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## *The Disciple-Making Minister*

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

### **Chapter Two**

#### **Beginning Rightly**

Biblically speaking, a disciple is a sincere believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, one who is abiding in His Word and consequently being set free from sin. A disciple is one who is learning to obey all of Christ's commandments, and one who loves Jesus more than his own family, his own comfort, and his possessions, and he manifests that love by his lifestyle. Jesus' true disciples love one another and demonstrate that love in practical ways. They are bearing fruit.<sup>1</sup> These are the kinds of people Jesus wants.

Obviously those who are not His disciples cannot make disciples for Him. Thus we must first be certain that we ourselves are His disciples before we attempt to make any disciples for Him. Many ministers, when weighed against the biblical definition of what a disciple is, fall short. There is no hope that such ministers can make disciples, and they in fact, won't even try. They are not committed enough themselves to Jesus Christ to endure the difficulties that come with making true disciples.

From this point on, I'm going to assume that ministers who continue reading are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ themselves, fully committed to obeying His commandments. If you are not, there is no sense in your reading any further until you make the necessary commitment to become a true disciple. Don't wait any longer! Fall on your knees and repent! By His marvelous grace, God will forgive you and make you a new creation in Christ!

#### **Redefining Discipleship**

Although Jesus made it quite clear what a disciple is, many have replaced His definition with one of their own. For example, to some the word *disciple* is a vague term that applies to anyone who professes to be a Christian. To them, the word *disciple* has been stripped of all its biblical meaning.

Others consider *discipleship* to be an optional second step of commitment for heaven-bound believers. They believe that one may be a heaven-bound believer in Jesus but not be a disciple of Jesus! Because it is so difficult to simply ignore Jesus' demanding requirements for discipleship that are recorded in Scripture, it is taught that there are two levels of Christians—the believers, who believe in Jesus, and the disciples, who believe in

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<sup>1</sup> This definition is derived from what we've already read in Matthew 28:18-20, John 8:31-32; 13:25, 15:8 and Luke 14:25-33.

and are committed to Jesus. Along these lines, it is often said that there are many believers but few disciples, but that both are going to heaven.

This doctrine effectively neutralizes Christ's commandment to make disciples, which in turn neutralizes the making of disciples. If becoming a disciple means self-denying commitment and even hardship, and if becoming a disciple is optional, the large majority of people will elect not to become disciples, especially if they think they will be welcomed into heaven as non-disciples.

So here are some *very* important questions that we must ask: Does Scripture teach that one can be a heaven-bound believer but not be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Is discipleship an optional step for believers? Are there two levels of Christians, the uncommitted believers and the committed disciples?

The answer to all of these questions is *No*. Nowhere does the New Testament teach that there are two categories of Christians, the believers and the disciples. If one reads the book of Acts, one will read repeated references to *the disciples*, and they are obviously not references to a higher-class of more committed believers. *Everyone* who believed in Jesus was a disciple.<sup>2</sup> In fact, "the *disciples* were first called *Christians* in Antioch" (Acts 11:26, emphasis added).

It is interesting to note that the Greek word translated *disciple* (*mathetes*) is found 261 times in the New Testament, whereas the Greek word translated *believer* (*pistos*) is only found nine times (as it is translated *believer* in the *New American Standard* version). The Greek word translated *Christian* (*Christianos*) is found only three times. Those facts alone are enough to convince an honest inquirer that those in the early church who believed in Jesus were all considered to be His disciples.

### Jesus' Commentary

Jesus certainly didn't think that becoming a disciple was a secondary, optional step for believers. His three requirements for discipleship that we read in Luke 14 were not addressed to believers as an invitation to a higher level of commitment. Rather, His words were addressed to everyone among the multitudes. Discipleship is the *first* step in a relationship with God. Moreover, we read in John 8:

As He [Jesus] spoke these things, *many came to believe in Him*. Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly *disciples* of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

No one can intelligently argue against the undeniable fact that Jesus was talking to newly-professing believers about being His disciples. Jesus did *not* say to those newly-professing believers, "Sometime in the future you may want to consider taking the next step, a step of commitment, to become My disciples." No, Jesus spoke to those new believers as if He expected them to be disciples already, as if the words *believer* and *disciple* were synonymous terms. He told those newly-professing believers that the way they could prove they were His disciples was by abiding in His word, which would result in their being set free from sin (see 8:34-36).

