

7 BIBLICAL SIGNS of TRUE disciples

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NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted.

Summary: *Are you really a true disciple of Christ? Are you sure? How would you find other true disciples? The Bible gives at least 7 identifying signs. Yeshua came to live and die for all mankind, of course – but he also came to prepare disciples. Disciples who would be just like Him and change the world. Learn how Christ continues calling and grooming disciples –and how to identify who they are -- in this 21st century. (This is a completely new sermon, though I gave one with a similar title in June 2004.)*

(Note: instead of “the LORD”, I will often write YHVH or Yehoweh. Instead of “Jesus”, I often revert to the Hebrew name His mama gave Him - - Yeshua, meaning “salvation.”)

Shalom, brothers and sisters, and welcome to Light on the Rock. Welcome, from wherever you are hearing or reading this.

Today let’s talk about being disciples of Jesus Christ, or as I say, ‘Yeshua’, the name His mother – following instructions -- called Him. It means “salvation”.

When someone, in reference to Christ, mentions “the disciples” – what do you think of? The Twelve disciples, right? You probably already know this, but we’ll also show there were far more disciples – hundreds, maybe thousands – than just the twelve. Besides the chosen 12 leading disciples, there were many more.

Remember when Yeshua sent out 70 disciples – and many of them came back thrilled to be able to cast out demons? Yeshua told them to be even happier that their names were written in God’s Book of Life (Luke 10:1, 17-20). So there were far more than just “the 12” male disciples we all hear about.

And wouldn’t you have loved to have been a disciple of Jesus Christ? When I was younger, I often mused on that point and wish I could have seen and heard Yeshua speak, perform miracles, and listen to his teachings. Then, as I got older, I began to realize – no – we’re the ones in the exciting times at the end of the age. And yes, I CAN be a disciple!

If you and I wanted to find other disciples, how would we know if they’re genuine or not? The Bible gives us SIGNS. There are really quite a few. I will have time to cover 7 SIGNS of TRUE disciples of Yeshua the Messiah. And make sure YOU *are* a true disciple! It’s an important topic. There are false ministers and there are false disciples. And true disciples.

And a big point for you: If God called *you* to be a disciple of Christ today, you can be as much a disciple as any of those we’ll be reading about from the Gospels and book of Acts! But let’s be SURE we’re living out the signs GOD said would verify whether we are true disciples or not.

Female Disciples also

But let's clear something up first: Were the disciples only men? If you're still thinking "the 12", you'll say "yes" – but again, remember, there were many followers of Jesus who were female! Just before the Day of Pentecost there were 120 faithful disciples gathered, and some *women* were also there, mentioned by name. So – yes, women were, and can be even today, disciples of Yeshua.

Acts 1:12-17, especially verse 15.

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. 13 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, ***with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.***

15 ***And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty),*** and said..." – and Peter goes on to explain they needed a replacement for the 12th spot of the 12 witnesses of Yeshua's ministry and resurrection, and the lot fell to Matthias.

Then after that, still more women are mentioned by name. **So we know there were many FEMALE disciples** also -- Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, Martha, Mary the sister of Lazarus, and others, like Timothy's mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois; Lydia, Euodia and Syntyche – the first converts in Philippi; **Acts 9:36 calls Tabitha—or Dorcas – actually referred to as a "disciple"** also. Don't forget Priscilla, and Phoebe – the deaconess who delivered the epistle of Romans to the church there.

So as I speak of discipleship, I want women to know they certainly are being fully included in scripture as full disciples. Remember in Christ there is no more male or female (Gal. 3:26-28). Remember that the sisters Mary and Martha followed Christ and they – along with Lazarus – had Him and his disciples stay with them at Martha's house. Do you remember **Mary** the sister of Lazarus, being commended for "*sitting at the feet of Jesus*", *hanging on to his every word*? "Sitting at the feet" was an expression denoting discipleship, being a learner, hanging on His every word, being sure not to miss anything? (**Luke 10:38-42**) She wanted to be his disciple in every way. So ladies, you're disciples too!

The earliest disciples in the strictest sense of the word meant people who *followed* Christ. He calls them to follow him, they drop what they're doing, and they follow Him with NO reservation, no pause, and no delay. (You can read examples in Matthew 4:19; Matthew 9:9). **They begin following a new Master. We can't serve two masters. They become disciples.**

The original disciples did drop everything and followed him.

These early followers are not called anything else but "disciples" in the gospel accounts. They're not referred to as anything else. That's it: "disciples". They're not called "Christians" til many years later in Antioch (Acts 11:26). After the gospel books, they are sometimes called "**believers**" (Acts 5:14; 1 Tim. 4:12; 6:2; 2 Cor. 6:15). The words "disciple" and "disciples" (plural) are used a total of 290 times in the New Testament – so it seems there's some deeper meaning to "disciples" than most people realize; the topic must be important! **Ananias** is called "a disciple" in Acts 9:10; Paul tried to

join the other disciples in Jerusalem but they were afraid of him. **Timothy** is called a “disciple” (Acts 16:1)... so you get the point: “Disciples” goes way beyond the famous “12” disciples.

