



IV. Once a Disciple Always a Disciple?

"Many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." John 6:66

Once saved always saved? Yes! The Bible is clear that we cannot lose our salvation. There are no good works by which we can earn salvation. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast,"* Ephesians 2:8-9. There is nothing we can do to gain or lose salvation. The good works of not doing bad works cannot save us or keep us saved. Jesus said that no one comes to the Father, but through Him, John 14:6. We cannot get to the Father through ourselves. Jesus promised that He would not cast out the ones who come to Him, John 6:37. He promised that, based on the strength of the Father, no one can snatch us out of His hand, John 10:27-30. In our finite strength, we cannot pull ourselves out of the hand of the infinitely powerful God. We are not holding on to Him. He is holding onto us. Nothing and no one (not even us) can separate us from His love, Romans 8:35-39. When we have believed, we have eternal life as our present possession ... and then we will never face a salvation judgment and we have already passed out of death into life, John 5:24. Saving faith is not a work that saves you anymore than stepping out of a doomed airplane at 5,000 feet saves you. It is the parachute alone that saves you when you step out of that plane. Your stepping out in faith does not save you ... it allows the parachute to save you. Moreover, frantically flapping your arms like a bird as the parachute carries you to safety adds nothing to your salvation. Once saved always saved!

A confusion of terms. *Disciple* and *believer* are not synonyms. Every disciple is a believer. However, not every believer is a disciple. Jesus told Jews who had believed, *"If you continue (abide) in My Word, you are truly disciples of Mine,"* John 8:31-32. Jesus made the state of being His disciple conditioned on continually abiding (being rooted in) His Word. That is not a continuum of good works that earns or keeps our salvation. It is a continuing condition for being His disciple. In addition, Luke 14:25-35 contains more conditions for being His disciple. Jesus stated there that we cannot be His disciples if we do not put Him above all relationships, if we do not put Him above ourselves, if we do not carry our cross, and if we are not willing to give up all for Him. Those good works are not requirements for being saved. These are the requirements for being, and continuing to be, His disciples.

Whose sacrifice and whose work is it? Salvation is solely based on the sacrifice of Christ. His work on the cross fully paid for our sin. Nothing is lacking in His payment. Our good works add nothing to His payment ... or His payment would have to have been insufficient. However, being His disciple is different. We must be believers to be His disciples. Therefore, His work and sacri-

fice continues to be the only foundation for our salvation. However, being His disciple is based on our work and our sacrifice. Being His disciples neither saves us nor keeps us saved ... but being disciples and making disciples is the goal He set forth in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

Multiple uses of the term *disciple*. In heavily persecuted parts of the world, most believers are disciples because they understand the price they must pay by becoming Christian. The terms *disciple* and *believer* could almost be used interchangeably in those places. However, there are other uses of the term *disciple*. Generally speaking, a disciple is more than a casual student of a particular teacher. A disciple is a person who accepts and propagates the teaching of that leader. Many Rabbis in the day of Jesus had disciples, Mark 2:18. Even John the Baptist had disciples, Matthew 9:14, Luke 5:33 & 7:18. In that era, most disciples chose the Rabbi, teacher, or philosopher whom they would follow. Jesus reversed that by choosing His twelve Disciples. That is important because the Twelve (minus Judas, plus Paul) were to become much more than normal disciples ... more than student-followers of Jesus. They were to become His Apostles. They would have a special place in foundation of the household of God, Ephesians 2:19-22. The Gospels' model of His training of the Twelve is more a model of Apostle-making than it is simply a model of discipling. It takes more to make an Apostle than it does to make a disciple. However, His training them demonstrates many principles of discipling. The Twelve were His disciples ... and identified frequently as such in retrospect by the Gospel authors. However, Jesus did not refer to them as His disciples until doing so indirectly on the day before His crucifixion, Matthew 26:18, Mark 14:14, and Luke 22:11. His twelve disciples became the Apostles. Jesus had many other disciples ... i.e., committed and semi-committed student-followers. After Jesus fed the 5,000 (John 6), He stated that He was the living bread that came down out of heaven. "*As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore,*" John 6:66. They were other disciples ... not the Twelve. Possibly, they were just disciples in the terms of His day ... semi-serious student-followers trying to learn from Rabbi Jesus. Then when His teaching got more demanding, they left. They may not have even been believers. However, it seems likely that they were believers who ceased to be disciples. His bread of life message was very unnerving to them. They refused to continue in His Word. They rejected it. They refused to continue to pay the Luke 14 price. Therefore, they withdrew from following Him. They ceased to be His disciples.

Once a disciple not always a disciple. *Once saved always saved* is a Biblical fact. However, continuing as His disciples is based on our continuing work and sacrifice. Being His disciple is not some elitist position in the Body of Christ. It is not a position near the top of the organizational chart of the Kingdom of Heaven. Turn that chart upside down. Being His disciple is near the bottom ... nearest to Christ. It is a demanding life of service and total submission to Him and to His Word.

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