to become (*thelo + ginomai*) Christ’s disciple came to believe on Him, John 9:25-30, 35-38.

<sup>12</sup> ἀληθῶς μαθηταί.

<sup>13</sup> Compare the section “The Certainty of Practical Sanctification For All The Regenerate” above.

<sup>14</sup> Note also that John repeatedly refers to continuing faith in true disciples—they grow in faith as they continue to believe on Christ, John 2:11; 16:29-31; 20:8, 26-29. “[D]isciples . . . believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:22).

<sup>15</sup> The *protasis* is the “if” portion of a conditional clause.

<sup>16</sup> The *apodosis* is the “then” portion of a conditional clause.

<sup>17</sup> Pg. 683, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, by Daniel Wallace.

<sup>18</sup> A third class condition, rather than a first class condition, is employed in John 8:31-32 because the evidence of continuance was not yet present. Christ’s admonition to those He had just brought to Himself accords with the greater framework of Biblical evangelistic methodology, so that His admonition to His new converts is good to give to any newly professed believer in the Lord. Those who profess faith should know what a “disciple indeed” looks like and have assurance of salvation promised to them if they evidence themselves as such (1 John 2:29; 3:7; 5:13). Christ’s practice of telling new believers that true salvation will evidence itself in perseverance stands in radical contradistinction to the popular and totally unscriptural practice of a soulwinner providing immediate and unconditional assurance to all who have just professed faith. If the Lord Jesus conditioned assurance upon perseverance in His counsel to those whom He, in His omniscience, knew were genuinely converted, how much more should soulwinners, who are very far from omniscient, condition assurance upon perseverance when speaking to those who have newly professed Christ but may or may not have come to genuine faith!

<sup>19</sup> 34 And when he had called the people *unto him* with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 35 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. 36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? 37 Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. 34 καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν ὄχλον σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ, εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Ὅστις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔλθειν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτόν, καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀκολουθείτω μοι. 35 ὃς γὰρ ἂν θέλῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ

the sinner's coming to the point of saving repentance, with a resultant lifestyle of continued following of Christ.<sup>21</sup> As already indicated above, Christ's call to sinners to "follow me" (v. 34) was a call to discipleship, since the Lord's "disciples follow him" (Mark 6:1; Matthew 8:23; Luke 22:39; John 18:15; 21:20).<sup>22</sup> One who was bearing a cross in the land of Israel in Christ's day was on his way to the shameful and extremely painful death of crucifixion (John 19:17); thus, repentant faith in Christ involved losing one's life, that is, turning from his own way of living, exaltation of self and comfort, to surrender to Christ as unconditional Lord (Mark 8:35). The person who wishes to continue to live his own way, to "save his life," will eternally lose "both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28, 39),<sup>23</sup> while one who turns from his own way, denying himself, taking up the cross, and losing his own life for the sake of Christ and the gospel, will save his life or soul (*pseuche*) by receiving eternal life. "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25). To

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σῶσαι, ἀπολέσει αὐτήν ὃς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ καὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, οὗτος σώσει αὐτήν. 36 τί γὰρ ὠφελήσει ἄνθρωπον, ἐὰν κερδήσῃ τὸν κόσμον ὅλον, καὶ ζημιωθῇ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ; 37 ἢ τί δώσει ἄνθρωπος ἀντάλλαγμα τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ; 38 ὃς γὰρ ἂν ἐπαισχυνθῇ με καὶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς λόγους ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ τῇ μοιχαλίδι καὶ ἀμαρτωλῷ, καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπαισχυνθήσεται αὐτόν, ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀγγέλων τῶν ἁγίων.

<sup>20</sup> The Lord addresses "the people . . . with his disciples also" in v. 34. He teaches the unconverted multitudes, the "people" (ὄχλος), because v. 34-38 was a call for them to repent and receive salvation. He also addressed His disciples because believers should be reminded about the commitment to follow the Lord they made when they repented and believed the gospel, and because not only at the moment of conversion and regeneration, but "daily" believers are to take up the cross and follow Christ (Luke 9:23).

<sup>21</sup> Note the aorists ἀπαρνησάσθω and ἀράτω, in contrast with the present imperative ἀκολουθεῖτω. Self-denial and cross-bearing certainly continues after the moment of saving faith, as the aorists are reasonably seen as ingressive (cf. Luke 9:23), but they nonetheless emphasize the point of the sinner's "turn[ing] to God from idols" (1 Thessalonians 1:9) as the command to "follow" in Mark 8 parallels the result of regeneration, "serv[ing] the living and true God; and . . . wait[ing] for his Son from heaven" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; note that the *turning* is similarly aorist, while *servicing* and *waiting* are present tense forms).

<sup>22</sup> Further texts that connect those who "follow" (ἀκολουθεῖω) Christ with the status of a disciple or of one who will have eternal life rather than eternal death are: Matthew 4:20, 22; 8:19, 22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21, 27-28; 20:34; Mark 1:18; 2:14; 9:38; 10:21, 28, 32, 52; 15:41; Luke 5:11, 27-28; 9:23, 49, 57, 59, 61; 18:22, 28, 43; John 1:37-38, 40, 43; 8:12; 10:4, 27; 12:26; 13:36-37; 21:19-20, 22; Revelation 14:4; 19:14. Many of the remaining texts, which speak of multitudes following Christ, including among them what was certainly a substantial number of unconverted persons (cf. Mark 2:15; Matthew 12:15; 19:2), describe those "disciples" (John 6:60, 66) who followed Christ for the wrong reasons (John 6:60-68) and thus were professedly His followers, although they "walked . . . with him" only for a time (John 6:66).

