

PORTRAIT OF A CHRISTIAN (1)

Loving what Christ loves and hating what Christ hates

A. Introduction¹

1. What kind of people ought we to be? What kind of people are we called to be like?

These are questions that are explicitly and implicitly asked in the New Testament, and the answers given generally focus on our character rather than our conduct.

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:1-2)

"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming." (2 Peter 3:11-12)

"Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil." (1 Timothy 3:2-7)

God is more concerned about our who we are (what our hearts are like) than what we say or do.

"But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

"These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." (Matthew 15:8)

Why?

Because right conduct will come from having a right character, in the same way wrong conduct comes from having a wrong character.

"For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'." (Mark 7:21-23)

Because right conduct can deceive others into thinking we have a right character.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord,' did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

2. If what matters to God is what our hearts are like, everyone has a problem.

The problem is that our hearts by nature are wicked.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil." (Jeremiah 13:23)

¹ This series is based upon Chapters 11-16 of An Infinite Journey by Andrew Davis

This is why we so desperately need Jesus to save us.

3. Those whom Jesus saves, He promises will be changed by His Holy Spirit, as they given new hearts and transformed into His likeness.

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." (Romans 8:29)

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

4. So, what kind of people ought those who have experienced this work of the Holy Spirit be?

What character traits will be found in them?

"Christian character is an internal nature conformed to Christ in five different areas, resulting in a variety of virtues." (Andrew Davis)

What are these five areas?

- a) Affection – what you love and what you hate.
- b) Desire – what you seek.
- c) Will – what you choose and what you reject.
- d) Thought – what you think.
- e) Emotions – what you feel.

5. The first aspect of a follower of Jesus' character is that they love what Christ loves and hates what Christ hates.

There is nothing in life that human beings are not either attracted to or repulsed by. Whilst the strength can vary from very weak to very strong, we will either love or hate what it is.

God commands us to love Him more than anything else.

"You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3)

"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:5)

Yet because by nature our hearts are wicked, we love other things more than Him, and we love sin more than righteousness.

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is for ever praised. Amen." (Romans 1:25)

"Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." (Romans 1:32)

"Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways." (Proverbs 2:12-15)

"A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct..." (Proverbs 10:23)

When someone is given a new heart and the process of transformation into Christ's likeness by the Holy Spirit begins, their affections change.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

They now love things they used to hate. They now hate things they used to love.

They grow in their love of what Christ loves and their hatred of what Christ hates.

B. Christians love what Christ loves

1. What does Christ love?

"Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37)

"While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5)

"And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:39)

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death." (1 John 3:14)

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

"He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked." (Psalm 146:7-9)

"May the glory of the LORD endure for ever; may the LORD rejoice in his works." (Psalm 104:31)

"But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." (Hebrews 1:8-9)

"The LORD detests the way of the wicked but he loves those who pursue righteousness." (Proverbs 15:9)

"For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face." (Psalm 11:7)

"Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them." (Psalm 119:140)

"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)

2. Christians love all these things as well.

Over time their love for them will increase.

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord." (Ephesians 5:8-10)

C. Christians hate what Christ hates

1. What does Christ hate?

"You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods." (Deuteronomy 12:31)

"...and do not erect a sacred stone, for these the LORD your God hates." (Deuteronomy 16:22)

"I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them." (Amos 5:21-22)

"Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations – I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them." (Isaiah 1:13-14)

"There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers." (Proverbs 6:16-19)

"To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech." (Proverbs 8:13)

"For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity." (Isaiah 61:8)

"Your adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." (James 4:4)

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15)

2. Christians hate all these things as well.

Over time their hatred of them will increase.

"Let those who love the LORD hate evil." (Psalm 97:10)

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1-2)

D. Summary

1. One aspect of the portrait of a Christian is that they love what Christ loves and hate what Christ hates.

The danger is that instead of this love and hatred growing over time, it instead diminishes.

"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love." (Revelation 2:4)

"Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols." (Revelation 2:20)

This is because the growth of these right affections, are opposed by the world, the flesh, and the devil.

2. How then do we grow our love for what Christ loves and hate for what Christ hates?

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

By using the 'means of grace': Word, Prayer, and Fellowship.