Jesus knew that just people's *profession* of faith was no guarantee that they really did believe. He also knew that those who truly believed He was the Son of God would act like it—they would immediately become His disciples—yearning to obey and please Him. Such

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<sup>2</sup> *Disciples* are mentioned in Acts 6:1, 2, 7; 9:1, 10, 19, 25, 26, 36, 38; 11:26, 29; 13:52; 14:20, 21, 22, 28; 15:10; 16:1; 18:23, 27; 19:1, 9, 30; 20:1, 30; 21:4, 16. *Believers* are mentioned only in Acts 5:14; 10:45 and 16:1. In Acts 14:21, for example, Luke wrote, "And after they [Paul and Barnabas] had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples..." Thus Paul and Barnabas made disciples by preaching the gospel, and people became immediate disciples at their conversion, not at some later optional time.

believers/disciples would naturally abide in His Word, making it their home. And as they discovered His will by learning His commandments, they would be progressively set free from sin.

That is why Jesus immediately challenged those new believers to test themselves. His statement, "If you are *truly* My disciples" indicates He believed there was a possibility that they were not *true* disciples, but only *professing* disciples. They could be fooling themselves. Only if they passed Jesus' test could they be certain they were His true disciples. (And it seems from reading the rest of the dialogue in John 8:37-59 that Jesus certainly had good reason to doubt their sincerity.)<sup>3</sup>

Our key scripture, Matthew 28:18-20, itself dispels the theory that disciples are a higher class of committed believers. Jesus commanded in His Great Commission that *disciples* be baptized. Of course, the record of the book of Acts indicates that the apostles didn't wait until new believers took a "second step of radical commitment to Christ" before they baptized them. Rather, the apostles baptized all new believers almost immediately after their conversion. They believed that all true believers were disciples.

In this regard, those who believe that disciples are the uniquely committed believers are not consistent with their own theology. Most of them baptize anyone who professes to believe in Jesus, not waiting for them to reach the committed level of "discipleship." Yet if they really believe what they preach, they should only baptize those who reach the discipleship level, which would be very few among their ranks.

Perhaps one final blow to this diabolical doctrine will suffice. If disciples are different than believers, why is it that John wrote that love for the brethren is the identifying mark of true born-again *believers* (see 1 John 3:14), and Jesus said that love for the brethren is the identifying mark of His true *disciples* (John 13:35)?

### **The Origin of this False Doctrine**

If the idea of two separate classes of Christians, the believers and the disciples, is not found in Scripture, how is such a doctrine defended? The answer is that this doctrine is solely supported by another false doctrine about salvation. That doctrine alleges that the demanding requirements for discipleship are not compatible with the fact that salvation is by grace. Based on that logic, the conclusion is drawn that the requirements for discipleship cannot be requirements for salvation. Thus, being a disciple must be an optional step of commitment for heaven-bound believers who are saved by grace.

The fatal flaw with this theory is that there are scores of scriptures that oppose it. What, for example, could be more clear than what Jesus said near the close of His Sermon on the Mount, after He had enumerated numerous commandments?

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

Clearly, Jesus linked obedience with salvation, here and in many other statements. So how can we reconcile the numerous scriptures like this with the Bible's affirmation that salvation is by grace? It is quite simple. God, by His amazing grace, is temporarily offering everyone an opportunity to repent, believe, and be born again, empowered to live obediently by the Holy Spirit. So salvation is by grace. Without God's grace, no one could be saved, because all have sinned. Sinners cannot possibly merit salvation. So they need God's grace to be saved.

