

“Christian, disciple or slave?”

Torben Søndergaard

What is a Christian actually?

The answer to this question today unfortunately depends on whom you ask. In this book you are going to get the biblical answer to what a Christian is and how you become one. You are also going to explore the various words used in the Bible to describe those who follow Jesus, such as “Christian”, “disciple” and “slave”.

Many of us have heard this statement: “I am a Christian, but just in my own way”. Is it possible, however, to be a Christian in your own personal way? The author argues it is impossible according to the Bible – just as you cannot be a disciple or slave in your own personal way. The book is written for both Christians and non-Christians.

“In the time when the biblical principle of discipleship has been diluted, it is a relief to read this book by Torben Søndergaard. Torben’s language is lively and full of illustrations, and he has a special evangelistic gift of taking the readers back to the biblical principles – an exploring trip which is both exciting and able to change your character. I can recommend this book to everyone who wants to see Christianity based on the original, apostolic pattern.”

Anders Ova, prophet, Bible teacher and author

“In this book Torben speaks out to describe Christianity in today’s Denmark – a Christianity where joy, freedom, signs, wonders and miracles have almost disappeared. I absolutely want to recommend people to read the book and I hope it will create a debate in our country with regard to being a Christian.”

Tamarra Bot, church leader and counsellor

About the author:

Torben Søndergaard is the author of four other books, as well as the person mainly responsible for the mission organization called Oplev Jesus (Experience Jesus). He is known for a direct approach to the Bible and his personal life with God – many know him from national Danish TV, where he has appeared many times.

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What is a Christian actually?

The answer to this important question today unfortunately depends on whom you ask. In this book you are going to get the Biblical answer to exactly what a Christian is and how you become one. You are also going to see the analysis of the various words that the Bible and people use about the followers of Jesus, such as “Christian”, “disciple” and “slave”.

Many of us have heard these statements: “I am a Christian, but just in my own way” or “I am a Christian, but I am not so much involved in it”. Is it possible, however, to be a Christian in your own personal way? According to the Bible, the author argues that the answer is “no” – it is just as impossible as being a disciple or slave in your own personal way. The book is written for both Christians and non-Christians.

“Christian, disciple or slave?”

Preface

My great wish for this book is to create a debate about the meaning of being a Christian – a debate which is needed both inside and outside the church.

Many people in the church live in a state of deceit that has taken them far away from the Christianity we read about in the Bible; the Christianity which saves and transforms. These “Christians” are the product of a “Christianity” that in some ways is very distant from what the Bible says. If you are one of them, you are among many who need to hear the real Gospel and start to live the life God has for you; a strong life with Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour; a life that many deceived Christians actually want and long for.

The average person who normally only knows Christianity through some church activities also needs to hear the real Gospel about salvation through faith in Jesus. They need the message in this book to show them that Christianity is much more than what they believed or thought about it.

Today we see people converting to Islam because they feel that Christianity is so diluted. The other day I heard an interview with a Dane who had just converted to Islam. The reason he gave was that in Islam you have some specific things to relate to, in contrast to Christianity where, in his understanding, you could live the way you wanted to as long as you went to church. Yes, it is clear that he does not know the Christianity Jesus came with and which is still practised in many places all around the world. However, his statement shows the picture of Christianity the way many imagine it today; a misleading picture that is far away from the Biblical description and the true Christian life practised by millions of Christians all over the world: a strong personal and dedicated life with Jesus as Lord. I hope this book can help us do something about that.

You can help by starting this debate about what a Christian really is so that we can soon see a change in Europe. You can also make a difference by spreading the message in this book; by beginning to use the words “disciple” and “slave” instead of the word “Christian”, which is so diluted. Just by beginning to use this word we can throw a completely new light over Christianity and its purpose, and take a step towards a change in the churches and outside them.

Enjoy the reading. I hope that today this book will make a change in your life as you see your place in the relationship with Jesus and His word concerning following Him.

God bless you.

Torben Søndergaard
A disciple of Jesus Christ
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A thought experiment

Try to imagine there is not even one Christian in the whole world. You are not a Christian, either, and you have never heard about Christianity. There are no churches, no Christian books, no Christian TV or Christian newspapers. There is nothing that directly has anything to do with Christianity, except for a little, well-hidden Bible.

One day you find this Bible.

You have never before seen or heard about the Bible, Jesus or Christianity, but you soon start to read through the book. You start with the Old Testament about how it all began and how the land of Israel came into existence. You read how God works with His people and you get a clear picture of God as holy and righteous; a God who can become angry, but who is also merciful and patient; a God who had great love for His people; a God who will one day send us all a Saviour, which is the red thread throughout the Old Testament. When you get to the end of it, you already have an impression of what God is like and how He acts. You continue by reading the New Testament, where you see who the Saviour that God promised.

You begin by reading the four Gospels which talk about how Jesus Christ went around, preached the Gospel and healed the sick. Page after page you read how he preached that people should repent and believe in the Gospel; that everyone who wants to inherit the Kingdom of God should take their cross and follow Him, and all the other radical things he said and did. The Gospels tell you how He took His disciples and then sent them out to preach the Gospel and heal the sick. You read how he was loved by some and hated by others. You read about how He gave Himself on the cross for all of us and how through His death and resurrection He conquered death. Everything put together gives you a really good understanding of who Jesus was and what He preached.

You continue afterwards by reading Acts, where you see how after His resurrection Jesus came and said that those who believed in Him would receive power from above when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Then you read about how it actually happened. As you read through Acts, you start to understand how the first Christians lived. It was a life with a lot of opposition and persecution where it really cost everything to follow Jesus; a supernatural life in fellowship with God and each other; a life where the Christians went around and preached the Gospel, being followed by signs and wonders.

After Acts you move on to the Book of Romans. In the first four chapters you read about how we have all sinned and gone far away from God. You go to chapter 5 which describes Jesus as the new Adam who was supposed to forgive us and reconcile us with God. Chapters 6-8 say that in Christ there is freedom from sin and that this freedom comes when you get baptized and walk in obedience to the Spirit instead of the flesh. After that you come to chapters 9 and 10, which explain that you get saved by making Jesus your Lord.

When you read this, you bow your knees and ask Jesus to come and become your Lord and save you. Then you immediately experience the new birth the Bible talks about, salvation in Christ and soon you get baptized in the Holy Spirit, which you have read about over and over again in Acts.

As you are there on your knees, born again, you can feel a difference inside. Now you know that you have been forgiven and that what the Bible says is true because you have experienced it in your body and you have this testimony inside of you. You rise, determined to follow Jesus 100% and start by baptizing yourself because there is no one else to do it.

From that moment on you begin to live as a Christian, based on what you read in the Bible, which is the only description of the Christian life you know. It is your only instruction book and the only

place that can give you the answer when it comes to what God is like. You begin to use it as your mirror because there are no other Christians you can compare yourself with or ask how things work. The only thing you have is the Bible – and the Holy Spirit to reveal it to you.

Ask yourself now: If it was you, how do you think you would live?

Do you think you would live as you do now?

Do you think you would live as most Christians today?

Or do you think you would discover something else than what we see in modern Christianity?

Do you think you would have another understanding of who God is and what it actually means to live as a Christian?

The truth is that if you start to believe in Jesus by reading His preaching and if the Bible is its only available source, you would surely discover something else than what we see in many places today. First of all, Jesus preached very radically. Secondly, in that case you would completely build your life on the Word, and not like many do today – a little bit on the Word and a little bit on our “Christian” culture.

One of the biggest problems today is that we as Christians so quickly compare ourselves to one another and to our Christian culture, and not to the Bible. We look at our fellow Christians and think: “If he can live like that and still be a Christian, then I can do that, too”. We look at our churches and think: “If they conduct the service in this way, it must be right. They have been doing that for many years so they must know what is best.” And when we read the New Testament about the power and the life of the first Christians, we think: “Yes, it was something special at that time. But today it is clearly another time where things are different”. It is, however, not only a wrong way to understand it, but also really dangerous because we should build on the Word alone and not our culture or other Christians around us.

As you are reading this book, try to ignore what the European “Christian” culture says and how other Christians around you live. If you succeed in that and you are open to what the Word of God says, this book can change your life and save you from perishing. In this book I am trying to draw a picture of what it means to live as a Christian according to the Bible. Let us therefore compare ourselves to the Word of God instead of one another and our culture. Let us read what the Bible says and be changed into the same image we see there, from glory to glory.

“But we all, with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18

Examine yourselves

Some of the content of this book will sound very radical and strange to many. The reason is that we have slowly moved so far away from the Christianity we read about in the Bible. We live in a time when people gather teachers to themselves according to their own lusts instead of listening to what the Bible really says.

“For a time will be when they will not endure sound doctrine, but they will heap up teachers to themselves according to their own lusts, tickling the ear.” 2 Timothy 4:3

They say that “truth hurts” and it is sometimes true. We have to remember, however, that even if the truth hurts, it is still the truth, and the truth sets us free, as Jesus says. Christianity has changed a lot in comparison to the first church that we read about in the Bible. Even in the last decades it has experienced big changes, especially in the western world. One of the things that looks different is the preaching – and especially our relation to faith. Today you can hear in many places that we as

Christians should not ask ourselves whether our faith is good enough. This is exactly the opposite of what the Bible says and of what Christians used to say a few decades ago.

“Put yourselves to the test and judge yourselves, to find out whether you are living in faith. Surely you know that Christ Jesus is in you? Unless you have completely failed.” 2 Corinthians 13:5

Here we can read that Paul challenges us to examine our faith. It does not mean that we should question our faith every single minute, but Paul says that we as Christians should prove ourselves and see if we are really in the faith. We have to examine ourselves because if Christ is not in us, we will fail the test. We have to read what the Word says about faith and living with Christ and then see if it compatible with our life. If it is not, we have to repent and come to faith. This is important if we are supposed to pass the test.

Examining and repenting is something that we as Christians have to do over and over again because all the time we learn something new. God is constantly working in us and wants us to be closer to Him. That is why as a Christian you must never sit back and think that you have grasped it. No, instead you have to ask yourself:

How do I live in comparison to the Bible?

Is Christ really in me, or am I still living in conscious sin?

Have I walked away from a pure and sincere relationship with Jesus?

Have I ever been there?

It is very important to do this especially because we are all influenced by the time we are living in; a time when the Gospel is seldom preached in the pure and radical form that Jesus and the apostles preached; when it is not always the sound doctrine that is preached, but rather something that tickles the ears, as we have read before. Therefore, we are all somehow influenced by the Christianity of today, which in many ways is not compatible with the Bible.

We have to examine ourselves by comparing ourselves to the Bible and not to our neighbours or the Christians in the church – if we do the latter, everything will go wrong. In some cases it can end like with a blind person leading another blind one:

“Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch“ Matthew 15:14

Many preachers of today, contrary to the preachers just a few decades ago consider it their task to help the believers not to doubt about their faith. At that time the task of preachers was – and fortunately it still is in some places today – to preach the Word as clearly as possible and thereby reveal if something was incompatible with the Bible. It created doubt in some people, and then the preacher’s task was done. It showed that something was wrong, which hopefully made the person repent and experience forgiveness. And this is clearly much better than continuing to live in deceit without Christ and failing your test one day.

Therefore, if this book makes you see something from the Word that is wrong in your life and which strikes you, be thankful – and do something about it. It is better to see it now than experience this terrible day when you stand before Jesus and hear Him say: “Away from me, I do not know you who commit sin”.

Today you can find forgiveness and salvation.

Confess Jesus as Lord

We will start by looking at some of the things Jesus says about salvation and confessing Him as Lord.

“Go in through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in through it. Because narrow is the gate and constricted is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Matthew 7:13-14

After this eye-opener Jesus goes on to talk about how we can get to know people by their fruit, or their deeds, and He continues the warning with these frightening words:

“Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in Your name, and through Your name throw out demons, and through Your name do many wonderful works? And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!” Matt 7:21-23

As we can understand from these verses, very few of all those who call Jesus “Lord” will get to heaven. He is saying that the gate is narrow and the way is constricted, and that only a few find it. He is also saying that one day He will tell many who confess Him as Lord: I have never known you. Away from me, you who break the law! It is therefore not enough to say “Lord, Lord” to Jesus and believe that everything is all right, like many do today.