And you can be Yeshua's disciple today, in the same way that Ananias in Acts 9 or Dorcas were disciples.

The early disciples of Christ – just as today -- were very human: they slept when Jesus asked them to watch and pray; they flee from the armed band who come to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:56), instead of sticking with Him. So they weren't perfect, but they were disciples, nonetheless. But still, God used them to change the world forever. If we learn from them, we too can be a force that changes the world today by God's spirit, for eternity. Or we can end up being disciples in name only.

Don't be a “secret disciple”

There were also SECRET disciples – like **Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus**, who came by night to talk to Yeshua (John 3:1-2). I doubt either of these 2 remained secret for long, and in fact Joseph of Arimathea was the one who collected Jesus' *body and buried it in his own tomb, with help from Nicodemus. But John 19:38-39 says Joseph was a secret disciple. Both were very wealthy men. Nicodemus brought 100 pounds of aloes and myrrh to the burial, which would have cost a fortune!*

Yeshua himself makes it clear to all, that though it is harder for the wealthy to put their business and wealth (and customers) on the line by professing Jesus, they were the two men (and several women) who were there for him at his death and burial. If you're wealthy and reading/hearing this, I admonish again: don't be a secret disciple. You can gain the whole world and lose a much bigger reward by being “ashamed” to tie yourself publicly with your Savior.

Notes on Joseph of Arimathea:

Joseph of Arimathea was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50) and was a disciple (Matthew 27:57; John 19:38), though secretly. When we compare Luke 23:51 and Mark 14:64, it appears he was not present at Yeshua's illegal trial. He went from being “secret” to going confidently before Pilate to beg for the body of our Master. He himself removed Yeshua's body from the cross. By the way, crucifixions were usually just 2-3 feet above the ground, not 10-15 feet above, as movies would have you believe. Then Joseph brought the body and laid him in his own tomb, fulfilling Isaiah 53:9. Tradition says he had extensive tin mines in England and later was sent there and to Ireland by Philip.

I guess these 2 men made their belief in Jesus a matter of public record with this act of openly caring for our Master's body. Nicodemus, “a ruler of the Jews”, appears to have been quite wealthy – as was Joseph of Arimathea – for it says in John 19:39 that Nicodemus brought 100 pounds of *aloes and myrrh for the burial. That would have been very, very costly.*

So don't be a secret disciple of our Savior. In that day, a disciple of a particular leader or rabbi was PROUD of his master or teacher and proud to be a follower. He would tell everyone! But remember that Yeshua WARNS us all that we can't be a half-hearted follower. **If we're ashamed of being a Christian, Yeshua says he will be ashamed of us** before his Father and the angels (Luke 9:26).

ARE you ashamed to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Do your neighbors and friends know you are a disciple of Yeshua? If it was a crime to be a follower of Christ – and someday it might be – would there be enough evidence to convict you?

If you really understood what it means to be a disciple, you would not be able to contain it inside you! ***So now YOU have been chosen as a modern day disciple.*** That's very special. Out of billions and billions ever born, you were chosen by God our Father in heaven and the son of God – Jesus Christ -- to be his son, his disciple, a child of the Highest, and to be part of the first fruits being called now. Perhaps you may even become a part of the Bride of Christ.

Where are you from? It hardly matters. If YHVH has called you, the great “I am who I am” has written your name His Book of Life. Hallelujah! Few have been offered what you have been offered. Value it, love it, cherish being a disciple. Your name is in the eternal “Dream Team” of heaven. We must not treat it lightly nor be ashamed of it. If we're ashamed of being a Christian, He will be ashamed of us. That's what Yeshua warns in Luke 9:26.

THE HISTORICAL “DISCIPLES” of Rabbis

We've already seen that disciples **put their calling ahead of anything else in their lives**. They were willing to deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow him. We also have seen disciples were **open about believing in Jesus**. They didn't try to hide it. If you are hiding it, sooner or later you'll have to decide to come out of the Christian closet – or lose out on what you've been called to be.

But before looking at more of the Biblical signs of discipleship, let me review HISTORICALLY what disciples were like, how they lived and what they did. It's a far cry from our western civilization view of “discipleship”.

In the book “Sitting at the feet of Rabbi Jesus”, by Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg, chapter 2, the authors point out that disciples in Yeshua's day were **expected to know their teacher's words by heart**. Many rabbis had followers or disciples. The disciples of Yeshua called him “Rabbi” on numerous occasions (see Matthew 26:49; Mark 9:5; 11:21; John 1:49; 4:31; 9:2 and so on).