<sup>23</sup> Compare the uses of ἀπόλλυμι in Matthew 10:28; Luke 13:3, 5; John 3:15-16; 10:28; 11:50; 17:12; Romans 2:12; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; 2 Peter 3:9; Jude 5, 11. Note the following texts which, as in Mark 8:35, employ both ἀπόλλυμι and ψυχή: Matthew 10:28, 39; 16:25; Luke 17:33; John 12:25. While the ἀπόλλυμι and ψυχή combination does not of itself absolutely require a reference to eternal damnation (cf. Luke 6:9), the saying of Mark 8:35 is specifically tied to losing one's life in hell in Matthew 10:28, 39, and to gaining eternal life in heaven in John 12:25, so Mark 8:35 necessarily refers to eternal bliss or woe.

encourage the lost to give up their own way and surrender to Christ's Lordship for salvation, Christ reminds them that it profits them nothing if they would gain the whole world, but lose their souls (Mark 8:36-37). Those who, rather than being ashamed of their sins (Romans 6:21; contrast Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 1:8, 12, 16) are ashamed to follow Christ and His Words in the evil and adulterous world will have Christ be ashamed of them at His return and be damned—for Christ is “not ashamed to call [true believers] brethren” (Hebrews 2:11), and “God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:16; Luke 9:26). No text in Scripture indicates that God will be “ashamed” of His people—He is not ashamed of them (Hebrews 11:16). Mark 8:34-38 clearly teaches that all saved people are disciples, and that one who refuses to become Christ's disciple will face an eternity in hell.

Mark 10:13-31 exemplifies the teaching of Mark 8:34-38. Christ told a man who wanted to “inherit eternal life” (10:17) to “take up the cross, and follow” Him (10:21). He refused to do so, because he was unwilling to forsake his riches, and so he did not inherit the kingdom of God (10:22-24). Indeed, the Lord Jesus taught that fallen man's attachment to sin is so strong that nobody will come to repentance and be saved apart from God's supernatural working (10:25-27). Those who do leave all to forsake all to follow Christ (10:28-29) become God's “children” (10:24) and will “receive . . . in the world to come eternal life” (10:30), having come to Christ as Lord and Savior with the faith of a little child (10:13-16). Matthew 19:16-30 supplements the record in Mark, indicating “eternal life” (19:16) is promised to those who “come and follow” Christ (19:21). Those who forsake all “inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29). Similarly, in Luke 14:15-35, Christ teaches that “whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath” (14:33, 26) to “bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (14:27, 33); those who refuse to put Christ before property (14:18-19) and people (14:20, 26) will not “eat bread in the kingdom of God” (14:15), but be “cast out” (14:35) of the eschatological feast of the saints (14:24) into hell,<sup>24</sup> while God rejoices over the repentance and salvation of those who become disciples in the way people rejoice over the recovery of a lost sheep, coin, or son (Luke 15). Parallel passages confirm the plain teaching of Mark 8:34-38—disciples get eternal life, and those who do not become disciples are damned.

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<sup>24</sup> The verb “cast out” (βάλλω) in Luke 14:35, out of 125 instances in the New Testament, is never employed for a judgment where believers are cast out by God, but the lost are, over and over again, said to be cast (βάλλω) into the fires of hell (note Matthew 3:10; 5:13, 25, 29-30; 7:19; 13:42, 48; 18:8-9; Mark 9:42 (cf. vv. 41-48), 45, 47; Luke 3:9; 12:58; 14:35; Revelation 2:22; 12:4, 9, 13; 14:19; 18:21; 19:20; 20:3, 10, 14-15). Note as well the βάλλω & ἔξω texts Matthew 5:13; 13:48; Luke 14:35; John 15:6, where the lost are those who are cast out each time (the only remaining text with βάλλω & ἔξω, 1 John 4:18, does not speak of anything eschatological, whether judgment or deliverance).

This fact requires the identification of believers and disciples as a single class, the people of God.

Scripture is clear that all believers are disciples. The notion that, after regeneration, a smaller, elite group of believers choose to become disciples is entirely absent from Scripture. Disciples are regularly contrasted with the unregenerate, but never with an underclass of truly saved people who have not yet become disciples. When disciples sin or backslide, they are never said to lose their status as disciples and return to a supposed larger unconsecrated Christian underclass. The usage of the noun and verb forms for *disciple* make the equation of believers and disciples exceedingly plain. Indeed, the terms *Christian* and *disciple* are explicitly equated (Acts 11:26). Numerous passages of Scripture teach and affirm the truth that one becomes a disciple at the moment of saving faith, and that those who do not become disciples are unbelievers who will be damned. If only some Christians are disciples, then only some Christians get eternal life and escape hell, are adopted into the family of God, enter the kingdom of God, have faith in Christ, and have a new nature—in short, if only some Christians are disciples, only some Christians are Christians. The Bible is clear—a believer is a disciple, and a disciple is a believer.