When you have the word “Lord” used twice, it is because of the way authors expressed themselves in the texts from those times. If we want to emphasize something today, we write it with BLOCK LETTERS, in *italics* or in **bold**. They did not do that in the past, but they repeated themselves instead. Therefore, when it says “Lord, Lord”, it does really mean that the person repeats the word twice – the person says “LORD” once, but from the heart and with emphasis. When Jesus says that not all who say “Lord, Lord” to Him go to heaven, He is not thinking about those who stand with their hands in the pockets and chew a gum while they mumble half-heartedly: “Jesus is my Lord”. No, the words of Jesus are even more serious: He is talking about the people who call Him “Lord” and really mean it – at least in their own way and our of their own understanding.

Terrifying words, are they not? Nevertheless, they are the words of Jesus, and this fact must make all Christians stop and evaluate their life according to Jesus and to the rest of the Bible.

In Luke, chapter 6 Jesus says:

“And why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46)

Is this not a good question? Why do you call Him “Lord” if you do not mean it anyway and do not act like He says?

After His question Jesus continues to tell a parable about building on a rock and not on the sand.

“Whoever comes to Me and hears My Words, and does them, I will show you to whom he is like. He is like a man who built a house and dug deep and laid the foundation on a rock; and a flood occurring, the stream burst against that house and could not shake it; for it was founded on a rock. But he who hears and does not perform, is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, on which the stream burst, and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great.” (Luke 6:47-49)

It is clear from this parable that the difference between those who build on sand and those who build on a rock is that you do what He says or not. Again it has not so much to do with the

confession, but with how you live. We can easily confess Jesus as Lord with our mouth without making Him Lord in our heart and living accordingly.

When you talk about obedience, many might say that you talk about deeds and that Christianity is not a religion of deeds. Of course I want to say that you cannot get saved through your deeds, but only through faith in Jesus. True faith will, however, result in obedience to Him because we believe that what He says is right and that is why we live accordingly with full confidence. Then the deeds will always be a natural part of the faith.

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” (James 2:26)

Naturally, it has nothing to do with achieving a whole lot, but with Jesus and inner life, which will also become clear further in the book. It is not about deeds for their own sake, but about the life with Him; a life which quite naturally produces deeds.

If you ask Christians today how to get saved, many will surely say that it happens through believing and confessing Jesus as Lord. Is it not what the well-known verse in Romans, chapter 10 says?

“Because if you confess the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” (Rom 10:9)

Yes, this is true. The point I want to make here, however, is that even though it seems to be so clear here, many will one day say “Lord, Lord” to Him, but not get to heaven. When Jesus Himself asks why you call Him “Lord, Lord” if you anyway do not act according to His word, it is because the confession in itself does not save. The thing that saves you is what lies behind the confession and gives you the reason for confessing “Jesus is my Lord”.

In Matthew, chapter 21 Jesus comes with “The parable about the two sons in the vineyard”. Try to pay attention to the fact that the sons are not compared according to what they say, but what they do.

“But what do you think? A man had two sons; and he came to the first and said, Son, go work in my vineyard today. He answered and said, I will not. But afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said to Him, The first. Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you that the tax-collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him. But the tax-collectors and the harlots believed him. And when you had seen it, you did not repent afterwards so that you might believe him.” (Matthew 21:28-32)

Therefore, not everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord will get to heaven, but only those who *have* Him as Lord; those who do God’s will, as we have just read in the Gospel of Matthew.

It should be obvious and unnecessary to mention, but unfortunately it is not so. Today’s attitude to faith/confession means that you can believe/confess one thing and do another. This has, however, never been the purpose of the faith the Bible is talking about.

In the next chapters it is going to become even clearer for you what true faith and Christianity is. It is going to be a discovery trip through the Word of God which is guaranteed to be exciting – and maybe also terrifying. It is going to be exciting because the Word of God is the truth, and it is the truth that gives life and sets us free. And if there is something we need today, it is the truth. It will be terrifying because the darkness and the deceit will become visible when the Word of God casts light upon things. In this teaching we want to let the Word of God show us how things really are. We will see how far we have come away from God; how wrong teaching has misled many Christians who think they walk the narrow path.

That is why it is so important to examine ourselves over and over again to see if Christ really is in us, especially in these last times about which the Bible says that people will fall away from the true faith because of wrong teaching, described as “seducing spirits and teachings of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).

The Christians as they used to be

What does it mean to be a Christian? If we look at us Christians today and compare ourselves with what we read in the New Testament, we will quickly see that we are missing something that the first Christians used to have. The Christianity we have today is much different from what we read about it in the Bible.

For example, we do not have the boldness that the disciples had. They could not stop talking about everything they had seen and done (Acts 4:20). Today we do not see the signs and wonders that the first Christians did. In the Bible we can read that people literally took Paul’s belt and laid it on the sick so that they got healed and the evil spirits went out (Acts 19:11) or that Peter experienced that when just his shadow fell on the sick, they got healed and the evil spirits left them (Acts 5:15). In many other ways we can see a difference between those times and today.

I am one of those who believe in a revival and seeing people turning to God. I do not believe, however, that we are missing something new which the world has never seen before. I do not believe there is a new kind of Christianity we need, but an old one. We need to come back to the beginnings of Christianity which we read about. We have return to God’s intention and see how God comes near and works among us as we can see on all the pages of Acts. In the Bible we can see that God really worked strongly among them and daily added new people who got saved (Acts 2:47). We can read about the kind of love they had both for God and one another (1 John 4:20). It was the love that covers many sins and makes you willing to lay your life down for one another (John 15:13).

Yes, many things have changed.

I am convinced that one of the reasons for not seeing the same things today is our understanding of what it actually means to live with Jesus as Lord. Many Christians never really reach the point where it becomes serious, where God is part of our daily life, where we see the continuation of the Acts, where it is us who serve Him so that His will may be done and not Him who fulfills our will.

I believe that one of the reasons for this misunderstanding – or this deceit because that is what it really is – is that we do not know the different words and expressions used in the Bible, such as “Lord”, “Christian” or “disciple”. We have given these words a different meaning, and that is why we can never reach the place where God wants us to be; the point where He can seriously work in our dead flesh as He did in the first church.

When we talk about the cross, the most central point of Christianity, we talk about death. Jesus died on the cross in order to take our punishment. The choice that all people have to make today relates to the cross – either we literally die on the cross and take our own punishment when it comes, or we die by the cross through making Jesus our Lord and do not live for ourselves, but for the one who died and rose again. You cannot deny the cross, even though many would like to. Dying to your own self is one of the keys to the life we read about in the Bible, and the key by itself.

There can be no doubt that the Christians in the apostles’ time lived differently from how we live today – even though God is the same today as He was at that time. It is therefore not the

Christianity and God that have changed, but our lifestyle. When people look for new definitions of Christianity, you must be on alert. It is not the new definitions that we need. What we are missing is a new demonstration. When we look deep into the Word of God, we will soon see where we have made a mistake.

What is a Christian?

The first word we will take a look at is “Christian”; one of the words we often misunderstand. Many people have misinterpreted it, which causes a lot of misunderstanding. Eventually this creates a deceit that makes many believe they are where they are not. Many who believe to be walking on the narrow path are actually walking on the broad one, the road to perdition.

Today many Christians cannot understand why modern Christianity is so different from the Bible. In many places they are served evasive explanations about today being a different time and God working in another way. The answer, however, is somewhere else.

One of the most important reasons is that many people misunderstand the word “Christian”, and therefore they also misunderstand what it means to *be* a Christian. That is why they have no life, power or love. What is even worse, it also means that many will perish forever if nothing happens. Many people consider themselves Christians due to wrong understanding of the Word. When they hear that Christians go to heaven, they think it is valid for them. Many, however, build on something that will not stand on the day the truth comes. It is very important that we do not misunderstand the real meaning of this word. Let us then go back to the place where the word “Christian” first appeared and see what lies behind it.

If you look for the word “Christian” or “Christians” in a biblical lexicon, you will see that it is found only three times in the whole Bible. The first time it appears is around the year 44, i.e. 11 years after Jesus walked upon earth and after the birth of the church.

“And the disciples were first called Christian in Antioch.” (Acts 11:26)

You may have heard someone teach that “being a Christian” and “being a disciple of Jesus” are two different things. It is a thought shared by many, even though they do not talk about it so much. Such an understanding implies that you become a Christian by believing in Jesus and then you go to heaven when you die. After you have already become a Christian, you can take a step further and become a disciple of Jesus if you want to, but it is completely voluntary. Jesus’ tough requirement of denying yourself if you want to be a disciple makes many choose to be just “Christians”. Living as a disciple requires namely that you are fully devoted in all areas of life, which we are going to take a look at later.

The truth is, however, that you cannot differentiate between “being a Christian” and “being a disciple” because this is the same thing. You cannot be a Christian without being a disciple.

We are clearly reading in this verse that it was the disciples who were called Christians so already here we have to exclude the possibility of two different groups. If it was right that you first became a Christian by believing in Jesus and then you could choose to become a disciple, then the verse is wrong. It would have to say that it was in Antioch that the Christians were first called disciples, and not that disciples were called Christians, as it actually says. You cannot, therefore, differentiate between the two.

Those three thousand people that came to faith at Pentecost, when apostle Peter was preaching, did not just become believers or Christians, as many people today interpret these notions. They all became disciples of Jesus.

The word “Christian” did not exist at all at that time. It was first introduced 11 years later as a sort of nickname given to the disciples by the heathens and came from the word “Christ”, or the anointed one. They were called Christians because in many ways they resembled Christ in their

lifestyle. They were His followers. However, the word that was used by the disciples and Jesus Himself was “disciple” – a disciple of Jesus.

As it has been said, the word “Christian” or “Christians” can be found only three times in the whole Bible, and the first time we come across it is 11 years after the first church was started.

On the contrary, the word “disciple” is used more than 200 times just in the New Testament and it was the word used by everybody, including Jesus, when He gave the great commission to His disciples. It is important to remember that at that time neither He nor the rest of the world knew the word “Christian”.

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority is given to Me in Heaven and in earth. Therefore go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you. And, behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the world.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

The commission given by Jesus was therefore that we should make all people into his disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and by teaching them to observe everything He has commanded. It is still the same today.

Do not let anyone deceive you into believing that a Christian and a disciple are two different things. You cannot be a Christian and get saved without being a disciple of Jesus with all its implications.

Disciple

The word ‘disciple’, just like the word ‘Christian’, is often misunderstood because it is not used in our culture. In the Bible you can read that many had their own disciples, for example John the Baptist and Moses. In those days disciples were a natural part of daily life. One of the first times we find the word used in connection with Jesus is in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 4, where Jesus gave this name to his first disciples.

In e-sword, the electronic version of the Bible, one of the commentaries says:

“They must separate themselves to a diligent attendance on him, and set themselves to a humble imitation of him; must follow him as their Leader.”

Therefore, when in chapter 4 of the Gospel of Matthew Jesus called His first disciples, He called them to put everything aside in order to follow Him. They were supposed to become His apprentices, follow Him and learn from Him by watching His life. That is why a metaphor of being a disciple is an apprentice or student.

*“The disciple is not above his master, but everyone who is perfect shall be like his master.”
(Luke 6:40)*

The disciples of Jesus were, therefore, his apprentices. Jesus was their master and they followed him. The term “apprentice” was often used in our culture many years ago, but it is not so common nowadays. The big difference between apprenticeship and ordinary studies is that in apprenticeship you do not have the same school course as in an ordinary studying course.

In apprenticeship you learn by following and imitating your master’s example rather than sitting at a school bench, which is what we read about Jesus and his disciples. In Jesus’ time, however, the requirements were much higher than just following your master eight hours a day and then having time off to do whatever you liked, so you cannot make a close comparison here.

In order to understand the right meaning of the word “disciple” we have to comprehend the context the author had in mind. You cannot just say that the gospels were written in another time and culture and that is why they are completely different today, so we have to use our modern definition. We have to learn about the author and the culture of those times so that we understand what it means when Jesus says that we should make people into His disciples.

Another difference about that time was respect for authorities. If we consider respect shown to parents, the police and school teachers, we will clearly see that it cannot be found among the youth of today, in comparison to the situation just 20 years ago. It is part of modern culture that we want to decide ourselves what is right and wrong and not leave that to teachers and the police. Unfortunately, to a large extent we can also observe this lack of respect with regards to people’s relationship with Jesus. “He is not going to decide, I want to do it myself, it is my life” etc.

However, when Jesus said that we should make people His disciples, he meant that everyone who wants to be His disciple has to put his life aside in order to follow Him and learn from Him – to listen to Him and obey what He says.

The original understanding of discipleship is clearly expressed in the gospels, where we see how the disciples were with Jesus all the time, how they learned and did what He said to them or at least tried to do it; they were also far from perfection. On the day of Pentecost, however, the Holy Spirit came upon them to help them to obey.