God's grace is revealed in so many ways in regard to our salvation. It is revealed in

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<sup>3</sup> This passage of Scripture also exposes the mistaken modern practice of assuring new converts of their salvation. Jesus did not assure these newly-professing converts that they were surely saved because they had prayed a short prayer to accept Him or verbalized faith in Him. Rather, He challenged them to consider if their profession was genuine. We should follow His example.

Jesus' dying on the cross, God's calling us through the gospel, His drawing us to Christ, His convicting us of our sin, His granting us an opportunity to repent, His regenerating us and filling us with His Holy Spirit, His breaking the power of sin over our lives, His empowering us to live in holiness, His discipline of us when we sin, and so on. None of these blessings have we earned. We are saved by grace from start to finish.

According to Scripture, however, salvation is not only "by grace," but "through faith": "For *by grace* you have been saved *through faith*" (Eph. 2:8a, emphasis added). Both components are necessary, and they are obviously not incompatible. If people are to be saved, both grace and faith are necessary. God extends His grace, and we respond by faith. Genuine faith, of course, results in obedience to God's commandments. As James wrote in the second chapter of his epistle, faith without works is dead, useless, and cannot save (see Jas. 2:14-26).<sup>4</sup>

The fact is, God's grace has never offered anyone a license to sin. Rather, God's grace offers people a temporary opportunity to repent and be born again. After death, there is no more opportunity to repent and be born again, and thus God's grace is no longer available. His saving grace must therefore be temporary.

### **A Woman Whom Jesus Saved by Grace Through Faith**

A perfect picture of salvation offered by grace through faith is found in the story of Jesus' encounter with the woman caught in the act of adultery. Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you [*that is grace, because she deserved to be condemned*]; go your way; *from now on sin no more*" (John 8:11, emphasis added). When she deserved to die, Jesus let her go free. He sent her away, however, with a warning: *From now on sin no more*. This is exactly what Jesus is saying to every sinner in the world—"I'm not condemning you now. You deserve to die and be condemned forever in hell, but I'm showing you grace. My grace, however, is only temporary, so repent. Stop sinning now, before My grace ends and you find yourself standing before My judgment seat as a guilty sinner."

Let us imagine that adulterous woman repented as Jesus instructed her. If she did, she was saved by *grace through faith*. She was saved *by grace* because she could never have been saved without God's grace, being a sinner. She could never rightly say that she earned her salvation by her works. And she was saved *through faith* because she *believed* in Jesus and thus believed what He said to her, heeding His warning, and turned from her sin before it was too late. Anyone who has genuine faith in Jesus will repent, because Jesus warned that unless people repent, they will perish (see Luke 13:3). Jesus also solemnly declared that only those who do the will of the Father will enter heaven (Matt. 7:21). If one believes in Jesus, one will believe and heed His warnings.

But let us imagine that the adulterous woman didn't repent of her sin. She kept on sinning and then died and stood at Jesus' judgment seat. Imagine her saying to Jesus, "Oh Jesus! It is *so good* to see You! I remember how You didn't condemn me for my sin when I was brought before You on the earth. Surely You are still just as gracious. You didn't condemn me then, so surely You won't condemn me now!"

What do you think? Would Jesus welcome her into heaven? The answer is obvious. Paul warned, "Do not be deceived; neither fornicators...nor adulterers...shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

All of this is to say that Jesus' requirements for discipleship are nothing more than a requirement for genuine faith in Him, *what amounts to saving faith*. And everyone who has saving faith has been saved by grace *through faith*. There are no biblical grounds for the claim that, because salvation is by grace, Jesus' requirements for discipleship are incompatible with His requirements for salvation. Discipleship is not an optional step for

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<sup>4</sup> Moreover, contrary to those who maintain that we are saved by faith even if we have no works, James says that we cannot be saved by a faith that is alone: "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone." True faith is never alone; it is always accompanied by works.