The word “rabbi” literally means “my Master” – or even, in Hebrew word picture, it means “My Great one”. It traditionally came to mean “teacher”. Teachers of scripture were called “Rabbi” as an act of respect. The term did not come into formal use until after the temple's destruction in 70 AD, according to this book. Yeshua later taught his disciples, including you and me, that we ourselves should never be called “rabbi” – Matthew 23:7-8.

Every sabbath, the synagogues would have a member of the congregation read the designated part of the Torah or other scriptures. “Torah” – though interpreted as “law”, is understood as “teachings” or “instruction” among the Hebrews. Someone who was not Torah-observant would never have been invited inside a synagogue, let alone to teach and speak there. And we know Yeshua never sinned, so obviously He was Torah-observant; at least the written part of Torah.

Yeshua did spar frequently with the Pharisees over their traditions – the so-called “oral law” that Moses supposedly passed on orally to the 70 elders. But please note, scripture tells us clearly that Moses wrote everything down God had told him. According to Exodus 24, there was no such thing as hidden, secret traditions reserved only for the elite elders. Those of you who think the Mishna or Talmud are equivalent in value to the Bible itself, read this carefully:

Exodus 24:3-4

"So Moses came and told the people [not just the elders] ALL the words of YHVH and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which YHVH has said we will do."

4 And Moses WROTE ALL the words of YHVH. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel."

Did you get that? ALL YHVH's words were written down for all of us to read. ALL the words! So that's what I go by as well – the written word of God, not the traditions and "oral law". To my Jewish friends and to many "Messianics": remember Yeshua *rejected* much of the oral law. That's our example. Exodus 24:4 says the long-held belief that Moses recorded in writing only *some* of God's words and kept a large part of God's instruction "secret" – just for the elders – is nonsense. It's the rabbis' way of trying to exert power; to claim they have special knowledge not available to the masses.

Anyway, in the synagogues, rabbis would also have been asked to teach – hence we see Yeshua, Paul and other rabbis speaking in the synagogues.

Studying the scriptures was considered a highest form of worship among Jews, sometimes even above prayer. Jews of Yeshua's day saw prayer as us talking to God, but they saw scripture study as God talking to us.

Learning – is for Transformation – not just Information

The best rabbis went way beyond just teaching the way of God. They were supposed to have absorbed Torah so much that they *embodied* Torah. So early disciples of rabbis were expected to copy everything their Teacher did. People studied, not just words – but the life of their leader; not just to glean *information* – **but to be transformed to think and act more and more like their Teacher**. *Being a learner, a disciple, meant learning from what their leader DID, not just what was said.*

In our western world we put so much emphasis on information – instead of its purpose: to get to know our Leader and be transformed. Do you seek information, or transformation? Romans 12:1-2 says we are to seek having our minds renewed, transformed.

So often we are fascinated by teachers who always have some new thing – like the ancient Greeks – *but we should rather be fascinated by teachers who bring us to a closer walk with our Savior, who show us things that transform us, that change us, that make us more like HIM.*

So next time you're fascinated by some new information – ask yourself: but how is this information transforming me? How is it leading me to Christ or to a closer walk with my Abba/dear Father?

So disciples literally apprenticed themselves "to a rabbi because the rabbi had saturated his life with Scripture and had become a true follower of God. *The disciple sought to study the text, not only of Scripture but of the rabbi's life, for it was there that he would learn to live out the Torah. Even more than acquiring his master's knowledge, he wanted to acquire his master's character, his internal grasp of God's law*" (Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus, chapter 2, emphasis mine).

We need to emphasize that we study not just for information, but transformation. That was the essence of discipleship among Jews of Jesus' day. We're going to read many scriptures that define it down even much more... and I'll tell you right now, it goes *way beyond* just keeping the sabbath as a sign of God's people. It goes way beyond the sign He gave that His disciples would be loving one another

(John 13:34-35) in the same way as he loves us. Those signs are huge, of course, but there's much more than that.

So let's now get into **the 7 more SIGNS that Scripture** says will define us as true disciples. I've already discussed the fact we should openly confess Him as our Leader and Savior and not be secret disciples, or ashamed of being a believer in Jesus Christ. If you are, how can you really be a disciple?

7 BIBLICAL SIGNS OF DISCIPLESHIP

1. A TRUE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST MUST PROFOUNDLY BELIEVE IN HIM and what He did and who He is. A true disciple of Christ is first and foremost a firm BELIEVER.

I can't imagine being a genuine disciple of anybody – unless you profoundly believe in him. A true disciple realizes Yeshua was the WORD (John 1:1-3) who spoke all things into existence – except man and woman, whom He personally fashioned and breathed HIS breath, something of God, into the man – and by extension, the woman – who was formed from man. We know Yeshua was the One who spoke "Let there be light". Yeshua was the One who came as the Son of God and took ALL your sins upon himself, once and for forever. Read that in Hebrews 10:10-13.

Yeshua is the Holy One who is perfect and is willing to live His life again in you.

But we have to believe in HIM. A disciple accepts him as your personal Savior. A disciple believes so deeply in Him that a love bond is growing more and more deeply each day.