Until now we have seen that the word “Christian” is something that was introduced as a nickname and was not used at the beginning and in the first church. Neither Jesus nor the first disciples used that word. It appears only three times in the whole Bible, while we see that the word “disciple” can be found more than 200 times in the New Testament alone.

We see that Jesus said that the purpose is to make people into His disciples. It happens by getting baptized into Him as well as by following Him and learning to obey His commands. In other words, everybody has to become an apprentice of Jesus and live a life where you follow Him closely.

It is thus important to understand the words correctly in order not to get confused about God’s purpose for us.

Try now, for example, to read some statements I have heard many times:

- I am a Christian, but just in my own way.
- I am a Christian, but I am not so much involved in it.
- I am a Christian because I have been baptized and confirmed.
- I am a Christian, but I do not believe in the Bible.
- I am a Christian, but I do not believe in all this stuff with Jesus as the Son of God.

Let us now try to use the correct word, which is “disciple”. Read the same statements, while thinking what you have just learned about true discipleship.

- I am a disciple of Jesus, but just in my own way.
- I am a disciple of Jesus, but I am not so much involved in it.
- I am a disciple of Jesus because I have been baptized and confirmed.
- I am a disciple of Jesus, but I do not believe in the Bible.
- I am a disciple of Jesus, but I do not believe in all this stuff with Jesus as the Son of God.

I hope you are starting to understand the deception when it comes to the word “Christian”. This is something very serious and shows how far we have gone from the original Christianity and the sound doctrine. It is clear that these statements, made by so many people today, do not make sense. Many Christians have a totally wrong understanding of living with God, which shows that Jesus is not their Lord and Saviour.

It is shocking to think that so many people nowadays have absolutely no problem with saying the things we have read before. They do not see the conflict. The deception does not only lie in the misunderstanding of the word “Christian”, but also of what it means to live with Jesus in biblical terms. It has nothing to do with using nice words, but with how we live and what we believe. Many people live in a deception and are going to be lost one day if they do not experience inner repentance.

Salvation does not imply adopting a nickname, which the word “Christian” really is. It is about being a disciple of Jesus. Not my disciple, or a priest’s disciple, but a disciple of Jesus.

We are first of all disciples of Jesus. Of course we have to follow the one who is above us, but if we move the emphasis from Jesus to our leaders and human role models, it can be abused with the purpose of getting power over others, which has unfortunately happened in some places. However, it is Jesus who has the power and it is Him it is all about – even though He uses leaders to show us the way. That is why what matters is what He says to us today through His Word, the Bible. It is about seeking Him and letting the Holy Spirit reveal Him as He is and what He is saying to us.

Jesus says many things about being His disciple. One of the proofs of this is that we abide in His word, which in addition prevents us from getting deceived.

“Then Jesus said to the Jews who believed on Him, If you continue in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered Him, We are Abraham's seed and were never in bondage to anyone. How do you say, You will be made free?” (John 8:31-33)

A Christian abides in the words of Jesus. In other words, he or she reads and studies the Bible and obeys what it says. It is not possible to be a disciple of Jesus without obeying his words. It is impossible to be a Christian – if we still use the most common notion – without believing in the Bible and living according to it. The Word, or the Bible, is what we should get our life from. Through the Word we have to get to know the truth, which will set us free. It is through the Word that we get to know Jesus as the way, the truth and the life.

Some people will call living according to the Bible fundamentalism, and this is correct. The word “fundamentalism” comes from “building on a foundation”, which in this case is the Bible. All Christians should be fundamentalists. I know that today this word has bad connotations because many people think associate it with Islam and its fundamentalists, but it is not dangerous to build on the biblical foundation. On the contrary, Jesus makes it clear that if you build on the rock, it is not enough to know what the Word says; you also have to live accordingly.

The other requirements of being a disciple of Jesus can be found in many places in all the gospels. It is also important, however, to remember what Jesus says:

“Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke on you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest to your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

We can quickly make a mistake and take a heavy yoke upon ourselves when we read the words of Jesus to us, but if our own self and ambitions are also dead, obedience is not a problem. Then it is not a heavy yoke, but pure pleasure.

The hardest thing is therefore not having to obey our Lord, but rather having to die to ourselves. This is what the struggle is about.

At the same time we find power in obeying Jesus so this not something we can achieve in our own power. In Him we can find everything we need, including the power to follow Him.

This cannot be used as an excuse to avoid obeying Him, but as help to know that what we need in order to obey can be found in fellowship with Him. We are going to take a look at it later.

A slave of Christ

In Ephesians 6 Paul is telling slaves how they should serve their earthly masters.

“Slaves, obey your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as to Christ” (Ephesians 6:5)

Slaves should thus serve their earthly masters in the same way as they would serve Christ, which means they should do it with fear and trembling, and with a sincere heart.

But is it not a little bit radical comparison? Serving Christ does not have so much to do with being a slave, does it?

The truth is that if you delve into the Bible in its original language, you will probably see that the same word which here and in other places is translated as “slave”, in other biblical contexts is rendered as “servant”. Here it really starts to get exciting.

The word that here in Ephesians is translated as “slave” is “doulos”. The context it is found in makes it clear that “slave” is the correct rendering of the word. It is the same in Paul’s letter to Titus, where again in one passage of the text he refers to the slaves.

“Slaves are to submit themselves to their masters in everything, aiming to please them and not argue with them” (Titus 2:9)

However, although you can see in many places that this word is correctly translated as “slave”, in many other places it is translated as “servant” instead. We can find an example in one of the parables of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew:

“For it is like a man going on a trip who called his servants and turned his money over to them” (Matthew 25:14)

Since the word “doulos” is used here, it could have been translated as “slaves” instead of “servants”: A man called his slaves and turned his money over to them.

Another place where this word is translated as “servants” is the episode where Jesus washes the disciples’ feet:

“Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, and a messenger is not greater than the one who sent him.” (John 13:16)

Again it could have just as well been rendered as: A slave is not greater than his master. It is the same word that Paul uses when he addresses the slaves in his letters.

There are more places in the Bible where the word “servant” could be replaced by “slave”, which is not completely irrelevant because being a servant has a slightly different meaning than being a slave. We are going to discuss that more deeply.

Let us go back to the verse in Ephesians again. This time we will follow it with the next verse in order to see even more clearly how you can translate the same word in two different ways.

“Slaves (doulos), obey your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as to Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants (doulos) of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service as to the Lord and not to men” (Ephesians 6:5-7)

They have thus decided to translate the word as “slave” in one place and as “servant” in the other. It should actually be rendered in this way:

“Slaves, obey your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as to Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service as to the Lord and not to men” (Ephesians 6:5-7)

Exciting, isn't it?

It means something completely different when you use the expression “slave of Christ” instead of “servant of Christ”. The word “slave” probably creates different associations in your mind, but as you gradually think about the meaning, you might; just as I, find the thought more liberating than restrictive.

A slave does not have so many worries. He does not have to worry about earning money or the future. His only task is to do what the master says.

We can also live in faith that every month God provides the money – it is so liberating! Of course it does not imply that we are supposed to sit back and do nothing. A slave does not do his own will, but serves and does his master's will. To be a Christian means to be a disciple and a follower of Christ; a slave of Christ, one who does what his master wants.

Paul understood this just like all his contemporaries. This is what it means to follow Jesus:

“He (Jesus) died for all, that the living ones may live no more to themselves, but to Him who died for them and having been raised.” (2 Corinthians 5:15)

“For both if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore both if we live, and if we die, we are the Lord's.” (Romans 14:8)

If we start to use these strong words – “disciple” or “slave” instead of the word “Christian”, which is misused today, we will see things as they are, and the deceit many live in will be revealed.

Jesus says to everyone who wants to follow Him:

“And He said to all, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever will save his life shall lose it, but whoever will lose his life for My sake, he shall save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses himself, or is cast away?” (Luke 9:23-25)

This was understood in the times of Jesus. Paul, Peter, John and the other disciples lived in that – they understood that they now belonged to someone else. To them baptism was the sign that they could not live for themselves any longer because they got baptized to belong to Christ.

The great thing about laying our lives down for Jesus as His slaves is that He will not call us slaves:

“No longer do I call you servants (slaves), for the servant (slave) does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:15)

I am going to come back to this later.

Right now the most important thing is to understand that it is just as correct, if not more correct, to say that we are Christ's slaves instead of His servants. We are His slaves, and that means that He is our Lord and we are obedient to Him.

Try again to look at the expressions we so often hear today, and then put in the words “a slave of Christ” and see the difference.

- I am a Christian, but just in my own way.
- I am a Christian, but I am not so much involved in it.
- I am a Christian because I have been baptized and confirmed.
- I am a Christian, but I do not believe in the Bible.
- I am a Christian, but I do not believe in all this stuff with Jesus as the Son of God.

Now try to read this version.

- I am a slave of Christ and I belong to Him, but just in my own way.
- I am a slave of Christ and I belong to Him, but I am not so much involved in it.
- I am a slave of Christ and I belong to Him because I have been baptized and confirmed.
- I am a slave of Christ and I belong to Him, but I do not believe in the Bible.
- I am a slave of Christ and I belong to Him, but I do not believe in all this stuff with Jesus as the Son of God.

Can you see what deceit many people are living in? So many call themselves Christians, but are neither disciples nor slaves of Christ. They are still their own masters and live as they wish. One day so many will perish because salvation is found only in Jesus as Lord.

Many people think everything is all right even though it is not. Many believe they are Christians and therefore on their way to heaven, but they have actually never made Jesus their Lord so they are living in deceit.

Next time you use or hear the word “Christian”, think about this:

The word “Christian” was not used at the beginning of the first church, and Jesus did not use it, either. It did not exist at all when Jesus lived here on the earth. It can be found only three times in the whole Bible and is first mentioned eleven years after the starting of the new church. It was something they gave as a sort of nickname to the disciples of Jesus, the ones who devoted their whole lives to follow Jesus as Lord and Master, which should be the same today.

To be a Christian means therefore to be a disciple of Jesus, or in other words his apprentice or follower; one who abides by his words and does what he says.

The word “disciple” can be found more than 200 times in the New Testament, which shows clearly that it is more important than the word “Christian”.

It is not about calling yourself a Christian or a disciple, but laying your life down for him and confessing him as Lord. It means that you become his slave, which the word “doulos” refers to. This word is often used in the original text, namely 125 times.

Not in our own way

If you ask average Europeans if they are Christians, most of them will say yes. If you, on the other hand, ask if they are disciples of Jesus, the majority will certainly look at you surprised and say: “A disciple? What are you talking about?” The reason is, as we have seen, a wide misunderstanding of the word “Christian”.

Another big problem is, however, that today many people think it is all right to make your own definition of what it means to be a Christian. Therefore, when you ask Europeans if they are Christians, you will often get the answer: “Yes, I am”, quickly followed by “but in my own way”.

If you ask further if they think they will get to heaven when they die, they will say, “Yes, I think so. I am a good person”. This is what I have experienced many times when I have been talking to people about God and eternal life. Unfortunately, home-made definitions of faith or even a life that is exemplary, but not based on the Bible, do not give access to heaven.

First of all, nobody will ever get to heaven thanks to their own deeds. If that was a possibility, then there would have been no reason for Christ to die for us. Deeds cannot possibly save anyone because everybody has sinned, as the Bible says. We are going to look at this soon.

That is why “a Christian in your own way” is completely excluded as a possibility.

Try to imagine that one day you are stopped in the traffic by a man who claims to be a policeman and wants to give you a fine of 100 dollars for an offence you do not really understand. You ask him, therefore, if you can see his police badge because it all seems a little strange. He answers he does not have any police badge. Then you ask him again if he really is a policeman, to which he answers, “Yes, I am a policeman, but in my own way”. In the conversation it quickly turns out that he has not had any police education or has not done anything that is required to become a policeman because, as he says, “It seemed to be too hard, so I decided to become a policeman in my own way”. Would you pay him those 100 dollars? Of course you would not because he is not a real policeman, but a cheat. He is actually a criminal because it is illegal to claim to be a policeman when you are not one.

The truth is that we all know you cannot be a policeman in your own way. It is simply impossible. Being a policeman implies namely that you have special education, know the rules and work under the authorities. In the same way it is completely impossible to be a Christian in your own way. Being a Christian implies namely that you are a disciple of Jesus, know the Word of God and work under God – if we make a comparison to the policeman. The expression “I am a Christian, but just in my own way” is therefore just as crazy as the expression “I am a policeman, but just in my own way”.

