

We're Called to Make Disciples, Not Converts

Has a culture of convenience and consumerism changed the way we preach the Gospel?

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What if I told you that Jesus didn't want us to win converts? What if I said that in all of Scripture we are never told to convert anyone? What if I proposed that people accepting Jesus into their life does not fulfill our mission?

We may share the Gospel, but it's not always the same Gospel Jesus shared. Our version can be a little softer. It can be easier. The message, too often, has been watered down. Many of us don't want to be called *radicals*. Many of us take the message of Jesus, and we omit some of the more intense parts because they might scare people away.

An Inconvenient Truth

Out of our desire to win converts we've often tried to make Jesus more convenient. That's what our culture is all about. So watering down the Gospel to reflect the culture can be an easy trap to fall into.

We often make following Jesus comfortable and easy, reducing the expectations: *You don't have to do anything different. Just believe.*

When we sell people on a Jesus who is easy to follow, can we really blame them for bailing out or drifting off when things don't go smoothly?

Carrying our cross has been reduced from a radical relationship of self-sacrificing love and humility to cheap advertisements with bracelets, jewelry and bumper stickers. We turned following Jesus into little more than eternal "fire" insurance. In so doing we made Him something He is not: safe.

What happened to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's idea of, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die"?

The Consumerism Gospel

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It shouldn't be surprising living in a consumer-based culture, that many times people bring the same attitudes into church: *It's my way, my preferences, my desires that are important. If I don't get my way, I'll take my business elsewhere.*

In watering down the Gospel we have taken what is all about Jesus and made it all about us.

Jesus is a part of our lives when He should *be* our life. He *is* life. Following Him requires all our life. The disciples ate, drank, sweat and slept ministry from when Jesus called them to the day they died. Jesus wasn't a part of their lives. He *was* their life.

We all are guilty of putting things above Jesus. Whether it's health, wealth, comfort, causes, dreams, hobbies or interests, we all come to Jesus with expectations of what He will do for us. We all have our passions and causes.

But Jesus didn't come to take sides. Jesus came to take over.

Disciples vs. Converts

Many people come to Jesus thinking it is enough to believe, to stand on the sidelines and root for Him. Jesus isn't looking for cheerleaders. He is seeking men and women who will follow Him whatever the cost. He is looking for radical devotion, unreasonable commitment and undivided dedication.

Jesus isn't looking for converts. He's looking for disciples.

Converts are new believers. We all start as converts. Too often we stop there. We make Christianity all about what we believe. Converts aren't bad or wrong. They are like babies. There's nothing wrong with being a baby. The problem comes when that doesn't change. When a baby acts like a baby, it's cute. When a 35-year-old does, it's sad. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:11, "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me."

For years churches have worked to get people to make a decision to accept Christ, which is a great thing. It's important. But what happens next? Where's the follow up? How do we train up new Christians?

Not only is a disciple willing to die for Jesus, but they are dedicated to living every day of their life for Him.

Our mission isn't to win converts; it's to make disciples. So what is the difference?

1. Converts are believers who live like the world. Disciples are believers who live like Jesus.
2. Converts are focused on their values, interests, worries, fears, priorities, and lifestyles. Disciples are focused on Jesus.
3. Converts go to church. Disciples are the church.
4. Converts are involved in the mission of Jesus. Disciples are committed to it.
5. Converts cheer from the sidelines. Disciples are in the game.
6. Converts hear the word of God. Disciples live it.
7. Converts follow the rules. Disciples follow Jesus.
8. Converts are all about believing. Disciples are all about being.
9. Converts are comfortable. Disciples make sacrifices.
10. Converts talk. Disciples make more disciples.

A disciple is someone who whole-heartedly follows the life and example of Jesus, who makes His mission their mission, His values their values, and His heart their heart.

A disciple is someone who desperately seeks to be like Jesus. A disciple is someone so committed to the cause of Christ that they would follow Him through the gates of hell and back.

A disciple is someone who finds their entire identity, purpose and meaning in Jesus. Jesus is the center of their lives. They are all in, fully committed.

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A Change of Heart

Jesus doesn't call us to be converts or to win converts. Jesus calls us to make disciples.

Jesus offers us grace and love without condition, but not without expectation. When we try to water down the message by saying things like, *You don't have to give up sin. You don't have to change. You don't have to be transformed. You don't have to die to yourself. You just need to believe.* In doing this, not only are we depriving people of the truth. We are denying them access to a real, transforming relationship with the almighty God.

Christianity isn't just a system of belief. It isn't a lifestyle. It's a life transformed by Jesus.

Jesus doesn't call everyone to leave everything every day. He calls us to be willing to give up everything at any point.

His call for each of us is different. He has uniquely gifted every person to carry out a unique and valuable function in His kingdom. While what we are called to may be unique, the call is an extreme standard: Jesus must be greater than everything else.