

# What does it mean to be a disciple *of Jesus*?

1 Corinthians 4.8-13



What would it mean to be a true disciple *of Jesus*? What does it mean if *Jesus* is the template (the foundation-stone) for leadership — and apostleship — and the life of the church? Is that the question that Paul is inviting the Corinthians to ponder on here? The clue to what Paul is on about lies in the context – the verses before and after our passage for today.

At the beginning of the chapter Paul is setting out the nature of true apostleship and applies those principles to himself and Apollos “for your benefit” (v.6). Verse 7 then puts these three rhetorical questions:

- For who makes you different from anyone else?
- What do you have that you did not receive?
- And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

And these are followed by three ironical exclamations in v.8(a) that are corrected in v.8(b)

- Already you have all you want!
- Already you have become rich!
- You have begun to reign—and that without us!

How I wish that you really *had* begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!

Paul then goes on to elaborate on the image of the life of the true apostle in the ironic opposites of verse 10

- We are fools for Christ [*true apostles*], but you are so wise in Christ!
- We are weak [*true apostles*], but you are so strong!
- You are honoured, we are dishonoured [*true apostles*]!

The Corinthians are pictured as being in full possession of riches, satisfaction, and ruling power; as wise, strong and honoured. In contrast the Apostles (Paul and Apollos) are pictured as criminals sentenced to death, fools for Christ's sake, weak, despised, hungry and thirsty, ill clad, homeless, working with their own hands, reviled, persecuted, slandered, the refuse and scum of the world! Which is more like Jesus?

But don't take these claims at face value or as historical information on the actual situation in Corinth. To do so would be seriously to undermine Paul's rhetoric. The clue is in the very next verse:

<sup>14</sup>I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children ... [be true Apostles of Christ]!

I wonder, have we so focussed on being the Church and doing 'Churchy' things, that we have lost the plot? Isn't it discipleship of Jesus first?

Maybe the work that the Methodist Church has recently done to help us with a 'rule of life', as many of the monastic communities call it, will help us all to put the focus back where it needs to be - on being disciples of Jesus!

Why not have a look at this that the Methodist Church has recently produced to help us focus on being disciples of Jesus <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/life-and-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/what-is-a-methodist-way-of-life/>

©Rod Hill, Methodist Minister