

Introduction to Character

The character of a Christian determines who he truly is and reflects how deeply he has allowed God to penetrate his heart. The more Christ has been allowed to infiltrate every aspect of your life, the more godly your character. Paul emphasizes the importance of character in his epistle to the **Philippians in Chapter 2, verse 22**. He states that the Philippians can trust Timothy because his character has been proven and he does not seek his own, but loves God and seeks the good of his neighbor.

Our goal as Christians should be to look more like Jesus Christ. We should want His perfect character to be reflected in us. The goal of sanctification is to conform us from the image of Satan and the world which is under his dominion, to the image of Christ (**Romans 8:29**). Our desire and pursuit should be to walk continually more in the Spirit and less in the flesh; to walk more by the principles of heaven and less by the principles of the world.

Our character must be conformed to the character of Christ. It is not enough to hear about Christ, read about Christ, or study about Christ if we are not becoming more like Christ in our hearts and souls daily. We must increasingly gain Christ's identity and lose our own. The goal is not to learn how to cover and cope with our depravity, but for our flesh to be daily crucified. The new man must reign increasingly over the old by the power of the Holy Spirit. Many of you may understand this concept even now in your minds, but while we understand with our minds, we do with our hearts. Our actions and words are an overflow of what is in our hearts (**Matthew 12:34-37**).

Please yield yourself to God to be a doer of the word, and not a hearer only. Please do not deceive yourselves (**James 1:22**). When we receive knowledge and make no application with it, it merely builds up and becomes stagnant. Knowledge itself only becomes alive when it is applied to your life by the Spirit of God. **I Corinthians 8:1** explains that "knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." Meditating on God's word and submitting to its authority gives the Holy Spirit opportunity to move knowledge from your head to your heart.

Turn to Romans 5:1-5 and read aloud

Justification toward God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to save. This faith, however, is not a one time occurrence. From the moment we first trust Jesus as Lord and Savior, we embark on a lifelong journey of learning how to walk by faith day by day. Faith is the means by which we may access the grace of God, which is the potential and power to be conformed to the image of Christ. This faith itself is granted to us by God as a stewardship in which we should walk responsibly. **Matthew 25:14-30** explains, in more detail, the necessity of being good stewards of what is given to us by God. Grace is like a treasure chest, and faith is like a key. Both being from God, the treasure inside the chest lies dormant without the key to access it and the key is wasted and useless unless it is used to open the treasure chest. Faith, or trust in God, is a tool from the Lord by which we may access the deep treasure of His grace. However, this key cannot be used for

selfish gain, or in other words, to deprive and cost God and/or our neighbor. **James 4:3** explains, in the context of prayer, that we must not ask God for blessings just to spend them fulfilling our own pleasures.

The process which is necessary for conformity to Christ's image is important to understand. **Romans chapter 5, verse 3** explains that tribulations and trying times will produce perseverance in us if we receive them with the correct attitude. If we grumble and complain during these trials, the outcome may not be as beneficial as God would intend (**James 5:9**). Our witness is most apparent during these times (**Philippians 2:14-16a**). As we continue to persevere through times that try our character, greater character is engrained into our souls, and the chaff (often used in the Bible as a symbol of the flesh and worldliness) is truly burned away. We cannot simply convince ourselves into a mindset to produce character. It must be worked into us through trials and tribulations. It must be chiseled into the very depths of our minds and hearts. Our hope in Christ may continually increase as our heavenly Father continues to sharpen and mold us into the image of His Son.

Our desire should be to love our neighbor as Christ does. We should love him enough to pray for him, to weep for him, to die for him. We may hope for the perfection of love in us. "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (**I Corinthians 13:13**). God created all things with the purpose of sharing His love. He saw that the greatness of the hope of sharing His love far outweighed the potential consequence of sin coming into existence and so He created. If God's desire is to fill our hearts with His love and with more of Himself, shall we not yield ourselves to this, to His very will? His will is our sanctification, for us to be His holy people who have been restored to the perfect image in which we were originally created (**I Thessalonians 4:3a**). He wants us to be people full of His sincere love, the kind of love that holds God high and esteems neighbor above self (**Mark 12:30-31, Philippians 2:3**). Yield yourselves to the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit today! Cease to live according to your own wisdom, desires, and ways. Cease to defend your name and reputation, but rather live a life of complete surrender to the one who died for you and rose again (**II Corinthians 15:5**).