heaven-bound believers; rather, *discipleship is the evidence of genuine saving faith.*<sup>5</sup>

This being so, *to be successful in God's eyes, a minister should begin rightly the process of disciple-making by preaching the true gospel, calling people to an obedient faith.* When ministers promote the false doctrine that discipleship is an optional step of commitment for heaven-bound believers, they are working against Christ's commandment to make disciples and are proclaiming a false grace and false gospel. Only Christ's true disciples possess saving faith and are going to heaven, just as Jesus promised: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

### **The New False Gospel**

Because of a false concept of God's grace in salvation, the modern gospel has often been stripped of essential biblical elements that are considered incompatible with a message of grace. A false gospel, however, only produces false Christians, which is why such a large percentage of modern new "converts" will not be found even attending church within a few weeks after they "accepted Christ." Moreover, many who do attend church are very often indistinguishable from the unregenerate population, possessing the same values and practicing the same sins as their conservative neighbors. This is because they don't really believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and haven't actually been born again.

One of those essential elements now removed from the modern gospel is the call to repentance. Many ministers feel that if they tell people to stop sinning (as Jesus did to the woman caught in the act of adultery), it will be tantamount to telling them that salvation is not of grace, but works. But this can't be true, because John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter and Paul all proclaimed that repentance is an absolute necessity for salvation. If preaching repentance somehow negates God's grace in salvation, then John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter and Paul all negated God's grace in salvation. They, however, understood that God's grace offers people a temporary opportunity to repent, not an opportunity to continue sinning.

For example, when John the Baptist proclaimed what Luke refers to as "the gospel," his central message was repentance (see Luke 3:1-18). Those who didn't repent would go to hell (see Matt. 3:10-12; Luke 3:17).

Jesus preached repentance from the start of His ministry (see Matt. 4:17). He warned people that unless they repented, they would perish (see Luke 13:3, 5).

When Jesus sent out His twelve disciples to preach in various cities, "They went out and preached that men should *repent*" (Mark 6:12, emphasis added).

After His resurrection, Jesus told the twelve to take the message of repentance to the whole world, because it was the key that opened the door to forgiveness:

And He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that *repentance for forgiveness of sins* should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47, emphasis added).

The apostles obeyed Jesus' instructions. When Peter was preaching on the day of Pentecost, his convicted listeners, after realizing the truth about the Man whom they had recently crucified, asked Peter what they should do. His response was that they, first of all, should repent (see Acts 2:38).

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<sup>5</sup> It is also helpful to keep in mind that the reason Paul often affirmed that salvation is by grace and not works is because he was constantly fighting the true legalists of his day. Paul was not trying to correct people who taught that holiness is essential for heaven, because he himself believed and often affirmed that fact. Rather, he wrote to correct Jews who, having no concept of God's grace in salvation, did not see any reason for Jesus to have died. Many did not believe that Gentiles could ever be saved because they had no concept of God's grace making salvation possible. Some thought that circumcision, physical lineage, or keeping the Law (which they did not do anyway) earned one's salvation, thus nullifying God's grace and the need for Christ to have died.

Peter's second public sermon at Solomon's portico contained the identical message. Sins would not be wiped away without repentance:<sup>6</sup>

*Repent* therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away (Acts 3:19a, emphasis added).

When Paul testified before King Agrippa, he declared that his gospel had always contained the message of repentance:

Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, *that they should repent and turn to God*, performing deeds appropriate to repentance (Acts 26:19-20, emphasis added).

In Athens, Paul warned his audience that everyone must stand in judgment before Christ, and those who have not repented will be unprepared for that great day:

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that *all everywhere should repent*, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31, emphasis added).

In his farewell sermon to the Ephesian elders, Paul listed repentance along with faith as an essential part of his message:

I did not shrink from...solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of *repentance* toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:20a, 21, emphasis added).

This list of scriptural proofs should be enough to convince anyone that unless the necessity of repentance is proclaimed, the true gospel has not been preached. A relationship with God begins with repentance. There is no forgiveness of sins without it.

