

INTRODUCTION

If you have become a Christian then you are now under a duty to become a disciple. Being a follower of Jesus Christ involves far more than just believing in Him. We can be saved (in the sense of being justified) in a moment. We achieve that by repenting and believing in Jesus. But from that point onwards we need to spend the whole of the rest of our lives learning how to follow Him and obey Him on a daily basis. That requires discipline, which is the root meaning of the word '*disciple*'.

Of course, we are not saved, in the sense of being *justified*, by the quality of our discipleship. Justification is achieved in an instant, by faith alone, not by subsequently being a good disciple. However, being *sanctified*, which is the second part of the overall process of being saved, requires that we live lives of obedience, self-sacrifice and discipline. So, our sanctification does require us to become disciples, and to remain so for the long term.

The point is that Christian character cannot be formed overnight. Neither is it a *gift* that God gives to us. It is a *fruit* which has to be grown. It can only arise as the product of years, and even decades, spent as wholehearted disciples of Jesus. In this book I hope to introduce you to some of the key things that are needed if we are to see our characters change and to become more like Jesus.

So, in chapter one, we shall try to define what a disciple really is. We shall also look realistically at the cost and difficulty that Christian discipleship involves, rather than focusing solely on the benefits, as many churches do.

Then in the remaining chapters we shall examine four vital subjects that we need to grasp if we are to grow as disciples. These are the qualities of thankfulness, faithfulness, truthfulness and forgiveness, i.e. our willingness to forgive others for what they have done to us. These are foundational character qualities, but they are not adequately taught in most churches. Indeed, in many, they are hardly mentioned at all. But they ought to be emphasized strongly, because they play a major part in the whole process of becoming a disciple.

So, by dealing with the above themes my hope is that a Christian will be helped to make a stronger start in their Christian life. Then they will be better placed to tackle a host of other important issues, topics and challenges, many of which are addressed in the remaining books in this series.

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