The other place where many Europeans make a mistake is when we believe we can get to heaven thanks to being good people. No person is good enough for heaven. It is not about taking some of our “good” deeds, adding a little bit of Jesus, mixing it together and creating a way to heaven. Salvation is found only in Him – that is why we can get to heaven only in His way. Many people might consider themselves good in their own eyes, but the truth is that we have all sinned and deserve eternal condemnation in hell.

Just try to take the Ten Commandments from Exodus, chapter 20 and see if you have at least once broken one of them. If you have just once broken one of the commandments, you are guilty of them all.

“For whoever shall keep the whole Law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” (James 2:10)

Therefore, if you have just once stolen something or lusted after someone else than your spouse, you are guilty and deserve hell. And if you go through the commandments one after another and read what Jesus says about them, you will quickly see that it looks really bad. See for example what Jesus says about the commandment “You shall not kill”. Let me ask you if you have ever killed anyone? The answer will surely be no. Try to read, however, what Jesus says about killing:

"You have heard that people were told in the past, 'Do not commit murder; anyone who does will be brought to trial.' But now I tell you: if you are angry with your brother you will be brought to trial, if you call your brother 'You good-for-nothing!' you will be brought before the Council, and if you call your brother a worthless fool you will be in danger of going to the fire of hell." (Matthew 5:21-22)

The conclusion from what Jesus is saying here is that we are all murderers because we have all done what he is mentioning here. It means that we all deserve to be thrown into the fire of hell.

When we talk about being a good person, our problem is that we again make our own definition of what it means to be a good person. On top of all this, we often compare ourselves to that which is wrong. We are so quick to compare ourselves to our neighbours or friends and conclude how it is with us. It happens both when we are supposed to check if we are good people or if we are good Christians.

The Bible, however, warns us against this kind of comparison. It says instead that the Bible is the mirror in which we are supposed to see our reflection. It is in the Word that we can see our condition and nowhere else. Only in this way can we avoid being led astray.

As I said at the beginning, if we compare ourselves to other people, it easily becomes a situation where one blind person leads another one:

"Don't worry about them! They are blind leaders of the blind; and when one blind man leads another, both fall into a ditch." (Matthew 15:14)

Let us take one more example so that you can see that according to the Bible you are not a good person, but you are guilty before God when it comes to deeds. The Bible says that no liar has access to heaven. Have you ever lied? You may not think that it is so bad to lie – at least not bad enough to be thrown into hell for all eternity. Try, however, to see here.

If you lie to a 3-year-old boy or girl, what can they do to you? The answer is: nothing. If you then lie to your spouse, what can they do? The person in question can get angry and do many other things, depending on their character. If you lie to your boss at work, what can they do? You can get fired. What if you lie to the authorities in the court of law? You can get a fine or be thrown into prison. You see that the same lie can have very different consequences, depending on who you lie to.

What we have to understand is that when we lie, we are not just lying to some people, but also to God. It is namely Him who has given us life and when we lie, we actually lie to Him. That is why lying is serious enough to make people go to hell for all eternity. If you therefore believe that you can get to heaven because you are a good person, it is a sign that you do not know God and His Word. It is really huge deceit that has led many to perdition.

We are all guilty, but we can receive salvation when we make Jesus our Lord and Saviour. There is no way in which we can deserve something from God. It is all about receiving his mercy and forgiveness. Neither you nor I are good people and if it was up to profit, we would perish. Salvation can be received only due to Jesus Christ and his offering on the cross. It is very important to understand this so that we do not try to earn God's grace, believing that good deeds can save us. The only thing we can do is to say, "Lord, here I am. Save me. Show me your mercy and take me as I am".

When we do this, he will receive us, not because of ourselves, but because of Him. God loves us and longs for us. He showed this to us when He forgave us through His son, Jesus Christ.

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior." (John 3:16-17)

Many “Christians”, few disciples

We cannot live as Christians in our own way. Becoming a Christian can only happen in one way, which is His way. Getting to heaven as a result of our own good deeds is absolutely impossible. Salvation can be found only in Him and in what He has done for us.

Try, however, to think about those you know who call themselves Christians. Ask yourself if they are actually Christians just in their own way or if they really live as disciples of Jesus, with all the consequences? Then ask yourself if they have really made Jesus their Lord or if they are still living for themselves and their own things? Some can agree with that, but unfortunately there are so many “Christians” who are not living with Jesus as Lord and Saviour. We have many “Christians”, but few disciples.

Many people live in self-deceit, and as the Bible says, one day they are going to hear Jesus say, “I do not know you. Away from me, you who commit sin”. This is an unpleasant thought.

When the Bible again and again says that we should make sure we are not deceived, we have to admit it is extremely relevant. This message undoubtedly seems very radical, but this is because we have gone so far away from the truth. The deception has sneaked in slowly enough for us not to notice how bad it actually is. Today many Christians are not aware that they do not live according to the Bible and that Jesus is not their Lord. Instead they compare themselves to people around them and to what their culture says about being a Christian. In this way many people have assumed that Jesus can be your Saviour, but not necessarily your Lord. This possibility is unfortunately excluded.

Ask yourself these questions as well:

Am I a disciple of Jesus?

Is He my Lord or am I still living for myself?

If you realize that you are not a disciple of Jesus, either, you have to do something about it before it is too late. Afterwards you have to warn the ones you know who are living in the same deceit. May this book help you reveal this deceit so that many people can make Jesus their Lord and get saved. May the churches begin to preach the Gospel as it is, and not as we have done it until now.

Our gospel today might create enough “Christians”, but only a few of them are actually disciples and slaves of Jesus, when we come to that point.

At the beginning of this book I mentioned Jesus’ warning about how one day people will say “Lord, Lord” to Him, to which He is going to answer, “I have never known you, away from me you who commit sin”.

When the Bible talks in other places about how in the end times love is going to get cold and many are going to fall away from the faith, it is exactly because they listen to wrong teaching.

To obey Jesus

One of the biggest idols nowadays is our money and materialism. Because of materialism many people do not have time to serve God. In other words, they choose to spend their life working and earning money instead of giving it to God. The reason is not too little time, but your prioritizing. All people have just as much time, but they do not all find themselves in the same situations. You cannot have this world and its pleasures and at the same time serve God. It is either-or, says Jesus clearly:

"No servant can be the slave of two masters; such a slave will hate one and love the other or will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Luke 16:13)

Again the word "doulos" is used here and correctly translated as "slave". No slave can serve to masters. It is impossible in itself so we have to choose.

I hope you understand that I am not writing this to condemn you or others. I just want to say what is written in the Bible, and then the Holy Spirit has to come and convince us. However, as I started to write, I believe this is the reason why many people today do not see the life we read about in the Bible. We have misunderstood this very significant part of Christianity, namely how you become a Christian and what it means to be a Christian.

When this falls into the right place, you will also experience that today God is the same as he used to be. Then you will experience fire, power and fellowship with Him, as the first Christians did. The essence is therefore that the Word of God says true and whether Christ is really in us or whether we are deceived.

"Put yourselves to the test and judge yourselves, to find out whether you are living in faith. Surely you know that Christ Jesus is in you?---unless you have completely failed." (2 Cor 13:5)

I am not saying now that you should drop whatever you are doing and run into the street in order to try to obey Christ out of pure fear. The purpose is not just to obey even though it sounds like that because if we are obedient due to false motives, it does not bring much profit. Then we focus on deeds, something we do to please God, which is wrong. The essence is much greater than deeds – it is Christ living in us and us in him; abiding in Him and His words; letting the Holy Spirit show us who we are in Him and how we should live. It comes from the inside as life and not as dead deeds.

Some people have asked me why I am not just living for myself and whether it is not hard to do what God is saying to me. This does not make sense because nothing could be more wrong. My problem is not obeying what God is saying to me. When He calls me to do something, I know this is going to be good because He is with me all the time. Therefore, when He tells me – through the Bible or directly – about something I should do, I think, "Yes, great, this is going to be good".

I can give you a little example of this. In January, 2009 I fasted for 40 days in connection with the book and God working in me when it comes to being a disciple. On the 39th day of the fast something very powerful happened. I was on a walk, praying, when I suddenly experienced God speaking to me very clearly: "Go to Nakskov (a small town in southern Denmark – translator's note)!" I became really excited about that and hurried home to tell my wife Lene about it. While I was telling that to her, I was crying over that strong experience of hearing God speak so clearly.

There is really nothing greater than hearing Him speak. Therefore, the following day we took the whole family to Nakskov to spend some days with friends. Those were days when God was really working in us. On Sunday I preached in a church where I also prayed for someone with a painful knee. After the prayer he was able to go up and down the stairs without the knee creaking. After the meeting he was very eager to talk to me. He asked with great excitement, "When was it exactly that God told you to go to Nakskov?" I answered it was Thursday afternoon. He said "wow" and explained how on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday he had seen our website and prayed to God, "Could you send Torben Søndergaard to Nakskov so he can pray for me to be healed?"

That was very powerful for him and us. Just think that he had been asking God for three days to send me to Nakskov, after which God clearly spoke to me about that. That experience really made us think a lot. When we came home from Nakskov a few days later, we could see that something had happened in us.

When you experience something so fantastic, you just want more of it. You want to do what Jesus asks you for when you know he has control over our life if we obey him. Sometimes we cannot see it here and now, but obeying him is the greatest thing we can do in this life. He loves us, and we

owe Him that. Obedience is not a problem when you are overwhelmed by Him. It does not feel like an offering, but rather like being in love. It does not begin by doing a lot of things, but by coming to him and getting to know Him as He is. It means getting hold of Him and falling in love with Him. Afterwards we can begin doing what we are supposed to because then it comes as life from the inside.

If you feel it is about deeds, take a pause, lay things aside and seek Jesus. Being a Christian means a life and not deeds or heavy burdens.

What a fantastic Lord

When we talk about being a slave of Jesus Christ, there comes a problem, namely the very negative meaning this word has today. If you mention the word “slave”, many people think about slavery in the USA until the end of the 19th century or in southern Europe, where millions of black Africans were sent.

For us slavery is an image of oppression and that is probably also why Bible translators decided to translate the word “doulos” as “servant” instead of “slave”. Being a slave does not, however, need to be something negative. It depends on whose slave you are and what your master is like. If the slave owner is really evil, being a slave can become terrible and oppressive, but if the master is very good, it can actually be fantastic and liberating.

When the slaves in America got their freedom through the Civil War in 1861-1865, many of them decided to stay at their masters’ homes instead of being free. They did not consider being a slave in the places they served to be something negative. Many of them regarded themselves as free, not as slaves. They loved their masters so much that that they wholeheartedly wanted to serve them and that was why they stayed. They had been treated right and wanted to reciprocate that.

If slaves of those times could have this kind of relationship with their earthly masters, how much more should we have it with Christ? The Bible emphasizes clearly that we as people are basically evil and only one person – God – is really good all the time. If you then can enjoy being a slave of a human being that is basically evil, you should much more enjoy being a slave of Christ.

Being a slave of Christ is thus by no means a terrible life, but a life where we can bring Him glory by serving Him and where we wholeheartedly want to please Him and reciprocate His goodness, although we can never come close to the price He paid for us.

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, Paul is talking about marriage and fornication and at the end he uses some strong words.

“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits fornication sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, whom you have of God? And you are not your own, for you are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. “ (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

The truth is that we as Christians, disciples or slaves – call it what you want – do not belong to ourselves. We have been bought for a high price and now belong to someone else, namely Jesus Christ. When He died on the cross, He paid for you and me with his blood so now He owns us. He is our Lord because this is what ownership means. You surrender your life to Him completely voluntarily.

However, even before Jesus bought us, we were not free and did not own ourselves. Actually we have never been free. As the Letter to Romans emphasizes in many places, we used to be slaves of

sin and this world. It means that we used to belong to sin and the god of this world, namely Satan. That was the life we were redeemed from.

In John's first letter he uses the expressions, "children of the devil" and "children of God". The difference between being one and the other can be seen from how you live and whose slave you are. People who have not repented and therefore still live as slaves of sin and follow the sinful lusts are called children of the devil because they belong to him, even if they go to church and call themselves Christians. When you, however, repent in your heart, receive Jesus as Lord and let Him pay for you, you do not belong to sin any longer – on the contrary, you become a slave of Jesus and righteousness. Our affinity will become clear through our lifestyle. Either you are a slave of sin which leads to death, or of righteousness which leads to eternal life.

“Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does righteousness is righteous, even as that One is righteous. He who practices sin is of the Devil, for the Devil sins from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed, that He might undo the works of the Devil. Everyone who has been born of God does not commit sin, because His seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God are revealed, and the children of the Devil: everyone not practicing righteousness is not of God, also he who does not love his brother.” (1 John 3:7-10)

It does not mean, therefore, that we used to be free and belong to ourselves, and when we became Christians, we got bound and began to belong to someone else. It does not mean, either, that we used to be bound, but when we became Christians, we were redeemed so now we can do whatever we want.

It is true that as Christians we have been redeemed from slavery of sin and this world, but not in order to live our own life; now we belong to Him. As Christians we are free from sin – free to say, “Lord, what is your purpose for me?” We are free to serve Jesus as our Lord and do His will.

Remember still that our service to Christ comes from within when we get born again. Our rebirth means that serving Him is not a heavy burden because in Him we get power to say no to this world and yes to Him.

“According as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue” (1 Peter 1:3)

The question is thus not whether we want to be free or bound, but whom we want to be bound to. Whom do we want to belong to and obey: sin, which leads to death, or righteousness, which leads to eternal life?

That is why the essence of Christian life is – as we read in 1 Corinthians – that we honour God with our bodies since now we belong to Him.

In Romans 6 Paul is also talking about being a slave of sin. The word in the original language is still “doulos”.

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be destroyed, that from now on we should not serve sin. For he who died has been justified from sin.” (Romans 6:6-7)

“Then being made free from sin, you became the slaves of righteousness. I speak in the manner of men because of the weakness of your flesh; for as you have yielded your members as slaves to uncleanness, and to lawless act unto lawless act, even so now yield your members as slaves to righteousness unto holiness. For when you were the slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness. What fruit did you have then in those things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now, being made free from sin, and having become slaves to God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:18-23)

Before Jesus saved us, we were slaves to sin, but on the cross Jesus redeemed us with His blood so that we no longer yield to sin, but to righteousness. That is what happens in salvation and baptism. We get redeemed from slavery of sin and become slaves of Christ instead. This life is completely different from how we used to live before.

Baptized to belong to Christ

To be a Christian means to be a disciple and a slave of Christ. A very important part of becoming a disciple is water baptism. We are going to take a look at it.

Baptism is the first thing Jesus mentions in the Great Commission, but we have misunderstood its meaning in today's world. Baptism is a transition from one state to another. You get buried with Christ and rise to a new life, where you now belong to Christ.

Baptism is really so important that you cannot find a single place in the New Testament where someone starts to believe, but does not get baptized immediately. You can see the same pattern here, whether it was in the middle of the night, as with the prison guard and his family in Acts, chapter 16, or whether it was about the three thousand people that started to believe at the same time, as was the case after Peter's preaching at Pentecost.

The Ethiopian eunuch who heard the Gospel through Philip also got baptized at once. When Philip preached the Gospel to him in Acts, chapter 8, we cannot read what he preached, but we can understand that in some way he preached baptism as the introduction to salvation in Christ. It is shown clearly in the eunuch's response to the preaching:

“See, here is water, what hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36)

Baptism is a very important part of being a disciple. Some might object: “Then what about the thief on the cross? He was not baptized, so did he get saved?” The answer is: No, he did not get baptized, but you have to remember that the new covenant (The New Testament) was first introduced on the cross. The thief could not get baptized in the name of Jesus yet because baptism is the image of the death and resurrection of Jesus. And Jesus was still hanging by his side, alive, so baptism had not been introduced at that time. After the cross we see, however, that everybody who started to believe got baptized immediately. Baptism in the New Testament is therefore an introduction to the life with Christ.

Today people are baptized “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”, which is due to the wrong translation in most Bibles. A more correct translation, when it comes to the baptism in the Great Commission, is “into” instead of “in”, as it says for example in the American Standard Version. You do not get baptized “in” the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but “into” the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In other words, you get baptized “to belong” to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the baptism you renounce yourself to belong to someone else, in this case God in the Trinity because we get baptized into Him.

Here is Matthew Henry's commentary from e-sword:

“We are baptized, not into the names, but into the name, of Father, Son, and Spirit, which plainly intimates that these three are one, and their name one. (...) Our consent to a covenant-relation to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Baptism is a sacrament, that is, it is an oath; super sacramentum dicere, is to say upon oath. It is an oath of abjuration, by which we

renounce the world and the flesh, as rivals with God for the throne in our hearts; and an oath of allegiance, by which we resign and give up ourselves to God, to be his, our own selves, our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, to be governed by his will, and made happy in his favour; we become his men, so the form of homage in our law runs. Therefore baptism is applied to the person, as livery and seisin is given of the premises, because it is the person that is dedicated to God. [1.] It is into the name of the Father, believing him to be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (for that is principally intended here), by eternal generation, and our Father, as our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, to whom therefore we resign ourselves, as our absolute owner and proprietor, to actuate us, and dispose of us; as our supreme rector and governor, to rule us, as free agents, by his law; and as our chief good, and highest end.”

This commentary could be good to read in connection with baptism today. Baptism is something we easily misunderstand since in our culture we do not relate to it in the same way as Jews. If Europeans understood what baptism really means, many would definitely consider one more time before getting baptized. Then they would know that baptism means renouncing your own will and deciding to belong to someone else, namely Christ. We can see from the Word of God and the pattern in the Acts that baptism is necessary to become a disciple of Christ.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Just like water baptism is necessary to become a disciple of Jesus, baptism in the Holy Spirit is important for us to be able to live as disciples. It is something that, just as water baptism, has created some controversy in various church circles. The problem that arises over and over again is, as I wrote at the beginning of this book, that we compare ourselves to our church culture and people around us instead of what the Bible says. If you or me were the only Christian on earth, and therefore had nothing else than the Bible to compare ourselves to, the question of the baptism in the Holy Spirit would be a very simple and natural part of being a Christian.

When I say that we should compare ourselves to the Bible, I mean that we should read the Bible as it is and not listen to long and complicated explanations through hard theological studies. We should not listen to people who try to deprive Christianity of life and power. If we read the Bible as it is, without our “cultural glasses” and heavy theological explanations, things such as water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit will become easy to understand.

Just like with water baptism, there is also a very clear pattern all through the Book of Acts when they talk about baptism in the Holy Spirit. This pattern shows distinctly that first of all baptism in the Holy Spirit is important for us to be able to live as disciples of Jesus. Secondly, it is available to all believers and not just to a handful of chosen ones. Thirdly, getting baptized with the Holy Spirit is visible – other people will be able to see the sign that the Holy Spirit has come upon a person. You are not going to be in doubt, either, that many things happen with you in your baptism with the Holy Spirit. Fourthly, you can see that in most cases baptism in the Holy Spirit happens through others, who have the Holy Spirit, laying hands on you.

We are going to take a look at all this.

There are some Christians today who have misunderstood baptism in the Holy Spirit and they think it is the same as water baptism. Many believe as well that the Pentecost in chapter 2 of Acts was the moment when the Christians got saved and received the Holy Spirit for the first time.

It was not so, however. You can read that right after His resurrection, or after the introduction of the new covenant, Jesus paid a visit to his disciples. It says that He:

“breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. “ (John 20:22)

We are reading here that they received the Holy Spirit, or got saved, as we do it today. Still Jesus said to those who had received the Holy Spirit that they should wait in Jerusalem until they got baptized in the Holy Spirit, although they had already been saved and had the Holy Spirit in them. This is where many people make a mistake by believing that salvation by the Holy Spirit is the same as getting baptized with Him. This is, however, incorrect and it is not the pattern we see in the Bible.

Jesus commanded His disciples, those who already had the Holy Spirit in them:

“... not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await the promise of the Father which you heard from Me. For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now. ... you shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you. And you shall be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:4-5;8)

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is therefore an important part of being a Christian, just like water baptism is necessary to become one. When you talk about becoming a Christian, you can see the same three things coming up: repentance before God, water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit. Sometimes water baptism comes first and people get baptized with the Holy Spirit afterwards. In other cases they first get baptized with the Holy Spirit and then in water.

A few examples:

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those hearing the Word. And those of the circumcision, who believed (as many as came with Peter), were astonished because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the nations also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, Can anyone forbid water that these, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we, should not be baptized? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” (Acts 10: 44-48)

Here Peter is talking to Cornelius and his family. In these verses we are reading clearly that they first got baptized in the Holy Spirit and then in water. This already shows that water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit are two different things.

We are also reading here, just like in other places in the Bible, that the Holy Spirit descended upon everyone. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not just for a handful of chosen Christians.

At the beginning of chapter 19 of the Acts Paul is in Ephesus. There he met some Christians who did not know anything about baptism in the Holy Spirit or water baptism as instituted by Jesus. They had only been baptized in the way John the Baptist practised it, namely repentance baptism in water.

What did John the Baptist say to the ones baptized by him?

“I indeed baptize you with water to repentance. But He who comes after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Matthew 3:11)

Anyway we read later when Paul pays a visit to Ephesus:

“While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior of the province and arrived in Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” “We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit,” they

answered. "Well, then, what kind of baptism did you receive?" Paul asked. "The baptism of John," they answered. Paul said, "The baptism of John was for those who turned from their sins; and he told the people of Israel to believe in the one who was coming after him---that is, in Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul placed his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them; they spoke in strange tongues and also proclaimed God's message. They were about twelve men in all." (Acts 19:1-7)

When you read this report and the answer that Paul got, you could almost think he was evangelizing among Christians today:

"We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:2)

The concept of the Holy Spirit and baptism in the Holy Spirit is something that has been suppressed and this could be one of the reasons why in many places today you cannot see the same life and power we read about all the time in Acts. In this text we can also see that water baptism to Jesus and baptism with the Holy Spirit are two different things. Here they first get baptized in water to Jesus and afterwards in the Holy Spirit as Paul lays hands on them. Again we see that they all clearly began to speak in tongues and prophesy, just like it happened with Cornelius and his family.

I have personally prayed for many who got baptized with the Holy Spirit. How can I see that? Just like we read in the reports from the Book of Acts, we can also see today how people start to speak in tongues, prophesy or praise God. I can notice a significant transformation in their lives later as well.

Many people begin to operate in the Holy Spirit's power immediately, too. They start, for example, to heal the sick and cast out demons, while at the same time they preach the Gospel with boldness they had not had before.

Everything we read about in the Acts is therefore the same today. It is still easy to see when people get baptized with the Holy Spirit, just like it was in the whole Book of Acts, e.g. in chapter 8:

"Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Simon saw that the Spirit had been given to the believers when the apostles placed their hands on them." (Acts 8:17-18)

It was easy for Simon to see that the people around him had got baptized with the Holy Spirit, but what did he see? It is not written there that they spoke in tongues or prophesied, but when Simon saw a result, we can believe it was so.

When I am talking about tongue speaking in connection with baptism in the Holy Spirit, I mean speaking which is available to everybody, and not the tongue speaking that has to be interpreted or the one we were reading about in chapter 2 of the Acts, which was very special.

Many people make a mistake here because they do not understand that the Bible clearly describes many forms of tongue speaking. When they therefore read in the Bible that not everyone can speak in tongues, they believe this is valid for all the forms of tongue speaking, including personal tongues, but this is wrong. We read that all this is valid for those who believe:

"And miraculous signs will follow to those believing these things: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will be well." (Mark 16:17-18)

You can also say that these signs follow those who are baptized with the Holy Spirit.

We have to understand that baptism in the Holy Spirit is important. Therefore Jesus said to his disciples that they should not leave the city before they got baptized with the Holy Spirit and received power from above. We read that this baptism is available to everyone and there is always a

visible sign when people get baptized. Sometimes people get baptized in water first and then with the Holy Spirit, and other times it is the other way round. Most often the Holy Spirit is given through laying hands on people. It is the same today. If you look at the places without enough power and life, you can surely see that the people there have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit because these two things go together.

I would like to finish off with two things connected with the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

First of all, it is true that in some places focus on the Holy Spirit is exaggerated and has resulted in a wrong worship of the Holy Spirit – an unhealthy worship where there is no place for Jesus. Remember that the Holy Spirit's primary task is to point at Jesus Christ and this is what we should be able to see, but exaggeration in some places does not mean that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is not necessary for us to live as disciples.

Secondly, today there are some Christians who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit, but do not speak in tongues. This is because they have received wrong teaching that has created fear in them, and the result is that they do not dare speak in tongues. They already have the Holy Spirit and want to be able to speak in tongues, but they hold it back due to fear. What they need is just to start speaking in tongues boldly and walk in what we read about in the Bible.