### **Repentance Redefined**

Even in the light of so many scriptural proofs that salvation depends on repentance, some ministers still find a way to nullify its necessity by twisting its clear meaning to make it compatible with their faulty conception of God's grace. By their new definition, repentance is no more than a change of mind about who Jesus is, and one that, amazingly, may not necessarily affect a person's behavior.

So what did the New Testament preachers expect when they called people to repent? Were they calling people to only change their minds about who Jesus is, or were they calling people to change their behavior?

Paul believed that true repentance required a change of behavior. We have already read his testimony regarding decades of ministry, as he declared before King Agrippa,

Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then

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<sup>6</sup> Likewise, when God revealed to Peter that Gentiles could be saved simply by believing in Jesus, Peter declared to Cornelius' household, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and *does what is right*, is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34b-35, emphasis added). Peter also declared in Acts 5:32 that God gave the Holy Spirit "to those who obey Him." All true Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6).

throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, *performing deeds appropriate to repentance* (Acts 26:19-20, emphasis added).

John the Baptist also believed that repentance was more than just a change of mind about certain theological facts. When his convicted audience responded to his call for repentance by asking what they should do, he enumerated specific changes of behavior (see Luke 3:3, 10-14). He also derided the Pharisees and Sadducees for only going through the motions of repentance, and warned them of hell's fires if they didn't truly repent:

You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore *bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance....the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire* (Matt. 3:7-10, emphasis added).

Jesus preached the same message of repentance as John (see Matt. 3:2; 4:17). He once stated that Nineveh repented at Jonah's preaching (see Luke 11:32). Anyone who has ever read the book of Jonah knows that the people of Nineveh did more than change their minds. They also changed their actions, turning from sin. Jesus called it *repentance*.

*Biblical repentance is a willful change of behavior in response to authentic faith born in the heart.* When a minister preaches the gospel without mentioning the need for a genuine change of behavior that authenticates repentance, he is actually working against Christ's desire for disciples. Moreover, he deceives his audience into believing that they can be saved without repenting, thus potentially insuring their damnation if they believe him. He is working against God and for Satan, whether he realizes it or not.

If a minister is going to make disciples as Jesus commanded, he must begin the process rightly. When he doesn't preach the true gospel that calls people to repentance and an obedient faith, he is destined to failure, even though he may be a great success in the eyes of people. He may have a large congregation, but he is building with wood, hay and straw, and when his works go through the future fire the quality of his work will be tested. They will be consumed (see 1 Cor. 3:12-15).

### **Jesus' Calls to Commitment**

Not only did Jesus call the unsaved to turn from sin, He also called them to commit themselves to follow and obey immediately. He never offered salvation on lesser terms, as is often done today. He never invited people to "accept" Him, promising them forgiveness, and then later suggested that they might want to commit themselves to obey Him. No, Jesus demanded that the very first step be a step of whole-hearted commitment.

Sadly, Jesus' calls to costly commitment are often simply ignored by professing Christians. Or, if they are acknowledged, are explained away as being calls to a deeper relationship that are supposedly addressed, not to the unsaved, but to those who have already received God's saving grace. Yet so many of these "believers" who claim that Jesus' calls to costly commitment are addressed to them rather than the unsaved *do not heed His calls as they interpret them*. In their minds, they have the option not to respond in obedience, and they never do.

Let's consider one of Jesus' invitations to salvation that is often interpreted to be a call to a deeper walk, supposedly addressed to those who are already saved:

And He [Jesus] summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the

whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:34-38).

Is this an invitation to salvation addressed to unbelievers or an invitation to a more committed relationship addressed to believers? As we read honestly, the answer becomes obvious.

First, notice that the crowd Jesus was speaking to consisted of "the multitude *with* His disciples" (v. 34, emphasis added). Clearly then, the "multitude" did not consist of His disciples. They, in fact, were "summoned" by Him to hear what He was about to say. Jesus wanted everyone, followers and seekers, to understand the truth He was about to teach. Notice also that He then began by saying, "If *anyone*" (v. 34, emphasis added). His words apply to anyone and everyone.

