

PORTRAIT OF A CHRISTIAN (6)

Being Christlike

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.

"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)

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

Why?

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 are given new hearts and are transformed into His likeness.

"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)

This work of conforming us to the likeness of Christ is something God, His Spirit, is actively bringing about now.

"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, they seek what Christ seeks, they choose what Christ chooses, they think what Christ would think, and they feel how Christ feels.

4. Growth in Christlikeness in each of these five areas is aided and encouraged by using the 'means of grace'.

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

The Bible tells us what Christ loves and what Christ hates, what Christ seeks, what Christ chooses and rejects, what Christ thinks, and how Christ feels.

In prayer we plead for God's Spirit to transform our affections, desires, wills, thoughts, and emotions so they reflect that of Christ's.

And the fellowship of believers we are part of and have committed to, can encourage us to grow in these areas and provide examples of what it means to have Christlike affections, desires, wills, thoughts, and emotions.

5. Our affections, desires, wills, thoughts, and emotions together make us what we are.

They produce various virtues or character traits in us.

6. In the Bible we find lists of positive and negative virtues or those virtues that are Christlike which we are to emulate, and those virtues that are not Christlike which we are to avoid.

These lists, though not exhaustive, tell us what kinds of people we ought to be.

"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:19-22)

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3-10)

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (Colossians 3:12-14)

"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:8-9)

"All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another." (1 Peter 5:5)

"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." (James 3:17)

As the Holy Spirit transforms our affections, desires, wills, thoughts, and emotions so they are more like Christ, so we will become more like Christ in our character.

We will display these positive or Christlike virtues.

7. But these lists of virtues are not the only place in the Bible we learn what a Christlike character is like.

We also learn what are positive and negative virtues are, from the characters in the various narratives.

"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come." (1 Corinthians 10:11)

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4)

"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1)

"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You become imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with joy given by the Holy Spirit." (1 Thessalonians 1:4-6)

"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." (Hebrews 13:7)

Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, Rachel, 12 sons of Jacob, Potiphar's Wife, Hebrew midwives, Moses, Aaron, the generation of Israelites who left Egypt, Joshua, Caleb, the different Judges, Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Hannah, Samuel, Saul, David, etc, etc, encourage us to be, or warn us against being, particular kinds of people or acting in particular ways.

B. Righteous Virtues

1. Any list of righteous virtues assembled from Scripture will not be exhaustive but can be thorough.

Here is a thorough list² of righteous virtues which Christians are called to be:

Alert – Bold – Cheerful – Committed – Compassionate – Content – Courageous – Determined – Devoted – Devout – Diligent – Discerning – Disciplined – Faithful – Forgiving – Friendly – Generous – Gentle – Giving – Glad – Godly – Good – Gracious – Holy – Honourable – Hopeful – Hospitable – Humble – Joyful – Just – Kind – Long-suffering – Loving – Meek – Merciful – Modest – Mournful – Obedient – Orderly – Patient – Peaceful – Poor in Spirit – Praising – Prayerful – Prudent – Pure – Purposeful – Quiet – Reasonable – Relentless – Repentant – Respectful – Restful – Reverent – Sacrificial – Satisfied (in God) – Serious – Sincere – Single-minded – Sober-minded – Steadfast – Strong – Submissive – Sympathetic – Temperate – Thankful – Trusting – Truthful – Understanding – Vigilant – Watchful – Willing – Wise – Worshipful – Worthy – Yielded – Zealous.

These are all traits that God's Word commands, commends, encourages, and which are desirable for us to have.

2. We are not called to be all these things all the time.

Not every situation or circumstance we find ourselves in calls for every righteous virtue to be shown.

We need to display the right character trait that the occasion calls for.

The Holy Spirit will not only give us a greater awareness of what these virtues we need to display are, He will also help us to show them more and more often.

C. Unrighteous Virtues

1. Any list of unrighteous virtues assembled from Scripture will not be exhaustive but can be thorough.

Here is a thorough list³ of unrighteous virtues which Christians are called not to be:

(Sinfully) Angry – Anxious – Complaining – Covetous – Deceitful – Deceived – Disobedient – Disorderly – Disputing – Double-minded – Doubting – Dull – Embittered – Envyng – Foolish – Greedy – Hypocritical – Ignorant – Immoral – Impenitent – Impure – Insolent – Insubordinate – Jealous –

² Taken from Chapter 16 of An Infinite Journey by Andrew Davis

³ Ibid.

Lawless – Lazy – Lukewarm – Lustful – Mocking – Murmuring – Pleasure-loving – Proudful – Quarrelsome – Quick-tempered – Rebellious – Restless – Scornful – Selfish – Self-willed – Sensual – Shameful – Slothful – Sorrowful – Spiteful – Stiff-necked – Stupid – Timid – Unbelieving – Uncharitable – Unclean – Unrepentant – Unruly – Unstable – Unthankful – Unwilling – Vain – Vengeful – Violent – Weary – Wilful.

These are all traits that God's Word forbids, rebukes, discourages, and which are undesirable for us to have.

2. We are called not to be all these things all the time.

The Holy Spirit as well as giving us a greater awareness of what character trait is needed in any situation and the ability to display them, this helps us to reject those virtues that would be sinful.

D. Summary

1. Don't be discouraged.

We can easily look at the portrait of Christian that we are to be and feel overwhelmed by this or crushed that we are not this.

In this life, none of us will live up to this standard.

We will fall short.

This portrait is true of only one person – Jesus.

Wonderfully, Jesus has not only taken the punishment we deserve for all our unrighteousness character; He has given us His righteous character, so we can be accepted by God.

2. Do be encouraged.

One day we will be finally conformed to the likeness of Christ.

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made 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)

With the help of God's Spirit, we can grow and make progress in Christlikeness.

"Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." (1 John 3:3)

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen." (2 Peter 3:18)