Unfortunately, Satan has really succeeded in creating confusion around the baptism in the Holy Spirit, just like he has made us believe wrongly that water baptism is unimportant. He knows that if we as Christians really get hold of what God has for us, we will have greater victory than today.

Both water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit are very important in following Jesus.

Revelation and life

Some years ago, when I had religion classes at school, we were told that Christianity is what you call a scripture religion. It means that Christianity is based on a scripture, contrary to other smaller religions based on traditions. I would not, however, describe it this way. First of all, I do not like to use the word "religion" to describe the life with Christ. This is something much more than religion.

Secondly, I would rather call Christianity a revelation religion than a scripture religion. Of course Christianity is based on the Bible, but this is something more than a scripture filled with words – it is full of revelation.

When Jesus says that we as his disciples must abide by the Word and get to know the truth, which will set us free, he is talking about the revealed truth. We can hear the truth and say that now we know it. However, the truth must first become a revelation to us in order to set us free and create life.

This is also valid when the Bible says that we have been redeemed from the slavery of sin. When this becomes revealed to us, it will create great freedom when it comes to sin as well as our relationship with Christ.

Many people who go to church today are still living as slaves to sin. In some cases the reason is that they are not born again. They have never really made Jesus their Lord and Saviour. Another reason is that many people lack a revelation. They have not received a revelation of what Jesus actually did for them on the cross. They have heard about it and understood it with their mind, but it has not become a revelation and life for them yet.

I have, for example, often heard Christians saying that living as a Christian is hard – there are so many things you must not do and other things you have to do. This is, however, not the way you should feel. As we have mentioned before, Christian life is something that should naturally flow

from the inside. These statements reveal the actual problem, namely that the person lacks revelation and life – or in some cases getting born again.

I remember so clearly how God saved me. I immediately experienced freedom I had not had before. I had actually not known anything about the Bible until that time, but I felt free to do good things and serve God, which can be hard to explain and hard for others to understand if you have not experienced it yourself. However, those who have know exactly what I mean. Later in my life with God I received greater revelation about my freedom in Christ in relation to sin, and then I became even more free.

Due to lack of revelation or not surrendering to Jesus, many people experience as a rule that it is difficult to have to serve God, especially when it comes to sin and living a pure life. This is unfortunately something we see more and more among Christians today. The reason is that we compromise with the Gospel.

We start, for example, seeker-friendly churches where the Gospel does not sound as radical as it is. We used to talk about dying to ourselves and this world and laying your life down by the cross, but today we are talking about how to have your best life here and now. Unfortunately, this is the focus in many churches today. We are talking about how we can be happy and succeed here in life instead of about how we can die to ourselves so that Christ can live through us; about how good and fantastic we are as people and about our potential to be happy – not about how miserable and sinful we are in ourselves, and that this is why we can find life and righteousness only in Christ. When we compromise with the Gospel in this way, it does not bring freedom and salvation, but bondage and eventually eternal perdition.

It may not sound this way at the beginning, but the true freedom is in Christ and not in compromising and allowing a little bit of the world. That is why you have nothing to win by compromising with the Gospel.

Jesus paid a high price to redeem us all so that He could have purified and obedient people who serve Him with their whole hearts. This is possible because He has redeemed us for that purpose.

Getting saved or starting to believe is something supernatural which we must never forget. It is not just a question of beginning to believe in God and going to church, but of getting born again of God. This does not just happen through a prayer we repeat after the pastor or through raising our hand. Neither does it happen when we get a little water sprinkled on our head or become a member of a church. It happens when you see your sin, lay down your life for Christ and make Him your Lord and Saviour.

You have to get born again as Jesus says in chapter 3 of the Gospel of John. When this happens, you get redeemed and then you will experience that something new has started. You are hungry for the Word, you abide by it and experience how the Holy Spirit keeps on revealing this for you so you become even more free.

Recently a girl said to me that she would like to have the same faith in God as I had. She thought, however, it would seem fake if she just decided to believe when she was not completely ready to give her life. I said to her that faith is not what she thought it was. Faith is not something human, as we tend to perceive it. This is not something we just start to do with our reason. Faith is supernatural – it is something God puts in us when we turn to him.

What can otherwise make people choose to stay inside a burning house and die rather than deny the faith and be allowed to get out of the flames? This is what happens with Christians today in the most persecuted areas of the world. Thousands of Christians die for their faith every year. This kind of faith is much more than you can imagine with your mind or get by coming to church.

Not so long ago we as family faced big challenges which really required God's intervention. Those challenges made me feel pressed like never before and seek God like never before. There was a

period when I prayed 6-8 hours every day because I was not able to do anything else. One Thursday evening, when I was walking and praying, I experienced a violent demonic struggle so I prayed even more and quoted the Word of God to make that disappear. I had experienced that once before in the same way until the breakthrough came.

The following day after that violent struggle, in the evening, I suddenly felt great supernatural faith coming upon me. I suddenly became filled up with faith as never before. It seemed tangible and I felt I could resurrect the dead if there were any. It is hard to explain, but I could feel the faith and I just knew that the answer to our prayers would come. I knew that nothing was impossible for God.

I also received great peace as if I had already got the answer to the prayer for our situation. It was strange to sleep that night. I woke up every hour, filled up with that faith. Although the circumstances still looked hopeless and I knew I would have to see a miracle before Monday morning, I was sure that God was in control.

On Saturday morning I said to my wife Lene that the solution would come that day. I just knew that, not because I saw that, but because I had faith from God. Some hours after that I got a phone call from a friend from Wales. The same night he was woken up by God at four o'clock and received a word for me. That word changed everything and we could see that God intervened in the last moment.

This is just an example of how real faith can be.

Many people go to church every Sunday without having stable faith. They are still in doubt whether everything about God is right and whether they are saved.

If we compromise with the clarity and sharpness of the Gospel, we will not experience the true faith and the life that the Bible talks about. We will not experience the life of the first Christians in Acts, where they just could not stop talking about everything they had seen and heard. That was a result of the life which sizzled out from within. They were not filled with this life, but the life of the Holy Spirit.

"Whoever believes in me should drink. As the scripture says, 'Streams of life-giving water will pour out from his side.' " (John 7:38)

You might get a lot of people to come to our churches by compromising with the sharpness of the Gospel and this is unfortunately what we see more and more often today.

Freedom and life can be found in making Jesus our Lord and abiding in Him and His Word. They come from the revelation that we can experience through getting filled with Him and His Holy Spirit. We must never forget this.

Honour God – your spiritual service

Now we are going to take a look at another expression which is also misunderstood today, namely "service". When we hear this expression, various thoughts and feelings can appear in our mind, depending on whether we go to a more traditional or evangelical church. There is something, however, that is surely common for both groups: it is something that takes place in a building called a church and consists of songs and teaching. Most Christians treat church services as something

very holy. That is why on Sunday, when you go to a service, many Christians put on smart clothes and behave in a particularly nice way.

This is clearly more or less how many of us imagine a church service today. If we, however, study the Bible and church history, we discover something totally different. The first church building as we know it was not built before the fourth century. During the first 300 years of church history meetings took place in various homes, not in a holy church building.

It is actually not where you gather that makes a big difference. What matters is our understanding of the church service. Many people imagine a service as something that is held in a particular place, at a particular time, with a particular person (a priest or a pastor) who does particular things, but this is very distant from what God had planned.

We say today that we “go to a service” or “are in church”, but the truth is that we ourselves “are” church and the service “is” our life. The church does not consist of dead stones as all the other buildings. What Jesus wants is to have a church consisting of living stones, where He Himself is the cornerstone.

“Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5)

We are all living stones used in building the spiritual temple, as it says here. We are holy priests who bring spiritual offers. We are a temple for the Holy Spirit. The only building God needs today is you and me. If we understand this, it will create fear of God and respect for him. Think that you as a Christian are a temple for God’s Holy Spirit. Think that God lives in you through His spirit.

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, whom you have of God? And you are not your own, for you are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

We do not own ourselves anymore. God has bought us so that the Holy Spirit could move in and make our bodies into his holy temple. He owns us so we have to honour Him with our life. This is our spiritual service.

“So then, my friends, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God---what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.” (Rom 12:1-2)

Bringing our bodies as a holy offering is our spiritual service. We are to be holy, just like God is holy. Holiness is our goal although this is something we do not speak a lot about in the churches nowadays.

Service is not really something you go to in a building or at specific times. It is of course good that we meet and we should continue doing this, but the real spiritual service is to bring yourself as a holy offering to God. When we gather at services, the purpose is not to hear the preaching, but to bring ourselves to God. This is not just something we have to do on Sunday morning, but it is also valid on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and the rest of the week.

“Rid yourselves, then, of all evil; no more lying or hypocrisy or jealousy or insulting language. Be like newborn babies, always thirsty for the pure spiritual milk, so that by drinking it you may grow up and be saved. As the scripture says, “You have found out for yourselves how kind the Lord is.” Come to the Lord, the living stone rejected by people as worthless but chosen by God as valuable. Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. For the scripture says, “I chose a valuable

stone, which I am placing as the cornerstone in Zion; and whoever believes in him will never be disappointed." (1 Peter 2:1-6)

Christians are those who serve God by bringing themselves as a holy offering to God. This is their spiritual service.

"We have been bought for a high price," says Paul in 1 Corinthians. We have to admit this is right. God paid an amazingly high price for us, namely Jesus Christ on the cross. The price could not be any higher. We can therefore at least honour God with our life because we belong to him. Paul understood this and really worked hard to please Jesus.

"Therefore we are also laboring to be well-pleasing to Him, whether at home or away from home." (2 Corinthians 5:9)

That was the goal in his life. He understood that he no longer belonged to himself, but to Christ. He was overwhelmed by Christ in such a fantastic way that he wished others would also experience that.

The way we honour God is by bringing ourselves to him. It means that we obey our Lord Jesus Christ because by honouring Jesus we honour God:

"Nor does the Father himself judge anyone. He has given his Son the full right to judge, so that all will honor the Son in the same way as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him." (John 5:22-23)

It is not enough that we belong to Christ and honour him, but He should also be our life. When we get seized by Him, everything else around fades. Then every price will be worth paying, even it is going to be blood, sweat and tears, which is quite certain because nobody enters life without going through tribulation.

Unfortunately, very few people really seize Christ. For them Paul's speech will be empty words or something that seems too radical.

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor. Yet I do not know what I shall choose. For I am pressed together by the two: having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your advancement and joy of faith, so that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again." (Phil 1:21-26)

Paul says that death is nothing but gain and that he wants to leave this life to be together with Christ. The only thing that keeps him on earth is consideration for others so that they can seize Christ, too.

Many people today will say the opposite of what Paul is saying here. "Jesus, you must not come now because I am enjoying life on earth so much. Jesus, you must not come because first I want to get married, have children, travel etc."

Many Christians do not want Him to come because to them life means living on earth and there is so much they want to achieve here. On the contrary, Paul wanted to come home to Jesus. Staying here was also good, but not because he wanted time to achieve lots of things for himself. The only thing that kept him here was to bear fruit in the lives of others so that they could also seize Christ, just like he had done it.

Paul was dead to this world. His life was now Christ. His focus was Christ. His desire was to honour Christ with his life, whatever was going to happen to him.

“For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that I shall be ashamed in nothing, but as always now Christ shall be magnified in my body with all boldness, whether it is by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:19-21)

The goal of true Christianity is that everyone is seized by Christ and that we all bring our bodies as living and holy offering to Him as our spiritual service. That is why there is absolutely nothing negative about being a slave of Christ. It is rather an honour when a man like Paul is seized by Him. Even if it should cost us everything, it would not matter because we are already crucified with Him and do not longer live for ourselves. For us who are seized by Christ death is just going to be a promotion because then we will no longer be separated from Him as we are here on earth. Then we will know him fully, and this is something we cannot achieve in this life.

May this not just be theory for us, something that only Paul practised. May it become something we all grasp.

Let not my, but Your will be done

This whole speech about being a slave, honouring God with our body and being seized by Christ may sound strange to many people today. Some will think that this is too radical and will scare others away from God, but why should we worry about that? It is God who saves people and if something is true, it should not be hidden, but revealed to as many as possible. It is important to learn that we cannot please everyone because as Christ's slaves we cannot serve people and do everything they expect of us. Paul says it so clearly:

“For now do I persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I would not be a servant (slave) of Christ. And, brothers, I make known to you the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not according to man. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it except by a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:10-12)

The Gospel we preach is not human, but Christ's work. We cannot be His slaves and at the same time serve our own wishes and needs. It is not the master's task to ask his slave what he wants to achieve in life and therefore do everything he can so that the slave can succeed. No, it is the slave's task to say: Lord, what do you want from me?