John 5:38-40

"But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."

One of the early descriptives of the disciples after we get past the Gospels, was – "believer". (Acts 5:14; 2 Cor. 6:15; 1 Tim. 4:12; 6:2). Believe what? That Christ was God in the flesh, the son of God, and that He lived a perfect life and offered his life to pay your and my sin debt, and that He loves you and wants to save you from the penalty of sin. It means you believe in the finished work of our Master, who sat down on the throne of Grace with His Father. He sat down because he finished that sacrificial work once and for all time, for forever.

If that's not clear to you, go back and read Hebrews 10:9-14 several times, then Romans 8:1-5 several times. Our sin nature will remain until we are changed. That sin nature will continue to give us wrong thoughts - - especially if we're feeding the sin nature more than the new nature we have been given. We now have 2 natures inside us – God's new nature and the old nature. A true disciple understands that our old nature is still there but sin no longer has dominion over us and Christ came to remove the power of sin in our lives. He condemned the condemnation of sin, once we believe in him. Again, read Hebrews 10:9-14 and Romans 8:1-3 (especially verse 3) carefully if that's not clear.

This in turn gives believers tremendous hope, joy and removes the constant depression of having failed so much. In Jesus there is JOY unlimited when we realize what he fully did. He died and paid for our sins, yes – but he also destroyed the power of sin to condemn the people of God. There is NO longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who now walk after the spirit and not after the flesh (Romans 8:1). Read it. Believe it. True believers understand this and rejoice over it!

And do we have to re-quote John 3:16-18 – “....that whosoever BELIEVES IN HIM should not perish but have everlasting life.”

True modern-day disciples believe in Him so much that this is what they mostly think about and want to share the word to others. The point of all preaching should ultimately be to draw people to a believing relationship with their Messiah. Those true believers then become as ONE body.

John 17:20-21

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

The point of doing any “work of God” is ultimately to help people come to believe in Christ. Period. It's about bringing people to a one-on-one introduction to their King and Master! Everything else is secondary. ALL other information is SECONDARY. We are to bring people to meet their Savior so they too can believe in Him and be saved.

John 6:29

Jesus answered and said to them, "THIS is the work of God, that you BELIEVE in Him whom He sent."

1 John 5:13

These things I have written to you **who believe in the name of the Son of God**, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

In **Acts 8:34-40**, Philip was explaining the book of Isaiah chapter 53 to an Ethiopian eunuch – but with what purpose: to show who Jesus was and what he did! When the eunuch wanted to be baptized, what did it come down to? Go back and read it in Acts 8:37—“If you believe with all your heart that Jesus is the son of God, you may be baptized”.

Are we getting that?

2. THAT profound BELIEF in Christ, AS we've already been saying, is transforming true disciples to be people who talk, live and act more and more like Christ.

It's about TRANSFORMATION, NOT just INFORMATION.

Luke 6:40

“A DISCIPLE is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will BE LIKE his teacher”.

Paul talked about helping the Galatian brethren grow “UNTIL CHRIST IS FORMED in you” (Galatians 4:19).

There you have it! (also Matthew 10:25). TRUE DISCIPLES ARE LIVING LIKE CHRIST MORE AND MORE. If you and I are not becoming more like our teacher, are we a disciple? Luke 6:40—“a disciple ...will be like his teacher.”

This is why I was talking earlier about transformation – and not just information. Being a disciple was not just about learning someone's teachings – but becoming like him.

Disciples in the days when Christ walked the earth, watched their leader carefully and mimicked everything he did. The rabbi didn't just teach the Way we should go, but showed them how to live, and the way we should go. *Disciples were learning by watching his life, his actions, even more than it was by hearing the words he preached.* Rabbis would live alongside their disciples - - often for years – until a deep bond and relationship was formed.

Fellow members of the body of Christ, this is what our lives are all about: it's about *RELATIONSHIP* that is possible only by us having a life that is in the process of being completely transformed. When we are in a strong relationship with our Maker is when we'll "see" and grasp so much more about what He is like. Transformation starts to happen. We're starting to talk, live, and act more like Him all our waking hours. And yes, it will take time. It is a process. All of life is first about having a deep abiding loving relationship with God. And second, a profoundly deep abiding loving relationship with people, all of whom are created in God's image.

What's my point? Besides coming to live and die for mankind, ***Yeshua also came to raise up disciples – including us 21st century disciples*** – who are people who are becoming just like HIM! This is what Paul meant when he said he wanted nothing more than to know HIM and the power of HIS resurrection. HIS – Christ's resurrection. What did he mean by that? He meant we disciples must let him live again, this time in us. The resurrected Jesus is to be walking the earth again, but this time, through you and me as we witness – not just with words – but with changed and changing lives that speak far more powerfully than our words do! And yes, I preach to myself. I must be changing too. And I know a lot of changing must yet happen.

