

True Disciples

John 8: 30-32 As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

*31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, **“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,***

32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Synopsis:

If you are a true believer in Jesus today, or if you are an unbeliever, or if you are a phony believer, thinking you believe when you don't, these words of Jesus are meant for you.

Introduction:

As the Pastor of LifeSpring Bible Church, I have worked to consistently convey to the congregation that we exist to create disciples of Christ.

This ideology is at the core of all the preaching and teaching in this fellowship.

With this in mind, let's consider our passage of scripture.

There are five questions that this verse raises — all are crucial for our life:

1. What does it mean to “truly be Jesus’s disciples”?

Verse 31: “Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.’”

What this phrase **“truly my disciples”** implies is that there are disciples who are not truly disciples.

The word **“truly”** means **“really”** — **“really my disciples.”**

In other words, there are real and unreal disciples.



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There are authentic and inauthentic disciples.

There is discipleship that is merely outward, and discipleship that goes down to the root.

The world is not just divided into two groups: disciples of Jesus and non-disciples.

It is divided into three groups:

- A. Non-disciples, people who make no pretense of following Jesus,**
- B. Unreal disciples, people that say they follow him and have only a superficial connection with him,**
- C. Real disciples — people who truly follow him.**

Why?

Because not all belief is real.

Why did Jesus bring up this distinction?

The hard truth is, it's disturbing and upsetting.

It makes us uncomfortable and forces us to ask ourselves the question, which one are we?

Jesus brought it up because *verse 30* says, ***“As he was saying these things, many believed in him.”***

There had been a large response to what he was teaching.

And whenever there is a large response to anything, as you may guess, that some are being carried along by the crowd.

If your friends are going, it's easy for you to go, even if you wouldn't go on your own.

You are along for the ride.



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Jesus knows that all belief is not real.

What he does is He provides a test that we can use to see if we are real.

Verse 31: “Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.’”

And in giving us this test Jesus helps us be real.

It is not just a test of reality.

It is a pathway to reality.

We have many examples in God’s word of Christ’s knowledge of man.

***John 2: 23-26 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.
24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people
25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.***

John 6:26 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

John 20: 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

He meant that this Gospel of John was written not just to awaken faith in non-disciples, but also to wake up people who think they are disciples but aren’t, and to help those who are real disciples confirm their reality and be stronger in their faith.

So, John’s Gospel was written to create faith as well as maintain it.

Rest assured that we are in one of those three categories.

We need to let Jesus diagnose for us which we are, and then move toward reality of being a true disciple.

So, what then is a true disciple?

Or what does Jesus mean by saying in **verse 31, “You are truly my disciples”?**

Let’s be crystal clear here: For Jesus “true disciple” is the same as “true Christian” or “true believer.”

Jesus is not saying that “true disciple” is a second stage in the Christian life.

First believer, and then later you attain the level of disciple.

There have been ministries who teach that way.

First, you’re an unbeliever, then you are a believer, then you grow into a disciple, and then you are a disciple-maker.

That is not what Jesus taught.

One piece of evidence for saying this is to note the words he uses here in **verse 31: “Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.’”**

He didn’t say, “If you abide in my word, *you will become* truly my disciples.”

In other words, he did not teach that being a true disciple was a later stage after believing.

No.

He said, **“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.”**

Now that you have believed, here is how you can know what you now are.



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You can know if your belief is real: you *are now* my true disciples if you go on abiding in my word.

So, there is no thought here about “true discipleship” being a second stage of Christian maturity.

True disciple means true believer or true Christian or true follower.

It means, for example, truly forgiven for your sins.

Look at **verse 24**: ***“I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”***

He’s saying, if you do believe in me, you won’t die in your sins.

Why not?

What happens to my sins?

They are forgiven, taken away.

Back in **John 1: 29**, Jesus is called ***“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”***

How does he do that?

He tells us in **John 10: 15**, ***“I lay down my life for the sheep.”***

So, Jesus takes our place, and receives God’s punishment of death which we deserved, which means that the wrath of God is totally removed from us.

And instead of getting wrath from God, we get life and adoption from God because of the death of Jesus.

Listen to this amazing scripture about God’s wrath in **John 3: 36**, ***“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”***



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But if you have believed — truly believed — God’s wrath does not remain on you.

Never again will you taste it.

Ever!

So, a true disciple is a true Christian, a true believer.

His sins are truly forgiven; the wrath of God never again rests on him.

He has true eternal life.

He is one of Jesus’s sheep, and no one can pluck him out of his hand.

He is no longer a slave but a son of God.

That’s what it means to be a true disciple.

To be saved from sin.

Rescued from the wrath of God.

And already in the enjoyment of eternal life.

2. What is Jesus referring to by the phrase “my word”?

John 8: 31, “If you abide in **my word**, you are truly my disciples.”

“If you want to know Jesus, you can know him through his word.”

Notice that the word is singular, “my word,” not “my words.”

This means that Jesus is thinking of the sum of all that he has taught.

We could leave it at that: Jesus means “abide in the sum of all that Jesus taught.”



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But my guess is that Jesus wants us to ponder what the sum of that word is.

And surely the answer to that is: He is the sum of his word.

All his words in one way or another draw our attention to him.

Words like:

“I am the bread of life” (John 6: 35).

“I am the light of the world” (John 8 12).

“I am not of this world” (John 8: 23).

“I am the good shepherd” (John 10: 11).

“I am in the Father” (John 10 38).

“I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11: 25).

When you take all his words together, they have one great focus — Jesus himself.

“These are written — all these words are written — so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20: 31).

They all point to him.