It is very radical to come up with these statements, especially in our western culture, where almost everything is concerned with us and our needs. According to modern Christianity it is God who is supposed to serve us so we can succeed and not vice versa: “Give your life to Him, and He will grant all your wishes. He can help you succeed in your life.”

The truth is, however, that this is not about you and me, but someone much bigger than us, namely Christ. Have you ever thought about what God received from the service last Sunday instead of talking about what you got out of it? After the service we should ask, “God, was it a good meeting? I hope You liked our worship of you and our offering because we were here for Your sake”.

God is not a machine that is supposed to grant our wishes. It is not the master who serves the slave, but the slave who serves the master. That is what it means to “make Jesus our Lord”. We put our own needs aside in order to serve him.

Try to read these radical words of Lord Jesus yourself. They are seldom read out loud because they contradict what Christianity has become today:

"Suppose one of you has a servant (slave) who is plowing or looking after the sheep. When he comes in from the field, do you tell him to hurry along and eat his meal? Of course not! Instead, you say to him, 'Get my supper ready, then put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may have your meal.' The servant (slave) does not deserve thanks for obeying orders, does he? It is the same with you; when you have done all you have been told to do, say, 'We are ordinary servants (slaves); we have only done our duty.' " (Luke 17:7-10)

Think that Jesus could say this to his disciples. It is radical, but that is what it is about. A slave's focus is only on one thing: to serve his master. Our job is to serve Jesus Christ so it is not a matter of our will being done, but his.

"Lord, what do you want from me?"

This is the natural life for those who have been seized by Him. It is not a heavy burden. His will becomes ours when we are one with Him.

The greatest thing we can experience after this life is to hear the well-known words from chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew from the mouth of Jesus:

"Well done, good and faithful servant (slave)! You have been faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." (Matthew 25:21)

We can already experience this joy now when we serve Him. I have experienced this many times when God has called me to do something for him. At the beginning I often went through enormous opposition and trials, but afterwards there comes great satisfaction and joy. At first it is hard to obey, but I have seen many times how he thanked me for my obedience. This is one of the wildest and most beautiful things. It is really fantastic.

I remember that some time ago God said I should write an article for a Christian magazine concerning something that happened in Lakeland, USA. A lot of Christians in Europe were excited about some meetings there and took a trip to that place. God showed me, however, that the whole thing was not from Him and that He wanted me to take a public stand and warn people against it, which was not easy because at that time they had heard almost exclusively good things about it.

I still wrote the article God asked me for and that caused a lot of trouble, of course. Some of the people I knew called me and said that now I could just end my ministry and that I was opposing God etc.

A week after my article there were a lot of positive articles about that place and lots of negative feedback about me and what I had written. When I read that in the article, I went for a walk and prayed. There I experienced immediately how God spoke to me again and said, "Good my son. You have been obedient," and I became filled with joy and thought about the verse talking about the first disciples who had also experienced opposition:

"Then indeed they departed from the presence of the sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be shamed for His name." (Acts 5:41)

When you are obedient and God is with you, people can say whatever they want because we obey God and not them.

Shortly after my article everything in Lakeland fell apart and it became visible that what I said was really correct. Obedience to him, however, causes opposition, even from the church, which is always the hardest.

The experience of how He rejoices over your offering is much bigger than the offering you could bring. The words: "well done, good and faithful servant" are something we can experience many

times in our life and hopefully the day when this really matters. It is my wish, and it should be all Christians' wish that one day he says:

“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” (Matthew 25:21)

James, the author of James' letter, was an important leader in the church in Jerusalem and a physical brother of Jesus. Nevertheless, having something to be proud of, he starts his letter by explaining that he is a slave of Christ.

“James, a servant (slave) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1)

He is not saying, “I am a leader in Jerusalem and a brother of Lord Jesus Christ”. No, he knew who he was and what it was about. Later in the letter he is saying something we can learn a lot from:

“Now listen to me, you that say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will travel to a certain city, where we will stay a year and go into business and make a lot of money.’ You don't even know what your life tomorrow will be! You are like a puff of smoke, which appears for a moment and then disappears. What you should say is this: ‘If the Lord is willing, we will live and do this or that.’” (James 4:13-16)

These are great words. We have so many plans for ourselves and for our lives, but we forget about one thing – hearing what our Lord wants us to do.

Jesus said that we should pray like this:

“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)

These are not just some empty words that Jesus is giving us in the Lord's Prayer. No, it should be our prayer and goal in life that his will is done. This is what it means to make Jesus your Lord.

The price of being a Christian

We have looked at the different aspects of becoming and being a real Christian. Now it is time to read Jesus' own words about what it costs to follow Him. As we read this, remember that this is Lord Jesus Christ Himself who talks about the price of following Him. It is also valid for us today, whether we call ourselves Christians, disciples, slaves or anything else that comes to our mind. This is not about what we call ourselves, but about whether we accept the calling Jesus is giving us – a call to follow Him, a call to make Him our Lord and Saviour.

Let us take a closer look at what Jesus teaches, but first I want to ask you a question. If now Jesus says one thing about what it means to be a Christian, and another person says something else, which of these two shall we believe? Who has the truth about being a Christian? The answer is, of course, Jesus.

Unfortunately, we do not always think this way nowadays. Today we are quick to quote many others even though they say something else than what Jesus does, but if we want to build our life on the rock, we cannot always build on our culture. We cannot even build on what great Christian writers are saying today if it is not the same as Lord Jesus says Himself.

If we are supposed to build on the rock and build something that lasts eternally, we have to build on the words of Jesus in the Bible and not on everything else. Try to remember this when you read the

next Bible passages. Remember that what you are going to read is true although it is very different from what others are telling you today.

In the following Bible passages I have decided to replace the word “disciple” with the word “Christian”. The reason is that even though we have taken a look at these words, it still lies deep in us that “a Christian” and “a disciple” are not the same.

“And he said to them all, “If you want to come with me (be Christians), you must forget yourself, take up your cross every day, and follow me. For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it, but if you lose your life for my sake, you will save it. Will you gain anything if you win the whole world but are yourself lost or defeated? Of course not! If you are ashamed of me and of my teaching, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. I assure you that there are some here who will not die until they have seen the Kingdom of God.”” (Luke 9:23-26)

Jesus is clearly radical when He talks about the price of being a Christian, and it is not only in this context:

“No pupil is greater than his teacher; no slave is greater than his master. So a pupil should be satisfied to become like his teacher, and a slave like his master. If the head of the family is called Beelzebul, the members of the family will be called even worse names! So do not be afraid of people. Whatever is now covered up will be uncovered, and every secret will be made known. What I am telling you in the dark you must repeat in broad daylight, and what you have heard in private you must announce from the housetops. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. For only a penny you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. As for you, even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows! Those who declare publicly that they belong to me, I will do the same for them before my Father in heaven. But those who reject me publicly, I will reject before my Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the world. No, I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set sons against their fathers, daughters against their mothers, daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law; your worst enemies will be the members of your own family. Those who love their father or mother more than me are not fit to be Christians; those who love their son or daughter more than me are not fit to be Christians. Those who do not take up their cross and follow in my steps are not fit to be my disciples. Those who try to gain their own life will lose it; but those who lose their life for my sake will gain it.” (Matthew 10:24-39)

Now from Luke, chapter 14:

Once when large crowds of people were going along with Jesus, he turned and said to them, “Those who come to me cannot be Christians unless they love me more than they love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and themselves as well. Those who do not carry their own cross and come after me cannot be Christians. If one of you is planning to build a tower, you sit down first and figure out what it will cost, to see if you have enough money to finish the job. If you don't, you will not be able to finish the tower after laying the foundation; and all who see what happened will make fun of you. ‘You began to build but can't finish the job!’ they will say. If a king goes out with ten thousand men to fight another king who comes against him with twenty thousand men, he will sit down first and decide if he is strong enough to face that other king. If he isn't, he will send messengers to meet the other king to ask for terms of peace while he is still a long way off. In the same way,” concluded Jesus, “none of you can be a Christian unless you give up everything you have.” (Luke 14, 25-33)

Wow! What strong words Jesus is using. Unfortunately, his message is so different from what we hear in many places. Today salvation is almost equal to believing that Jesus has once lived. When

we do that, we are Christians. In some places, however, this is not enough; there you also have to pray a prayer that you repeat after someone else, and then you are surely saved.

If you therefore do not follow the Bible fully, you are still a Christian, but just a lukewarm Christian, a weak Christian or whatever you call it. One thing is certain, though: you will get to heaven when you die because this is what the Bible says, does it not?

Is Jesus implying here that it is all right to love others more than him?

Is the Bible implying that it is all right to live in conscious sin?

Does the Bible say that it is all right to be a lukewarm Christian and that the lukewarm ones get to heaven?

Try to pay attention to the last words Jesus said here:

*“In the same way none of you can be a Christian unless you give up everything you have.”
(Luke 14:33)*

According to Jesus we cannot be Christians if we are not willing to pay the price, even if it is everything we own. That is what Jesus said then and that is what He is saying today. When did we last hear it preached in our churches? The answer might be: Never.

You must be thinking just like me that this is radical, but this is true. The reason why we think this is radical – or maybe even too radical – is probably that we have gone so far away from the real Christianity. If we read through all the four gospels, we will clearly see that this is what Jesus said, namely that it costs everything to follow Him.

If we want to get saved, we have to make Him our Lord and thus become His slaves. Our own wishes, needs and dreams cannot be of much use. Now it is our Lord’s will that matters because He has bought us.

Persecutions and tribulations

One of the things Jesus often talked about was that we as Christians should expect persecutions and tribulations. He says even more often that following Him can cost our life. We Europeans can have a big problem understanding this talk because of religious freedom in Europe, but this is a reality for thousands of Christians all over the world. If we experienced the same opposition and persecution in Europe as they do in the countries with persecution, our European Christianity would look totally different.

First of all, it would mean that suddenly we would see clearly which ones are real Christians and which ones just call themselves Christians. Many of the false Christians, i.e. those who still live for themselves would namely stop coming to church. They would deny their faith the day it suddenly cost them a price they have never been willing to pay. I imagine that many European churches would become very small in just a few days.

It would, however, also mean that the remaining ones would be those who have really made Jesus their Lord and have been willing to pay whatever it costs to follow Him. The opposition would make them seek God as never before, which would bring real growth and development. This is the pattern seen around the world and I believe it would happen in Europe, too.

Now it almost sounds like I want the persecution of churches to come and I have to admit it. We need persecution so as not to fall asleep. At the same time it would reveal the false gospel that is preached in many places.

In the parable of the sower Jesus says that it is tribulation and persecution that revealed what was sown on the rock and what was sown on the good ground:

“But that which was sown on the stony places is this: he who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. But he has no root in himself, and is temporary. For when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word, he immediately stumbles. And that sown into the thorns is this: he who hears the Word; and the anxiety of this world, and the deceit of riches, choke the Word, and he becomes unfruitful.” (Matthew 13:20-22)

In Europe it is very hard to see who is sincere and who is not. It is hard to distinguish between those who want to pay the price and those who want to be entertained. Again it is hard for us because we let ourselves get cheated by numbers and outer things, but lose focus on true devotion and on what lasts eternally.

Let me explain what I mean by this. Since we are not experiencing persecution and tribulation today, it looks like it does not cost so much to become a Christian. That is why we easily compromise the Gospel without seeing how dangerous it is. Today we seem to achieve greater growth by compromising the radical message Jesus brought and preaching a human-centred gospel. If you look at the types of big churches in the West, this is unfortunately a frequent reason; they preach a gospel that talks more about success and happiness than about laying your life down and making Jesus your Lord.

This gospel will, however, never be received in the countries where it costs to be a Christian. Many of our Sunday sermons would be immediately ignored if they were preached to people in heavily persecuted countries.

Just try to imagine messages such as: “Give your life to God, and He will help you to be happy” or “God has a wonderful plan for your life so just come to Him”. How would these messages be received if one has just seen their family tortured and killed because they have given their lives to Jesus?

The truth is that much of what is preached in the West today would be useless if we had to face persecution. We would then be forced to go back to the Bible and the true Gospel, where it costs everything to follow Jesus. This is where we have to go through many tribulations in order to start the real life – a life with God without any pain, sin or sickness. Nowadays we are focusing so much on this life and so little on the life that will come. This would change if the present life became hard due to tribulations and persecution.