This is why I repent a lot and ask Yeshua to *live again* in me. This is what is behind Paul's inspired words in Philippians and Galatians. He wanted nothing more than to experience the risen Christ and HIS resurrection inside him (Phil 3:9-11 – "that I may know him and the power of HIS resurrection"). Paul also wanted nothing more – Gal 2:20 – than to nail his old self to the cross and let the risen Messiah now live inside him. Unless that happens, we will fail.

Only Jesus can be perfectly like Jesus. I can follow, I can mimic, I can learn – but in the end, I want YESHUA, my Jesus, your Jesus, to live in me again by His Spirit. He wants to live and walk on earth again – this time in me and in you. If we ask Him to, He will. If we get ourselves out of the way, He will. If we believe in Him and claim Him as our life, He will! And then when we pray to our heavenly father, we can truly come "in Jesus' name" – and that is whom our Father sees and hears!

As disciples, we are seeking not just to know the Bible, God's book – but to know the AUTHOR!

John 5:38-40

But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.

39 *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.*

40 *But you are not willing to come to Me* that you may have life.

"DISCIPLE" MEANS "LEARNER. A REAL disciple is learning about His Master in every way. He knows the DETAILS about his Master and follows him implicitly. A true disciple wants to become like his master in every way.

Quoting from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia for “disciple”:

The **GREEK** means (*mathetes*), “a learner,” from *manthano*, “to learn”: The word is found in the Bible only in the Gospels and Acts. But it is good Greek, in use from Herodotus down, and *always means the pupil of someone*, in contrast to the master or teacher (*didaskalos*). See Matt 10:24; Luke 6:40. *In all cases it implies that the person not only accepts the views of the teacher, but that he is also in practice an adherent. The word has several applications. In the widest sense it refers to those who accept the teachings of anyone, not only in belief but in LIFE.* [We would say today, they not only talk the talk, but walk the walk.] *It is the only name used for Christ's followers in the Gospels.*”

Our **English** word “disciple” comes from the Latin word “*discipulus*” – meaning “a scholar”. But that implies BOOK learning – and not transformation. Our Bible study is to primarily teach us how to be more and more like Him. Remember John 5 – you search the scriptures, for in them you think is life. But you won’t come to ME that you may have life.”

When you study God’s word, pray about it first. Ask God to open your mind to see Christ in the verses you’re reading, and to help it *transform* you. Pray for a closer relationship with God and to be more and more like Christ. **Matthew 11:29** —“Take my yoke upon you and learn from ME....”

Many like to quote the verse in 2 Peter 3:18 about “growing in grace and *knowledge*”—and miss the *rest* of the verse: “grow in grace and knowledge OF OUR LORD Jesus Christ...”

Jesus – Yeshua – is the living word of God. HE wrote that book. If we remember that the Israelites had to gather their bread from heaven – the manna – first thing in the morning, this should be a good prod for us to also gather the true Bread from Heaven in prayer and study every morning.

3. **TRUE DISCIPLES Obey and DO what their MASTER SAYS to do.**

John 8:30-31—

As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. 31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ***“IF YOU ABIDE IN MY WORD, you are My disciples indeed.”***

Abiding in his word – not human tradition. Not what you’ve always thought you’ve heard. Not what you think the Bible says – but it actually does teach! What His Word actually says!

Another translation says: John 8:31-32--Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples *if you keep obeying my teachings.*

So there we have another definition of “disciple”:

1 John 2:3-6

“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked”

Here’s where the rubber meets the road. Are we seeing growth in our desire to obey God-- in the areas especially that are PET sins? What command are we still refusing to obey? What SIN do we

coddle and hide? What is our bowl of lentils for which we could give up everything? We all have them... and need to understand in the end, true disciples are obedient, they are obeyers.

Yes we stumble. Yes we still fail to walk the walk from time to time. I have, you have. But a true disciple keeps getting back on the right path and back in tune with the Master after we have failed. Thanks be to God that He's patient with us.

Very simply believe God's word on this point. Yes, we must obey. A believer follows His master on everything.

1 John 5:1-3

"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. 2 ***By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.*** 3 For ***this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.***"

Remember when Jesus was being tempted by Satan? He said we need to 'LIVE BY every word of God' (Matthew 4:4). Every word. By the whole Bible – from Genesis to maps and everything in between the first cover page and maps.

Don't pick and choose what you want to decide to keep and obey. For example: Husbands – yes we are to love our wives. Wives, yes you are to submit yourself and obey your husband. He is your head. I know that sounds old fashioned... but then again husbands, you and I are to be examples of the love of Christ in our marriages, gentle and patient and loving.

Others believe we don't need to ever discipline our children. Scripture says otherwise and mentions the "rod of correction" and Paul discusses that in Hebrews as well.

It says to pray for our leaders and "the king" and to honor him. But I hear Christians who disagree with their president saying very dishonorable things. My point is – learn what the book says by diligently studying it, to help you become more like Christ – *and* to help you DO what it says. You can't do what it says if you don't know what's in there.

