

## Christlikeness

We can't take terms that are used in Scripture and give them meanings that we today would like them to have. So, a "Christian" in Scripture is one who follows Christ. And a follower of Christ is a "disciple." A disciple in Scripture is one who copies exactly the Master's persona and who exhibits, teaches, and promotes for his own generation the Master's teachings, character and lifestyle. A disciple was not simply someone who liked, agreed with, or absorbed the Master's teachings. Discipleship was all about replicating the Master. It was transforming, for it involved a radical, life-changing commitment to the Master. Thus, to be a Christian is to be Christ-like. But what exactly is Christ like?

First, let's try to imagine (if it's even possible) the depth of His **humility**. To effect the incarnation, the eternal and infinite Son, equally God with the Father, had to condescend to enter finitude, to enter His creation, and so to enter humanity. He had to set aside His inherent glory and the independent use of His capacities. He had to submit to the necessary limitations of bodily functions. He had to submit to being rejected for whom He was, and not only rejected but despised by His very own people. He had to depend on the Holy Spirit for His acts; He submitted to real and full weakness. Paul drew upon his own reflection on the incarnation to demand that followers of Jesus be like Him, humble. And accepting of weakness, depending on the Spirit for life.

Second, Jesus was **obedient** to the Father. The Persons of the Godhead share one will. The Son didn't have to be "obedient" because the Son and the Father were always of the same will. But in His incarnation, the Person of Jesus had to submit to the Father's will. Jesus obeyed the Father's will, the authoritative will that was documented in the Scriptures, the will to redeem a fallen race that was formed in heaven prior to creation. Only one who is humble, and who understands authority, can be submissive to the will of another. We either obey God's good and holy will as revealed in His Word, or we take the side of evil and serve Satan and our proud self. There are no other options. Sin enslaves us, but the Spirit indwelling followers of Jesus enables us to obey – if we want to.

Third, Jesus **loved** the unlovely. He loved the very people who hated Him. He loved those who sinned, who were proud, who gave themselves over to Satan to serve that monster. He loved with a transcendent love, the kind of love that's generous beyond understanding, that seeks nothing in return. Jesus' kind of love even means He suffers – horribly even – for the sake of the ones who are loved. His love—and His suffering—was so that others might be blessed and have their needs met. He willingly accepted the shame of the cross out of love for God and others. This kind of love is not natural, it's supernatural. Yet, it's the very kind of love we who follow Jesus are commanded (not merely expected) to live out. A follower of Jesus doesn't eschew personally dangerous situations or suffering if also filled with love for God and for others.

Fourth, Jesus was **purposeful**. The Son came to earth *on mission*. Everything He did was deliberate, intended to fulfill some great purpose in God's will. Do we get this? I suspect not. Rarely if ever do we hear about Jesus' purposivity. Yet, it is one of the most important features of His Person for us! If we've been called to follow Jesus, our lives too must be filled with purpose, with God's will, with a sense of mission. His purposes? Jesus came as a servant. He came **to serve** the Father. He came to fulfill the Father's will for His creation, for His human creatures. Jesus also came **to reveal** the Father. Jesus' life and character expressed very life and character of the Father. Jesus made the Father known to humanity in a tangible way that words cannot do. We're not here to live however we please, or according to how our friends and neighbors live, indifferent to God's intent for us. We're here to serve God and to reveal to others truths about God and about life, truths from the Word.

Fifth, He was **selfless**. He came to honor and exalt the Father. All that He said and did was so that people would turn to God in repentance and so please God. He cared not at all for His own safety, nor His needs, nor for any pleasures. He demanded the same selflessness of His followers. We're not here to enjoy life or to enjoy what the world places on offer. We're here, as was Jesus, to bring honor and glory to God in all that we do. An aspect of selflessness is kindness. Jesus could be overwhelmingly **kind** toward others precisely because He didn't need or want to satisfy Himself in any way. If we're not determined to exalt ourselves, to always be right, we too can be as kind, welcoming, tolerant, and compassionate as was Jesus. Another aspect of selflessness is **dependence on the Father**. Jesus had perfect, implicit **trust** in the Father for His ministry, for His own needs, for His resurrection. Jesus lived out the kind of life expected of a godly person, a life of trust in God.

Sixth, Jesus was **good**. Everything about Him, His words, His works, His teachings, everything expressed goodness. He wanted people to be blessed. He **forgave** people their sins. He wisely and graciously sought to bring people to faith. He lovingly **met the needs** of those desperate for help. And this: theologically He was (is) the "way, the truth and the life." He and He alone is able to take us to the Father for an eternity of blessing in God's presence. He is truth embodied; He spoke only things that are absolutely true and therefore that have inherently compelling authority. And He and He alone can offer life – *His* life – to people who are otherwise dead in sin.

Seventh, Jesus was **holy**. No one could accuse Him of wrong-doing. Some tried to accuse Him of Law-breaking, but He easily and wisely put those efforts to shame. He was not only blameless, He also was perfectly **righteous**, that is, He always did what was just and good for others, according to the norms of Scripture. But Jesus went even deeper into holiness: He taught that adultery is a heart problem, for example, and that retaliation for offenses is forbidden because we're to love even our enemies. Holiness includes commitment, and Jesus was **committed** full-time with awesome zeal to fulfill the work He came to do on behalf of the Father. Holiness is also **separation** from that which is profane. Jesus lived and taught apart from the norms of life in Israel at the time. He lived separate from the values, ideals, and beliefs that were common in His world, and instead according to those of Scripture. So holiness includes also **fulfilling God's Word**. Jesus knew the Scriptures and lived them, explained them, taught them, and enjoined them on us. The command, "Be holy as I the Lord am holy!" means we're likewise to eschew sin, know what righteousness is and practice it, separate ourselves from that which is worldly, and live out the Word of God. And if we're serious about following Jesus, we'll desire to do these things more than anything else.

There's more, but I'll stop here. We can't do anything more worthwhile than to read the Gospels and think about what a wonderful Person Jesus is and how we can—should, must!—imitate Him. If we're following Jesus, that is, imitating His Person and work, the Spirit so empowers us that it's as if Jesus is continuing His life here on earth in our day. That's God's will for us in this era. That's how we exalt Jesus and take the side of good in God's great cosmic conflict with evil. Of course, making atonement for sin is something Jesus alone could do, but we've been commissioned to spread in the world the good news of His atoning work so that people everywhere can benefit by it, regardless what sacrifice we must make to do it. In this indirect way, we participate even in Jesus' atoning, sacrificial death. Jesus is the loveliest Person in existence. We should want more than anything to be like Him.

To be a Christian is to express the very Person, life and work of Christ Jesus in our world today. His character and His mission are to be our character and mission. Easy, it's not. But the stakes are high: Eternal values matter vastly more than earthly ones. We have only one life to expend for God's glory. Let's make it count.