

What If My Life Does Not Match the Bible's Description of a "Disciple"?

The Bible contains many verses which define what a disciple is and what he does. Quite obviously, to ignore them, and to still claim to be a "disciple," would be quite foolish. However, there are other verses which remind us that we are imperfect, and capable of failure. Even from experience (if we haven't deceived ourselves - 1 John 1:8), we know that we are not "sinlessly perfect." The more we understand (and submit to) Scripture, the more we understand that sin has had a greater effect on our lifestyle and on our thinking, than we realized.

How should we respond to this? Is it possible to know if we are a disciple, or not?

The key in this matter has to do with two issues:

1. *What types of things characterize our lifestyle (and desires) the most?*

Does sin characterize our life - especially willful sin? Or do we desire the ways of God, in our innermost being? Do we have a constant battle within us, with our hearts warring against our flesh? Or is our heart and flesh both on the same side in the war, fighting against our souls?

2. *How are our lives changing over the course of time?*

Even if our lives seem to be characterized by struggle and failure, are we *increasing* in the characteristics that mark a Christian? Are we *growing* in grace? Or are we stale and unchanging?

Something will be happening in the life of the person who is a disciple. God has guaranteed it. God has begun a "good work" in the life of *every* disciple, and he has promised to continue until that "good work" has been completed. (Philippians 1:6) Also, every genuine disciple has the Spirit of God living inside him. So he *has* the power - the Spirit - which will enable him to grow as a disciple.

Though we may temporarily fall into sin, in the long run, God will work in our lives, even using the sins we may commit, to change us and to make us more like the Son! (Romans 8:28 and context) He will also discipline us, if necessary, so that we won't want to stay entrenched in sin. (Hebrews 12:5-11)

If *nothing* is happening in the life of a person who claims to be a disciple, then there is genuine reason (and need) to question his claim - for this goes against everything that the Bible says about how a person "grows" in his salvation.

On the other hand, we should not expect all believers to be growing to the same degree of spiritual maturity, at the same pace. There *will* be growth, if they are Christians - and that's why Scripture tells us we "will recognize them by their fruits." However, the manner and the speed of that growth will be different for each of us.