What are our secret sins? You know, the sins we put up with that we know are wrong? I've got 'em, and you've got 'em. *It's time to give those up.* Is it the secret sex sins or things on internet? Or drinking to excess? What are they? They've got to go!

Yeshua says you know true ministers by their fruits (read Matthew 7:15-16, 21-23). Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom, but those who do the will of the Father in heaven. Those who practice lawlessness (no law), to them Christ will say "I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness." (Matthew 7:23).

The 12 were to go to all nations and make disciples (KJV- teach) and teach them "**to observe** (to do) all things that I have commanded you...." (Matthew 28:19-20). God's way of life was in fact called "the Way". It IS a way of life – a life of obedience.

4. **True disciples have a profoundly DEEP Love for one another, a love that is just like the love Jesus has for us. Frankly, the church is largely failing on this point so far.**

John 13:34-35 –

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; *as I have loved you*, that you also love one another. **By this all will know that you are My disciples, IF** you have love for one another."

Isn't it wonderful to visit a home where you can feel the love the husband and wife have for each other, where the children and parents love to be with each other? God's household must be the same – or those who aren't that way are probably not part of that household.

This deep agape love that disciples have becomes so obvious and evident to onlookers that they may even want to find out how we have that deep concern and caring for one another. (Story of sister of a disciple. "I want you to do for me what you did for her" – and I assured her that it was what JESUS did for her, not what I did for her. But the sister was impressed by the change she saw in the loving nature of her sister now that she had become a disciple)

Unfortunately, what we see among so-called believers is different. We see ministers who ban their flock from visiting other ministries. All too often we have infighting, politicking, bickering, gossiping, backbiting, striving for position. We have pastors who are being lords over their flock, ruling the flock of GOD like a tyrant. Read Ezekiel 33 sometime. And praise Yah (God) that there are some ministers who are beginning to see the light and allow their flock to mingle with other sheep from other flocks of God. Even Yeshua said, "I have sheep who are not of this flock... The time is coming when there will be one flock, and one shepherd" (**John 10:16**). Lord, hasten that day.

Those who divide and seek personal advantage and who tear apart the people of God -- are not true believers. By this very sign Yeshua gave, they cannot be.

I recommend you hear the series I gave that started in Oct 2009 about the **One Body of Christ**. It's time for us to all come together. We should not let some differences of opinion or belief keep us apart. You can't read the books of Romans and Corinthians, for example, without realizing there were deep seated differences of beliefs among the brethren. Some were saying there would be no resurrection. Others were teaching we should all be vegetarians...and on and on... but my point is: they were all part of the body of Christ!

People will know we are the true followers of Christ – when they see us truly following Christ, including His life of self-sacrifice and deep affection to care for his followers. This is possible when we also learn to forgive as he forgave us. This oneness is possible only when we are filled with the Spirit of God, desiring oneness, desiring unity, desiring to get along and desiring to overlook annoying things about one another – and seeing Christ in each person, instead.

Notice again what it says in John 13:34-35 – we are to love one another, Yeshua said, "**AS I have loved you.**" That was a very patient love. That was loving us while we were yet sinners. If we are loving one another "AS" He did, we would love one another even when they have irritating quirks. Remember on the cross how Yeshua even asked God to forgive his executioners? That's the kind of love we are to have. It's a love that prays for those who are slandering us. It's a love that blesses those who say bad things about us (Matthew 5:44-48). *It's easy to love the lovable. It's easy to be loving to those we like, or who treat us nicely, but we've been called to something much higher than that.*

Matthew 5:43-47

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,
 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?
 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

So we have our work cut out. Start by really loving those who do love you most – right in your own home. It's time for believers to quit divorcing. It's time for believers to have loving homes – and from there, extend that love to everyone. When we have the love of God in us, we will be one, just like Christ and the Father (John 17:20-23). That love and unity is possible only when we are “in Christ”. Read it for yourself in John 17:20-23. Jesus even goes on to say, in verses 25-26 of John 17:

“O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, *that the LOVE with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.*”

5. TRUE DISCIPLES ARE BEARING MUCH FRUIT. They're changing. Their life has meaning and purpose, useful to God and man.

John 15:7-8

*“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, **that you bear MUCH fruit; SO you will be my disciples.**”*

The New Living translation says: John 15:8 -- “MY TRUE DISCIPLES PRODUCE MUCH FRUIT. This brings great glory to my Father”

Realize what its saying -- true disciples don't just bear fruit, but bear **MUCH** fruit. And we will, if we are letting the first 4 points live in our lives, and especially if we are being transformed by the divine presence of Messiah in our hearts. The fruit is brought about by HIS active living in us.

Fruit is not the same as growth. Bearing fruit is NOT the same thing as growing. Growth -- spiritual growth – is good, is needed. ***Growth must happen before there can be fruit.*** But if all we have is growth, a bunch of green leaves -- that won't be enough. Do you remember the fig tree that Yeshua cursed because it had no fruit? It had ample growth -- but no fruit!