As we continue reading, it becomes even clearer whom Jesus was addressing. Specifically, His words were directed at every person who desired to (1) "come after" Him, (2) "save his life," (3) not "forfeit his soul," and (4) be among those whom He will not be ashamed of when He "comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." All four of these expressions indicate Jesus was describing people who desired to be saved. Are we to think that there is a heaven-bound person who does not want to "come after" Jesus and "save his life"? Are we to think that there are true believers who will "forfeit their souls," who are ashamed of Jesus and His words, and of whom Jesus will be ashamed when He returns? *Obviously*, Jesus was talking about gaining eternal salvation in this passage of Scripture.

Notice that each of the last four sentences in this five-sentence passage all begin with the word "For." Thus each sentence helps to explain and expand upon the previous sentence. No sentence within this passage should be interpreted without considering how the others illuminate it. Let's consider Jesus' words sentence by sentence with that in mind.

### **Sentence #1**

If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me (Mark 8:34).

Again, note that Jesus' words were addressed to anyone who wished to come after Him, anyone who wanted to become His *follower*. This is the only relationship Jesus initially offers—to be His follower.

Many desire to be His friend without being His follower, but such an option does not exist. Jesus didn't consider anyone His friends unless they obeyed Him. He once said, "You are My friends, if you do what I command you" (John 15:14).

Many would like to be His brother without being His follower, but, again, Jesus didn't extend that option. He considered no one His brother unless he was obedient: "Whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, *he* is My brother" (Matt. 12:50, emphasis added).

Many wish to join Jesus in heaven without being His follower, but Jesus conveyed the impossibility of such a thing. Only those who obey are heaven-bound: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

In the sentence under consideration, Jesus informed those who wanted to follow Him that they couldn't follow Him unless they denied themselves. They must be willing to put their desires aside, making them subordinate to His will. *Self-denial and submission is the essence of following Jesus*. That is what it means to "take up your cross."



## Sentence #2

Jesus' second sentence makes the meaning of His first sentence even more clear:

For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it (Mark 8:35).

Again, notice this sentence begins with "For," relating it with the first sentence, adding clarification. Here Jesus contrasts two people, the same two people who were implied in the first sentence—the one who *would* deny himself and take up his cross to follow Him and the one who *would not*. Now they are contrasted as one who would lose his life for Christ and the gospel's sake and one who would not. If we look for the relationship between the two, we must conclude that the one in the first sentence who would *not* deny himself corresponds to the one in the second sentence who wishes to save his life but will lose it. And the one in the first sentence who *was* willing to deny himself corresponds to the one in the second sentences who loses his life but ultimately saves it.

Jesus was not speaking about one losing or saving his physical life. Later sentences in this passage indicate that Jesus had eternal losses and gains in mind. A similar expression by Jesus recorded in John 12:25 says, "He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to *life eternal*" (emphasis added).

The person in the first sentence who would not deny himself was the same person in the second sentence who wished to save his life. Thus we can reasonably conclude that "saving one's life" means "saving one's own agenda for his life." This becomes even clearer when we consider the contrasted man who "loses his life for Christ and the gospel's sake." He is the one who denies himself, takes up his cross, and gives up his own agenda, now living for the purpose of furthering Christ's agenda and the spread of the gospel. He is the one who will ultimately "save his life." The person who seeks to please Christ rather than himself will ultimately find himself happy in heaven, while the one who continues to please himself will ultimately find himself miserable in hell, there losing all freedom to follow his own agenda.

## Sentences #3 & 4

Now the third and fourth sentences:

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:36-37).