We cannot let ourselves get cheated, but have to preach what the Bible says even if it does not seem to work. If we start to preach the Gospel today just like Jesus, it will really require the Holy Spirit to come and draw people to repentance. Then salvation will be something that God does in a sovereign way, just like in the first church.

This is not the case with the other gospel, where we compromise. We make it sound so appealing to become a Christian that one would have to be stupid not to receive it, but this different gospel does not make a difference and does not bring the life the Bible talks about. People cannot come to God unless He draws them. Salvation is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. We read in the Bible how God was adding people, but will He do it if we are not faithful to His Word?

Jesus said this about those who became Christians:

“None of you can be a Christian unless you give up everything you have.” “ (Luke 14,33)

One day many ministers will get a hard judgment when it turns out that they have led people astray by preaching another gospel. Many are so driven by a wish to have great numbers that they have compromised with what they know is true. They have seen it is easier to get people into the church by preaching something else than Jesus said we should.

I have a motto I want to live out although it is often very hard. Here it is:

I'd rather people cursed me now and thanked me in eternity than thanked me now and cursed me in eternity because I didn't preach the truth.

This is a motto that is incredibly hard to follow because we all want to be praised and liked by people. If, however, they curse us now and hear the truth so they can repent and thank us in eternity because we have not kept the truth to ourselves, it is better than if they thank us now for our wonderful sermons and perish the day they die because Jesus was not their Lord and then they curse us.

We must therefore remember that even though we do not see the price of following Jesus as clearly as in other countries, it is the same price. Although we do not experience the same persecution, it is still the same Gospel.

We might not have to give up our houses, family and other things in the physical sense to become a Christian in Europe, but in order to follow Jesus, we have to renounce them in our hearts so that we can do it without hesitation. This is what Jesus says:

"None of you can be a Christian unless you give up everything you have." (Luke 14,33)

God looks at the hearts and our willingness or lack of it. If we are not willing to do that, God has to make us willing.

I can say personally that the last three years before this book was finished had been the hardest years of my life as a Christian. They had been full of tests in which God allowed everything to be taken away from my family. One of the things we experienced was losing our house, just like Jesus mentioned. It was not funny to go through years, but it was necessary to be able to learn and come closer to Him.

It is through this kind of struggle and tests that we see what has true value. At the same time we have found out that houses and all other things have no value when the rubber hits the road. The only thing that has true value is to know Jesus – seize and serve Him. Struggles and tests are one of the ways God works in us.

Friends of Jesus and children of God

Before we finish, we will take a look at what it means to be friends of Jesus and children of God. You are going to notice that this is not contrary to what I have been teaching until now even though some may understand it this way. In a conversation with the disciples soon before the end of the life and ministry of Jesus, He calls the disciples his friends for the first time:

"No longer do I call you servants (slaves), for the servant (slave) does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15)

Try to pay attention to what He is saying or rather not saying. He is not saying they are not His slaves anymore, but that he is not calling them slaves any longer. Another translation says that He no longer treats them as slaves. In order to understand what Jesus is actually saying here, it is necessary to look at the context. Just before that He says:

"No one has greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." (John 15:13-14)

When we lay down our own life for Him as slaves and call Him our Lord, Jesus comes to us and says that He no longer treats us as slaves, but as friends.

What a great honour to be called a friend of Jesus. It is amazing to think about. Imagine being friends with HIM who created everything, our Lord and God.

Today many people take this verse from John 15 and make it sound like Jesus is friends with everyone and everything, which is completely wrong. You first become his friend through salvation by laying down your life for Him and doing what He says. You cannot live as a sinner and at the same time be friends with Jesus. Friendship with the world is namely enmity with God.

You might say it is written in the Bible that Jesus was a friend of sinners and you point to this verse:

"When John came, he fasted and drank no wine, and everyone said, 'He has a demon in him!' When the Son of Man came, he ate and drank, and everyone said, 'Look at this man! He is a glutton and wine drinker, a friend of tax collectors and other outcasts!'" (Matthew 11:18-19)

This is another verse that often gets misunderstood. Of course Jesus used to spend time with sinners in order to call them to repentance, as the Bible says, but you cannot say on the basis of this verse that he was close friends with them. What we read here is just what people said about him. In the same verse it also says that Jesus was a glutton and a wine drinker, which he was not, either. John the Baptist was not possessed, either, as they also claimed in these verses.

Therefore, this friendship where Jesus confides in one is for those who have laid their life down for Him and made Him Lord. Not everyone shares this friendship with Him. We read that one day He will say to many: *"I never knew you. Get away from me, you wicked people!"* (Matthew 7:23)

We do not see Jesus starting to call people by saying: "Come and become my friends". No, it starts when we turn away from this world and make him Lord. Then we become His friends and He becomes ours.

Another thing that happens in salvation is that God puts a ring on our finger and we become His son or daughter, as you can read in the parable about the prodigal son.

However, even though we become friends with Jesus or children of God, and we are really adopted by God and can say "Abba, Father", it is still important that we know who we are and who He is.

Joseph from the Old Testament was promoted from a slave to a ruler, but even as a ruler he was in a way a slave for the pharaoh. The pharaoh could degrade him at any time and send him to the dungeons again. The pharaoh's word was still valid and Joseph was supposed to obey him even after his promotion to a noble position.

Although Jesus calls us friends and we get this noble honour of becoming God's son or daughter in Christ, we are still like slaves and do not deserve anything else. This means that we get everything out of grace and should therefore be thankful for everything.

In other words, it is all about love. You may be surprised by these words right now because there has not been written so much about love in this book. I know I have been writing a lot about serving Jesus and obeying him, but serving and obedience should be the result of love for Him.

He loves us and showed it by sacrificing His life for us. His love for us, which is beyond any limits, should be the driving force in everything we do.

Jesus said:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

It is not hard to love Him when you understand how this is connected. Teaching about being a slave can actually help us to love Him even more when we see that He is really good to us and understand that everything we are and get is out of grace.

We are His slaves, but He treats us like His friends. He loves us more than we will ever understand as long as we are here on earth. As slaves we own nothing and have nothing to say, but still He reaches out and confides things to us.

We were nothing, but due to salvation in Christ we become children of God. We can thus call God our Father because that is who He is. Let us therefore love Him with all our heart and love our neighbours.

King David understood that, too. He did not brag about his success or power as a king. His prayer was like this:

"I am your servant, Lord; I serve you just as my mother did. You have saved me from death. I will give you a sacrifice of thanksgiving and offer my prayer to you." (Psalm 116:16-17)

Therefore through salvation we become children of God and Jesus calls us His friends.

Conclusion

Now we have taken a look at different aspects of being a Christian if I may use the most common word of today.

But what is a Christian then?

The short answer to this question is: *A Christian is one who believes in Jesus.* The problem is just that many people today do not know what it implies. They have misunderstood the meaning of faith and many do not know what Jesus actually teaches. That is why it is impossible for them to believe in Him because that means to believe both in Him and his teaching. Faith means practising what He says.

In this book I have tried to put an end to this problem by explaining what it means to believe in Jesus. I have used some other words, which should make it clearer to see what faith in Jesus really is and what it implies.

As you probably see, there are unfortunately really many who have gone wrong here. One day many will perish because salvation can be found only in Jesus. It also explains, however, why many churches and Christians lack the life and the power that the Bible says the first Christians had.

I will now give you a longer and deeper answer to the question: *What is a Christian?* It is going to be based on the things we have looked at in this book. I could highlight other important aspects that are part of Christian life, such as church, prayer, care etc. but I will not deal with them here.

What is a Christian?

A Christian is one who has laid his life down at the cross and made Jesus his Lord and Saviour. You show this devotion by getting baptized in order to belong to Jesus Christ. From that moment you no longer live for yourself, but for the one who died and rose again, namely Jesus Christ. This is also called repentance.

When you repent before Jesus Christ, you get born again and the Spirit of God takes residence in you. You are now a new creation, as the Bible calls it; not born of human will, but of the Spirit of God. Something supernatural happens within you, and this new birth is the beginning of your Christian walk.

In this new birth you also get redeemed from the slavery of sin, and that is why now you can bring yourself as a holy, living offering to God. As a “born-again Christian” you can no longer live in conscious sin as before. Your conscience has become new. It is sharp and clean, which makes you notice it immediately when you commit sin. It also makes you stop living in sin. You will feel free in relation to sin and strive to live a holy life, in spite of shortcomings and constant struggles against the flesh.

Thus, as a Christian you no longer live for yourself, in conscious sin – you are done with yourself and this world. You do not say anymore: “Let my will be done”, but “Lord, I love you, let your will be done in me”.

As a born-again Christian you will also feel natural hunger for the pure milk of the Word, which is the Bible. Just like a healthy baby is hungry for milk, your spirit will cry out for more of God. As a Christian you remain in the Word (the Bible), and you let the Word guide you and set you free.

“If you continue in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32)

A Christian is also one who gets baptized in the Holy Spirit and experiences His power and life in himself. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is really important for us to be able to live as Christians. Without it you are never going to experience the power and revelation that the first disciples had. Through the baptism in the Holy Spirit, as well as the personal fellowship with God and his word, we as Christians find the strength to live the life we read about in the Bible; a life with many challenges and obstacles; a life in the supernatural, where we see how God is close and intervenes daily in many fantastic ways; a life as we read about it in the Book of Acts; a life where you cannot stop talking about everything you have seen and heard.

All these things characterize a Christian life, but in order to receive it, you must absolutely get born again. You should not try to live as a Christian without this new birth because this is impossible. If you try, it will go wrong because in the new birth God gives you what is necessary to be able to live with Him. He gives us the Holy Spirit as our helper and guide who reveals Christ for us.

Without the new birth your Christian life will feel like rules and dead deeds, and it will end in perdition – without Christ you are going to fail your test. The new birth of God is where it all starts. Unfortunately, many people in the churches today ignore it.

A Christian is also one who really wants to honour God through his life. This happens through honouring the Son and obeying God; through being faithful in what you do; through working as if it was for Lord (Ephesians 6:7); through laying your life down for your family as if it was for the Lord (Ephesians 5:25); by doing everything as if it was for the Lord.

“And everything, whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.” (Colossians 3:17)

“For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For both if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore both if we live, and if we die, we are the Lord's.” (Romans 14:7-8)

A Christian lives and breathes for his Lord, Jesus Christ.

In other words, a Christian is a person who loves God with all his heart, all his soul and all his mind, just as he loves his neighbour like himself. (Matthew 22:37-40)

As you have read, the Christian life starts with the new birth, but it does not end there because after the new birth and the baptism in the Holy Spirit you have to learn to walk and live with God. This walk is to a large extent based on fellowship with God and being a disciple of people who go before us – others who live the life you read about in the Bible.

Discipleship does not only happen through teaching at meetings, but mainly through sharing life.

It happens through making mistakes and learning from them. It happens through correction and challenges to take responsibility and new steps. It happens through practical things such as learning to evangelize, learning to pray, fast and study the Bible – something that unfortunately is emphasized too little today.

Jesus uses this description of being a Christian and belonging to Him:

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give to them eternal life, and they shall never ever perish, and not anyone shall pluck them out of My hand.” (John 10:27-28)

You can thus also say that a Christian is one who hears His voice and follows Him. If you therefore do not hear what Jesus says, then you do not follow Him and you do not belong to him, which implies that you are not a Christian. This is what Jesus himself says.

My question to you is not whether you are a Christian or whether you are baptized and confirmed. I am not asking, either, whether you believe in Jesus or go to church. My question is: Are you really born again? Are you a disciple of Jesus? Do you hear His voice and follow Him? If not, you must repent today and ask Jesus to save you.

Without His salvation you will perish in hell for ever. God is a just God, who will one day judge all people. We are all guilty of sin and that is why we all need forgiveness. God loves us so much that He gave His only son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place. On the cross Jesus took the punishment we should have got. He took your sin and my sin on Himself so that we can be free in Him. We find this forgiveness only in Jesus, by repenting and making him Lord, with everything it implies. I hope you will receive this forgiveness before it is too late.

Seek Him and get to know Him as He is. Read the Bible and let the Holy Spirit show you how to live. Then find some disciples who can take you into discipleship – some who can go before you so you can learn and develop. Then you can also begin to make others disciples of Jesus, which is what He commanded us to do.

If you are already living in this, let us stand together and spread the message about being a Christian, disciple and slave to all those who have not heard it yet. May Europeans understand what it means to be a Christian on a daily basis.

Let us see a New Testament Christianity come back to Europe. God is the same today as He was in biblical times.

God bless you

Torben Søndergaard
A disciple of Jesus Christ