A. All Jesus’s Words Point to Him

Which is why when you get to **chapter 15**, Jesus can say, not only “abide in *my word*,” but “abide in *me*.” ***“If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch” (John 15: 6).***

So the answer to our second question would be: the phrase ***“my word”*** here in **John 8: 31**, (***“if you abide in my word”***) refers to the sum of Jesus’s teaching which is summed up in Himself and all that He is for us as the crucified and risen Son of God.

B. You Know Jesus Through His Word

One practical implication of this is that, if you want to know Jesus, you know him through his word.

One of the most important convictions you can ever form is the conviction that Jesus, as a real, living, precious person, is known today chiefly through his word.

And the only reason I say “chiefly,” and not “only,” is that in the fellowship of obedience and suffering from day to day, our personal knowledge of Jesus goes deeper and deeper, but always through His word.

But if you want to see the face of Jesus most clearly, most surely, you must look at him through his word.

II Corinthians 4: 6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

For me, ***I Samuel 3:21*** has been tremendously helpful, ***And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.***

It says, ***“The Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.”*** Himself by the word.

And the same is true for Jesus — he reveals *himself* to us today “by the word of the Lord.”

3. What does it mean to be “in” that word?

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.”

Here’s a picture of what I think it means.



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The word of Jesus, with Himself as the center and focus of it, has a kind of sphere of influence, like a magnetic field around it.

And when you are **“in his word,”** you are in that sphere of that influence.

You are under the sway of that force that comes from his word.

So, for example:

Part of this sphere of influence is the *truth* of the word.

A. When you are “in” the word, you are in the persuasion of the truth of the word.

- the persuasion of its truth,
- and the attraction of its beauty,
- and the treasuring of its value,
- and the peacefulness of its grace and power,
- and the nourishment of its bread,
- and the refreshment of its water,
- and the brightness of its light.

This is what it is to be a true disciple.

To live “in” the word of the riches of the word of Jesus.

But Jesus doesn’t simply say that true disciples are in His word.

He says they “abide” in it.

So, our fourth question is:

4. What does it mean to abide in his word?



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“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.”

The word “abide” is simply the word “remain.”

It doesn’t really carry in it any special spiritual connotations.

It just means remain in His word.

Don’t leave it.

This doesn’t mean that you can’t lay your Bible down and go to work.

No.

Abiding in the word of Jesus means remaining in that sphere of influence of the word.

A. It means not leaving it.

- **Not ceasing to be persuaded by its *truth*, and never elevating any other truth above it.**
- **Not ceasing to be attracted by its *beauty* and *value*, and never seeing anything as more beautiful or more valuable or more attractive than the word and the Lord it reveals.**
- **Not ceasing to rest in its *grace* and *power* — never turning away as though greater peace could be found anywhere else.**
- **Never ceasing to eat and drink from the word as the *bread of heaven* and *living water*, as if life could be sustained anywhere else.**
- **Never ceasing to walk in the *light* of the word, as though any other light could show the secrets of life.**

This is what it means to be a true disciple.

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.”

And the fact that Jesus puts the emphasis on abiding — remaining — gives the answer to our last question:

5. How are abiding in his word and truly being his disciple related to each other?

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.”

A. Jesus is saying that the mark of the true disciple is:

- **lasting,**
- **enduring,**
- **persevering,**
- **keeping on in the sphere of influence of the word.**

Temporary tastes of the truth and beauty and value and power and grace and bread and water and brightness of the word doesn't make you a Christian.

The mark of Christians is that we taste, and we stay.

To whom shall we go? You, O Lord, have the words of life (John 6: 68).

The Power of Jesus's Word

So, if you are a believer in Jesus, may the Lord use this word to confirm and strengthen and gladden your heart in the word of Jesus.

If you are an unbeliever, may the Lord use this word to give life to your spiritually dead soul and give you faith and joy through Jesus who died so that you might have eternal life through faith.

And if you are not a true believer, I pray that the Lord will use this word, to show you what a true Christian is, and wake you up and give you a true spiritual taste for the truth and beauty and value and grace and power and brightness of Jesus in his word.

Amen.

True Disciples

1. What does it mean to “truly be Jesus’s disciples”?
Three groups:
 - A. Non-disciples, people who make no pretense of following Jesus,
 - B. Unreal disciples, people that say they follow him and have only a superficial connection with him,
 - C. Real disciples, people who truly follow him.
2. What is Jesus referring to by the phrase “my word”?
 - A. All Jesus’s Words Point to Him
 - B. You Know Jesus Through His Word
3. What does it mean to be “in” that word?
 - A. When you are “in” the word, you are in the persuasion of the truth of the word.
 - the persuasion of its truth,
 - the attraction of its beauty,
 - the treasuring of its value,
 - the peacefulness of its grace and power,
 - the nourishment of its bread,
 - the refreshment of its water,
 - the brightness of its light.
4. What does it mean to abide in his word?
 - Not Leaving It.
 - Not ceasing to be persuaded by its *truth*, and never elevating any other truth above it.
 - Not ceasing to be attracted by its *beauty* and *value*, and never seeing anything as more beautiful or more valuable or more attractive than the word and the Lord it reveals.
 - Not ceasing to rest in its *grace* and *power* — never turning away as though greater peace could be found anywhere else.
 - Never ceasing to eat and drink from the word as the *bread of heaven and living water*, as if life could be sustained anywhere else.

- Never ceasing to walk in the *light* of the word, as though any other light could show the secrets of life.

5. How are abiding in his word and truly being his disciple related to each other?

A. Jesus is saying that the mark of the true disciple is:

- lasting,
- enduring,
- persevering,
- keeping on in the sphere of influence of the word.