

Make Disciples Of Jesus

By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. Let me begin by reading a short article from Newsweek Magazine

A Christian by Any Other Name

On Facebook, more than 900 groups use a variation of 'follower of Jesus.' It doesn't carry baggage.

By [Lisa Miller](#) | NEWSWEEK

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Ward Brehm doesn't call himself a Christian. "I just call myself a follower of Jesus," says Brehm, a Minneapolis businessman and former chairman of the U.S.-Africa Development Foundation. "It's a huge difference." Christian definitions used not to matter so much. People used to be Methodists or Lutherans, Episcopalians or Baptists. Each denomination had its own culture, its own jokes. A Congregationalist friend once defined himself to me this way: "We're the ones who fold up the chairs after church to make room for the basketball court." Outsiders could—and did—make assumptions about their neighbors' personal habits and politics based on denomination. The United Church of Christ was left-wing. The Southern Baptists leaned to the right. Methodists, Episcopalians and Lutherans fell somewhere in between.

Then, in the 1980s, as nondenominational churches became the fastest-growing segment of American Christianity, a number of Christians cast off their labels. But with this freedom came a challenge: what should this new generation call itself? Initially, some chose "born again," but after Jimmy Carter and Jerry Falwell, the media always used the term with derision. "Evangelical" eventually came into fashion, but that had disadvantages, too. What kind of evangelical? A conservative evangelical, allied with the powerful religious right? Did that mean fundamentalist? A progressive evangelical? Over the past several years, as evangelicals strained to define themselves and the media strained to comply, Christians fell into narrower and narrower niches—until at last the niches were as narrow as the denominations once were.

Younger evangelicals, meanwhile, preferred to call themselves simply "Christian," as in "My parents are Lutheran, but I'm a Christian."

Now, as the Christian world continues to refine its identity, another label is gaining currency: "follower of Jesus." It is gaining among the young. On Facebook, more than 900 groups use some variation of "follower of Jesus." The tag is also popular among people in the so-called fellowship movement—small, collegial groups that regularly meet for ecumenical prayer. (The weekly prayer breakfasts in Washington—one for senators, another for members of the House—are the most prominent example, but such fellowships are common at corporations too.) "Follower of Jesus" has at least two advantages over "Christian" or "evangelical," its boosters say. First, it doesn't carry baggage. You can wear it abroad, in Islamic countries, or at home with your Jewish or Buddhist friends, without causing offense. Second, it distances the bearer from the culture wars that have made American politics so divisive. David Durenberger, the former Republican senator from Minnesota, puts it this way. "As my party in particular has begun to characterize its base as 'Christian' and to express its values as 'Christian' values ... it has been really important to identify myself as a follower of Jesus." The syndicated columnist Cal Thomas adds that "follower of Jesus" has the virtue of reflecting biblical truth: the earliest Christians called themselves "followers of the Way."

While many Christians applaud this effort to transcend labels and history, some also worry that "follower of Jesus" diverts people from the fundamentals. "Two questions constantly come up," says Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary. "The first is Christology. What about the full divinity of Christ? How much can you keep that in the background? Second, what's the role of the church in all this?" Brehm admits, guiltily, that he left his longtime church five years ago and is still shopping. For the time being, he finds communion in regular meetings with fellow followers of Jesus: "That's real church." To accusations that he's letting identity politics overshadow Christian tradition, Brehm delivers what he believes to be his knockout punch: Jesus, after all, said, "Follow me."

Find this article at <http://www.newsweek.com/id/188198>

B. That is by far more than I like to read, but I thought the article focused on a topic of great interest, not just because of the current popular use of the term "follower of Jesus," but because it relates to the main issue of evangelism – helping people become disciples (followers) of Jesus Christ

1. There are some real problems here that we're often unwilling to face
 - a. in the present state of denominational Christianity, it's fairly obvious that nobody settles for calling people to be followers of Jesus
 - b. Baptists are interested in people becoming Baptists, Methodists want people to become Methodists, etc.
 - c. would it be too shocking to suggest that churches of Christ have fallen into this trap as well – that we're often more interested in people becoming a "church of Christ" – and even then we're interested in which branch they join up with
2. This has always been a problem in evangelism – even from the beginning of the church
 - a. 1 Corinthians 1:10-12
10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." NASU
 - b. the basic problem, is that people were following their favorite teacher, and few seem to have been focused on following Jesus
3. In recent years, a lot of evangelism was really designed to convince people about church organization, worship and practice, but not much on Jesus
 - a. you might think that's a strong opinion, but from my participation with a number of churches as a preacher, I think it's a matter of fact
 - b. it's not that those are unimportant topics, but we've got to learn to take scripture as it's written and not change it to what we think it ought to say
 - c. tonight I want us to think about making disciples of Jesus Christ

I. THE GREAT COMMISSION IS THE INSTRUCTION WE ARE TO FOLLOW

A. Let's look at the relevant passages again

1. Matthew 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." NASU

2. Mark 16:15-16

15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. NASU

3. Luke 24:45-48

45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 "You are witnesses of these things. NASU

4. John 20:30-31

30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. NASU

B. This is something basic, something ground-floor – we need to get this one right

1. Evangelism is all about preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus
2. Preaching the gospel is the initial means of turning people into followers of Jesus
3. The passages that tell us what our mission is, tell us that the focus is Jesus
4. When we put anything in the place of Jesus, we've changed the gospel and we've changed the whole idea of discipleship
5. Our job is the turn unbelievers into followers of Jesus Christ
 - a. not anything or anybody else
 - b. we need to get this on straight – we are followers of Jesus
 - c. that's what disciples are, and it's amazing to me that it would ever be controversial, or offensive, or suspicious
 - d. the truth is that anyone who wants you to be something other than, or in addition to, being a disciple of Jesus is off base biblically

II. WHAT DO WE REALLY MEAN BY “DISCIPLE OF JESUS?”

A. “Disciple” defined

1. Basically, the word means “learner” or “pupil”
 - a. we ought to think about someone who is a student, and in this case, a student of a particular teacher
 - b. a student or learner is about the business of learning something
2. More, the word carries the idea of not only learning from a teacher, but being adherent or follower of that teacher for the purpose of becoming like him
 - a. Luke 6:40 -- "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. NASU
 - b. if we are disciples of Jesus, then the ultimate goal is for each of us to be like Jesus

B. If that is true, then I have a few questions

1. Why is there such a wide variance in thinking and behavior among Christians?
 - a. two people who follow Jesus and are like him, can't possibly be all that different from one another, even taking into consideration the temperaments and personalities of the individuals
 - b. could it be that too many Christians are determined to be like someone or something else?
2. Why does Jesus often get the minor emphasis in Bible study?
 - a. John 17:3 -- "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. NASU
 - b. Jesus, the one we say we follow, said that eternal life was a matter of knowing God, and himself
 - c. if you don't know Jesus, how is it possible to be saved?
3. Do we really think that God's grand scheme of redemption, and knowledge of the Savior, and understanding the problem of mankind and God's solution to the problem of sin – do we think they can be turned into theological shorthand
 - a. I don't mind tell you I'm pretty critical of the “hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized” formula
 - b. you might understand each of the “steps” but tossing a list of terms at people does not turn them into followers of Jesus
 - c. we must do a better job of helping people to know Jesus, to know the Father, and to understand what God has done, is doing, and will do in the future
 - d. we must help people become like Jesus

CONCLUSION

A. Simple evangelism has a simple goal – we help people learn about and become like Jesus Christ – anything else is off target

B. Invitation