

PORTRAIT OF A CHRISTIAN (3)

Choosing what Christ would choose

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.

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

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

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

2. 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)

3. 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.

Followers of Jesus love what Christ loves and hate what Christ hates.

Followers of Jesus seek what Christ seeks.

They also choose what Christ chooses.

They have wills which are increasingly conformed to that of Lord Jesus'.

4. A word or three, about our wills.

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

What are our wills?

Our wills are what takes our affections (what we love and what we hate) and our desires (what we seek) and turn them into choices which lead to actions.

Our wills never choose to do something that, at that moment, we don't love or desire to do.

If there is a choice between two loves, the will chooses what we perceive at the time to be best and what we desire the most.

We are therefore free to act and will act according to our wills.

However, by nature, there is a problem with our wills, which is that they are bound to sin.

"Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." (1689 BCF 9.3)

Not only will we not come to Christ, we also will not choose what Christ would choose.

"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." (Genesis 6:5)

"The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no-one who does good, not even one." (Psalm 14:2-3)

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." (John 3:19-20)

"No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:44)

"I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness." (Romans 6:19-20)

In salvation, God, through the Holy Spirit frees our wills from this bondage to sin, so that not only can we choose to trust in Christ and be saved; we can also choose to follow Christ in our decisions.

"The power and pervasiveness of our bondage is such that God must create and decisively fulfil the act of faith and the pursuit of holiness." (John Piper)

With new affections and desires, we are able to see God's will as more attractive than sin.

"When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage under sin, and by His grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so as that by reason of his remaining corruptions, he does not perfectly, nor only will, that which is good, but does also will that which is evil." (1689 BCF 9.4)

5. Why then do we still sin?

Sin still remains in us, which causes us to be conflicted people.

"For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." (Galatians 5:17)

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good

I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.” (Romans 7:15-20)

Whilst our wills have been set free from slavery to sin so that we are free to choose as Christ would, because our sinful nature still remains, it means that we will struggle to.

Only in heaven will this war within us be gone.

“You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.” (Hebrews 12:23)

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2)

B. Imitating Christ means doing the will of the Father

1. Jesus was devoted to doing His Father’s will.

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:34)

This commitment hit a crunch moment in the Garden of Gethsemane.

“Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” ... He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for the cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” ... So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.” (Matthew 26:36-39, 42, 44)

At Gethsemane, Jesus was confronted with what it would mean for Him to die in the place of sinners and to go through hell for us as our substitute in a more vivid way.

It caused Him to fall to the ground and sweat drops of blood.

“And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” (Luke 22:44)

Jesus was left in no doubt as to what was lay in store for Him.

He chose to do the will of His Father – “Not my will, but yours”.

He was free to do this – He was not forced to go to the cross against His will.

2. We choose what Christ chooses when we are devoted to doing His Father’s will.

“I have been before God, and have given myself, all that I am and have, to God; so that I am not, in any respect, my own... Neither, have I any right to this body, or any of its members – no right to this tongue, these hands, these feet; no right to these senses, these eyes, these ears, this smell, or this taste. I have given myself clear away, and have not retained any thing as my own. I have been this morning to Him, and told Him, that I gave myself wholly to Him.” (Jonathan Edwards)

This will require our minds to be renewed by Scripture so that we increasingly know what the Father’s will is in every situation we find ourselves in.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

C. Imitating Christ means delighting in the will of the Father

1. Jesus was delighted to do His Father's will.

He was pleased to do it.

He did it joyfully.

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."
(Hebrews 12:2)

Why?

Because He believed that the temporary pain (and for Him that pain was extreme suffering) did not compare to the infinite blessing that awaited Him and all those His death would save.

2. We choose what Christ chooses when we are delighted to do His Father's will.

Even if doing so brings pain and suffering.

Even if doing so denies us temporary pleasures.

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24)

Because we believe that these do not compare to what is ours in the new heavens and new earth.

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26)

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

D. Summary

1. One aspect of the portrait of a Christian is that they choose what Christ chooses.

They delight in doing the will of His Father.

They say, "Not my will, but yours be done."

They see "*God's will is always more delicious, nutritious, satisfying, and pleasing than any meal*" and "*Sin is more disgusting, disease ridden, damaging, repulsive than any plate of manure.*" (Andrew Davis)

We need to grow our affection and desire for the Father's will, because in moments of madness our wills are hijacked by our sinful nature, and we are drawn to the immediate pleasure of sin whilst forgetting the destruction it causes.

2. How then do we grow our affection and desire for the Father's will?

"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.