What is fruit? Of course there is the “fruit of the Spirit” described in Galatians 5. The fruit is the evidence the holy spirit is working in our lives and that we are the body of Christ. The fruit is shown in productive ways in our lives – ways that help, build up, serve and feed people's needs. *Fruit is something the tree GIVES to others and for others.* Fruit gives. Fruit sustains. Fruit nourishes, strengthens and gives life. Our LIVES need to become lives that do all the above: giving, sharing, sustaining others, feeding, building up, strengthening, as we serve and share what God has done so bountifully for us.

So of course “fruit” also refers to the fruit of the spirit. It’s one fruit with many aspects. But think also of your fruit as being shown by things you do to help others and provide for others. That’s what fruit does.

Look at your fruit basket. How full is it? if we don't bear ANY fruit, we're going to be cut down and burned. If we are bearing fruit, we'll be pruned to bear more fruit. The Vine Dresser is God the Father. He is watching us – like one would watch a vineyard. He wants optimal fruit.

Some years ago we took a tour of some wineries – and we learned a lot about vineyards and grapevines. One thing we learned is that too much sun and water produces a lot of fruit, but not the best fruit. The Vine dresser told us that grape vines put down the deepest and strongest roots when it is experiencing some hardship - - maybe a lack of rain for a time. I immediately thought of trials God allows us to go thru knowing we will do what it takes to get through the tough times during that time period of trial....and we will bear good fruit at the end of it all.

Our periods of greatest growth – and then fruit – are often the times after we’ve “been through hell” in our lives. I say it that way to make my point. Don’t totally object to the “hellish” times of your life. You’re praying more during those times. Maybe check out my sermon a few months ago on why we are allowed to go through so much pain and anguish.

OK, so it's fine and dandy to say we have to have fruit, so HOW do we bear much fruit?

John 15:1-5

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; *and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.* 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. ***He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.***" – ***any more than a branch by itself can bear fruit by itself.***

Did you notice the “abiding in me” – the importance again of daily Bible study and praying always, all through the day, and hanging on to our Master? Read my blog about “Praying Always”.

On your own, read Matthew 13:18-23. The parable of the sower for another tip on fruit-bearing.

The good seed are the children of the kingdom. Different possibilities are offered and described. That which bore the most fruit was good soil -- has a mind and heart characterized as “good ground” – receptive hearts – hears and understands the word.

We don’t want to be stony ground – the shallow people who can’t bear with any hard times; or thorny ground – those distracted by cares of this life and pursuing other goals...we want to be good ground.

But think about this: Ground is what it is, until someone works with it. Ground can't change all by itself. Outside influence usually makes a ground better or worse. In the same way, we are what we are – until God works in us. If we’re **thorny** ground, or rocky ground, or barren ground or any kind of ground but ‘GOOD ground’ - - we better recognize it. Ground can’t change itself. Here’s a point we need to consider:

When we recognize we’re not bearing fruit, perhaps our ground – our reception – is thorny or rocky or shallow. ***We need to pray for the GROUNDSMAN, the Sower, to come break up the rocks***

in our ground, to rip out the thorns in our lives SO we can have fruit. But beware! God likes to answer prayer! But we must become good ground – people who receive God's word, understand it, want to learn, want to grasp it, and let it sink in.

A person who is full of godly fruit is a humble person -- like an apple branch heavy with fruit, its branches full of apples hang down low to the ground. ***Remember too, that fruit is for the benefit for others. Be watching for a full-fledged sermon on Bearing Fruit of the Spirit next May-June 2014, God willing.***

If our basket of fruit is empty – or just 2-3 fruit in there – then we're not abiding in the Vine (Christ) enough. "He who abides in Me, and I in him, shall bear much fruit." See how all these points overlap?

6. A true disciple loves Christ more than anything else and stays loyal to Him to the end.

Luke 14:26-33

26 ***"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate [love less than Christ] his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*** 27 And whoever does not **bear his cross and come after Me** cannot be My disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, ***whether he has enough to finish it*** -- 29 lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. 33 ***So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has [and in context: endure to the end] cannot be My disciple.***

Jesus said if we are to really follow him, we must take up our cross daily, deny ourselves and follow him (**Luke 9:23; Matthew 16:24**). To the end. Let that sink in. How are we doing so far? I like to think of myself as a disciple – but have I really dropped everything, proven by the fact that my focus, my priority each day, is to draw closer to my Master? Am I really denying myself, then taking up my cross daily and following him? How about you?

Luke 9:23

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

I recommend you hear the sermons I gave on Gal. 2:20 for more on this point of crucifying yourself. You can find them in 2007 – **March 2007, May and June 2007.** "I am Crucified with Christ".

