

Are you my Brother? Are you my Sister?

The Bible often uses the terms "brother" and "sister" to describe people who share the common bond of salvation - people who are disciples, or followers, of Jesus Christ. When it does so, it does not use these terms in some type of figurative or symbolic "religious talk." Rather, it uses them to describe a genuine relationship that exists between such people.

All who truly belong to Jesus - genuine disciples - are truly brothers and sisters. The Bible tells us that they have entered a new relationship - both with Jesus and with each other. Just as they share a common bond with all members of the human race (all being offspring of the original two humans) Jesus' disciples now share a common bond with all members of God's new race (1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-49).

This new relationship is so much superior to the other one - as superior as life is over death - that, to ignore it is almost like a slap in the face of Jesus himself. After all, our bond as a member of Adam's race results in death, but our bond as a member of God's new race, made available only through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, results in eternal life. (See Romans 5:17 and the surrounding verses.) How could we *ever* treat a relationship that the blood of Jesus brought into existence, as though it was of little importance, or that it didn't even exist?

The Bible describes Jesus' disciples as having been *adopted* into God's family. Jesus is *our* brother; the Father of Jesus Christ is *our* Father. Scripture tells us that God "predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves" (Ephesians 1:5-6). Again, this is not some type of "religious talk," any more than is the part of the verse that mentions the praise God will receive, for having done this.

As sons and daughters of the Father, our relationship to this present world has changed. Though we still live in this sinful world, we are no longer a part of it (John 17:16). Rather, we are temporary residents - aliens (1 Peter 2:11) - and have no right to follow after the desires of our old nature (the way the *world* does). God created us anew so that we could live as "new creations" (2 Corinthians 5:17) - now able to do what *God* calls "good" (Ephesians 2:10). Presently, we are like ambassadors representing a foreign country - but we represent Christ, and our country is an eternal one (2 Corinthians 5:20)!

Having described the nature of a follower of Jesus, we have to deal with an important question. What if a person *claims* to follow Jesus, but does not live like an ambassador, or a new creation? What if he doesn't treat other disciples of Jesus like the brothers and sisters that they are?

One possible reason may be due to ignorance. Some people might not have been shown the Scriptures that teach these truths. Or they may have followed the bad examples of those who claimed to be "Christian," but who were actually false believers. If this is the case, then once

they know what God's Word *really* says - and if they are reading this article, they now *do* know what God's Word says - they will want to obey God. (This assumes that they are genuine disciples of Jesus; the fakes won't change.) They might not obey God perfectly, but they will try - and they will repent, when they realize their shortcomings.

However, there are others who - even after learning these things - will continue to *not* do them. They may claim to be "followers of Jesus" (or "Christians"), but according to the Bible, the fact that they *aren't* following him proves that their claims are false. (Oh how we wish they could learn that followers *follow*!) This way of life is not the mark of a genuine disciple, but of a counterfeit.

Today, it seems that we can find counterfeit disciples - false "brothers" and "sisters" - everywhere. Sometimes they are obvious fakes. At other times, they look like disciples for a while, but eventually their "fruit" (their lives) prove them false (Matthew 7:20, etc.). The Bible warned us that this would be the case, as we approached the "last days." Yet even in the days of the apostles, false "brothers" were present (2 Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4).

We must take caution to not use these warnings against *fakes* as an excuse for ignoring others who are *genuine* brothers and sisters in Christ (or even for denying that other followers of Jesus exist). Instead, these warnings imply that there *is* such a thing as a genuine brother (or sister), in the family of God. It is our duty to *learn to recognize who they are, and to treat them as such*. To do this, we must learn to distinguish between the genuine and the fake.

It is only when we are willing to study the Scriptures - first, to learn how to *identify* our brothers and sisters, and second, to learn how to *treat* them as brothers and sisters - that we will be able to have the type of relationships that Jesus requires of his disciples. On the other hand, if we are *unwilling* to do this, what right do we have, to claim that we are Jesus' disciples or followers? It is the one who *pays attention* to God's Word and puts it into practice, who is the genuine brother (or sister) of Jesus (Matthew 12:48-50; Mark 3:33-35), not the one who chooses to ignore it. Let us *not* follow the example of the fakes!