In these the person is highlighted who will not deny himself. He is also the one who wishes to save his life but ultimately loses it. Now he is spoken of as one who pursues what the world has to offer and who ultimately "forfeits his soul." Jesus exposes the folly of such a person by comparing the worth of the whole world with that of one's soul. Of course, there is no comparison. A person might theoretically acquire all the world has to offer, but, if the ultimate consequence of his life is that he spends eternity in hell, he has made the gravest of errors.

From these third and fourth sentences we also gain insight into what pulls people away from denying themselves to become Christ's followers. It is their desire for self-gratification, offered by the world. Motivated by love of self, those who refuse to follow Christ seek sinful pleasures, which Christ's true followers shun out of love and obedience to Him. Those who are trying to gain all that the world has to offer pursue wealth, power and prestige, while Christ's true followers seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. Any wealth, power or prestige that is gained by them is considered a stewardship from God to be used unselfishly for His glory.

## Sentence #5

Finally, we arrive at the fifth sentence in the passage under consideration. Notice again how it is joined to the others by the beginning word, *for*:

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:38).

This again is the person who would not deny himself, but who wished to follow his own agenda, pursuing what the world had to offer, and who thus ultimately lost his life and forfeited his soul. Now he is characterized as one who is ashamed of Christ and His words. His shame, of course, stems from his unbelief. If he had truly believed that Jesus was God's Son, he certainly would not have been ashamed of Him or His words. But he is a member of an "adulterous and sinful generation," and Jesus will be ashamed of him when He returns. Clearly, Jesus was not describing a saved person.

What is the conclusion to all of this? The entire passage cannot rightfully be considered to be a call to a more committed life addressed to those who are already on the way to heaven. It is obviously a revealing of the way of salvation by means of comparing those who are truly saved and those who are unsaved. The truly saved believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thus deny themselves for Him, while the unsaved demonstrate no such obedient faith.

## Another Call to Commitment

There are many we could consider, but let us look at one other call to commitment by the Lord Jesus that is nothing less than a call to salvation:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

Evangelists often use this passage of Scripture in their evangelistic invitations, and rightly so. These words are clearly an invitation to salvation. Here Jesus is offering rest to those who are "weary and heavy-laden." He is not offering *physical* rest for those who are *physically* burdened, but *rest for their souls*, as He says. Unsaved people are weighted down with guilt, fear and sin, and when they become weary of it, they then become good candidates for salvation.

If such people want to receive the rest that Jesus is offering, they must do two things according to Him. They must (1) come to Him and (2), they must take His yoke upon them.

False grace teachers often twist the obvious meaning of the expression "taking Jesus' yoke." Some actually claim that Jesus was speaking of a yoke that must be around His own neck, which is why He called it "My yoke." And Jesus must have been speaking of a *double-yoke* they say, one half of which is around His neck and the other half of which is empty, waiting for us to take on our necks. We should understand, however, that Jesus is promising to do all the pulling of the plow because He said that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Thus our only job, according to such teachers, is to make sure we stay yoked to Jesus by faith, allowing Him to do all the work for our salvation, while we just enjoy the benefits offered through His grace! That interpretation, obviously, is quite forced.

No, when Jesus said that weary people should take His yoke, He meant that they should submit to Him, making Him their master, allowing Him to direct their lives. That is why Jesus said we should take His yoke and then learn of Him. Unsaved people are like wild

oxen, going their own way and ruling their own lives. When they take Jesus' yoke, they give up control to Him. And the reason Jesus' yoke is easy and His burden is light is because He empowers us by His indwelling Spirit to obey Him.

Thus we see again that Jesus called people to salvation, in this case symbolized as a rest for the weary, by calling people to submit to Him and make Him their Lord.

### **In Summary**

All of this is to say that a truly successful minister is one who obeys Jesus' commandment to make disciples, and who knows that repentance, commitment and discipleship are not options for heaven-bound believers. Rather, they are the only authentic expression of saving faith. Therefore, the successful minister preaches a biblical gospel to the unsaved. He calls the unsaved to repent and follow Jesus, and he does not assure the uncommitted of their salvation.