Galatians 2:20

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Crosses are not very convenient, not very nice, not very beautiful. They wouldn't feel good, or make us look good. I speak as a fool. The early disciples were often killed. Remember James was beheaded. So was Paul. We're coming to a time of greatest trouble the world has ever seen. I hope we're getting spiritually and mentally ready for it. Those who endure to the end will be saved.

7. TRUE DISCIPLES ALSO HAVE another SIGN: they keep the 7th day Sabbath and the annual sabbaths.

Many miss this point, thinking the sabbath is only for the Jews or Israelites. Remember the sabbath was made by God at creation and given as a gift to Adam and Eve (**Gen. 2:1-2**) – the forefathers of all humanity. This was done at creation, long before Mt. Sinai. Yeshua taught that **the sabbath “was made for man” – not just the Jews (Mark 2:27).**

We are “the Israel of God” today (Gal. 6:16). We today are the spiritual Jews, spiritual Israelites (**Romans 2:27-28**). It is clear Paul kept the sabbath. Jesus certainly kept it as originally intended though he broke their Pharisaical *traditions* about the sabbath.

The sabbath was a sign YHVH gave – along with circumcision at the time – of being the covenant people.

Exodus 31:13

"Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: '**Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign** between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am YHVH who sanctifies you.

Exodus 31:16-17

“Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.

17 It is a SIGN between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days Yehoweh made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed."

Ezekiel 20:12 (also verse 20)

“Moreover I also gave them **My Sabbaths, to be a SIGN between them and Me**, that they might know that I am YHVH who sanctifies them.”

It's interesting to me that those who continued to keep sabbath have not lost their identity. Jews know who they are. The other so-called “lost tribes of Israel” never returned to sabbath keeping and they've lost their identity. Some of us believe they are the USA/UK and northwestern Europe, Canada and Australia. But these nations don't keep sabbath – and have lost their sign.

The other sign given to Israel was circumcision – but that is kept today by “circumcision of the heart” (**Romans 2:28-29; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4**). So there too, is a sign – but it means conversion, it means opening ourselves up to God and letting Him come into our hearts. And I realize also that Abraham was given the promised covenant with God while Abraham was still uncircumcised (Genesis 15, Romans 4:9-12. But he believed God and so it was credited to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6).

Now back to the sabbath as a sign. If you think it really is just for Israel, and that for the rest of us there are only nine commandments (because you want to remove the 4th commandment), please read this passage, about Gentiles in the Millennium and how **THEY** will be blessed as **THEY** keep sabbath:

Isaiah 56:3-7

Do not let the son of the **foreigner** Who has joined himself to YHVH Speak, saying, "YHVH has utterly separated me from His people"; Nor let the eunuch say, "Here I am, a dry tree."
4 For thus says YHVH: "To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant,

5 Even to them I will give in My house And within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

6 **"Also the sons of the foreigner** who join themselves to YHVH, to serve Him, And to love the name of YHVH, to be His servants — **Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,** And holds fast My covenant —

7 **Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer.** Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a **house of prayer for all nations."**

If you have questions about whether or not we are to keep the 7th Day sabbath today, please hear my 3 part series on that subject. **Go to January 2008 and March 2008 to hear that series about which day is the sabbath today.**

So if you're looking for true disciples, they will acknowledge that the sabbath day is still to be kept today. Remember that Yehoweh said in Lev 23:1-3 that the weekly sabbath was but one of the sabbaths of God. There were also annual holydays, which are annual sabbaths. Those also must be kept, or you aren't keeping the sabbaths of God. There are 10 commandments, not just nine. One of them is to observe and keep the 7th day as a holy sabbath to God. God doesn't change. But beware: there are a lot of sabbath keepers who are not true disciples – if they aren't obeying the rest of God's word, or loving their brethren. True disciples have all 7 points.

SO WHAT ARE THE PROOFS, THE SIGNS OF A TRUE, MODERN DISCIPLE:

1. True disciples absolutely believe in their leader and confess Him openly.
2. True disciples are being transformed. They are talking, living, acting and doing more and more like Christ. All their information is to help in the transformation.
3. True disciples obey what they read in God's word.
4. True disciples are deeply loving people. They quickly forgive people and everyone sees their joyful love and kindness, especially among other believers, but to all mankind.
5. True disciples are changing, are bearing much fruit.
6. True disciples will endure to the end and love Christ more than anyone or anything else.
7. True disciples also keep the 7th day sabbath.

We've been called by God and Yeshua to be his disciples. What an honor! It's very special. Very few are being called right now. You have been. Cherish that calling.

Now let's be sure we act and look like, and are, those disciples – just as identifiable today as they would have been in the days the book of Acts and the gospels were written. With God's help – and helping each other grow – we can be disciples God is well pleased with today. We've slipped a ways in the last few years – but we can wake up and get back in the life of being a disciple.

What an awesome reward you and I will have, if we will respond to this call to become true disciples of Jesus Christ.

All for now, have a wonderful day – modern-day disciples! It's an honored calling!

This is Philip Shields, saying "til next time, God be with you always".