



CHRIST'S CHARACTER IN THE BELIEVER

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The magnificence of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ has always attracted people. No earthly life has ever matched His life. He did all things well ([Mark 7:37](#)). His life was the light of men ([John 1:4](#)). No one loved as He loved, gave as He gave, labored as He labored, or died as He died. None was so patient, so compassionate, so courageous, so humble, so spotless, so wise, so whole-hearted in devotion to the will of the Father. To children, to the needy, to lepers, to outcasts, to the best, and to the worst, He ministered faithfully, displaying the perfect character of God. Who has ever successfully matched the character of Jesus?

It is the desire of the Lord to manifest this same moral excellence in His people. Christ is in us, the hope of glory ([Col. 1:27](#)). He wants to live that marvelous life in the body of every believer who will yield fully to the control of His Spirit. The goal of God is not simply to have people who attend weekly church meetings and perform various acts of service or ritual worship. It is rather to conform His people to the image of His Son ([Rom. 8:29](#)).

Christian virtues are frequently listed in the New Testament and accompanied by exhortations to adopt them [for example, see [Gal. 5:22-23](#) (the fruit of the Spirit); [2 Pet. 1:5-7](#) ("add to your faith"); [1 Tim. 6:11](#)]. There are also many references to negative traits, with commands to put them out of our lives. This lesson is designed to help us consider Christian virtues, along with Scriptural suggestions for getting them firmly rooted in us.

Qualities of Christian Character

The following brief descriptions are for Scriptural definition. Much of it is indebted to W E. Vine's "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words."



1. **LOVE.** This is the greatest of all moral qualities for the believer ([1 Cor. 13:13](#)). The Scripture says if we lack love, we do not even know God ([1 John 4:8](#)). God must be the primary object of our love. This love must be expressed in obedience to His commands ([John 14:15, 21, 23](#)). The New Testament has several distinct words for "love," whereas many languages have only one. The special Greek word is agape. It is used of God's love for us and for the love of the believers for one another. Agape love is self-giving or sacrificial. It is not based on natural inclinations, attractiveness of the object, or emotional impulse. Its most beautiful description is found in [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](#).
2. **FAITH.** This is also a primary virtue ([1 Cor. 13:13](#)). In fact, without faith we cannot please God ([Heb. 11:6](#)). Godly men obtain His approval through faith ([Heb. 11:2](#)). It is active trust, reliance, or confidence. Therefore, faith is commonly seen in some act in obedience to God's Word. His Word or promise is always the basis of Biblical faith. Faith has nothing to do with appearances but rather dwells in the realm of the unseen ([Heb. 11:1](#)). It has nothing to do with probabilities, but glorifies God by believing what seems impossible ([Rom. 4:19-20](#)).
3. **HOLINESS.** What is holiness? To be holy is to be separate from – that which is defiling and to be separated unto God. It is thus both positive and negative. As God is holy, so believers are to be holy ([1 Pet. 1:15-16](#)). As believers are holy in position (sanctified and called saints) so they are to be holy in practice. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord ([Heb. 12:14](#)). Defilement breaks fellowship with a holy God. Purity glorifies Him.
4. **SELF-CONTROL.** This might also be rendered self-discipline. This is the fruit of the Spirit ([Gal. 5:23](#)). Self-discipline is something that we must practice by the Spirit's enablement and is high on God's list for us ([2 Pet. 1:6](#)). Unless self-discipline is developed in our lives, we will be unfit for the work of the ministry.
5. **SERVANTHOOD.** The believer is taught that not only is he the ordinary servant of Christ, but also he is Christ's bondsman ([1 Pet. 2:16; Rev. 22:3, 6](#)). Through love we are to serve one another ([Gal. 5:13](#)). The servant-minded believer looks for opportunities to serve, not to seek preeminence or the easy path. Not so much as a cup of cold water given in Christ's name will lose its eternal reward ([Matt. 10:42](#)). Our Lord Himself took the role of a servant when He walked among men ([Luke 22:27](#)). The quality of hospitality to strangers might come under this heading ([Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9](#)).
6. **GRACE.** The frequent greeting of New Testament letters begins "Grace be unto you." This undeserved favor is what we need from God and from one another. We are not called upon to treat other people as they deserve but rather as they do not deserve. The people wondered at the gracious words of the Lord Jesus ([Luke 4:22](#)). Our words also should be with grace toward others ([Col. 4:6](#)). Forbearance and forgiveness of others spring from this marvelous well called grace.
7. **FAITHFULNESS.** This means trustworthy or reliable and is the fruit of the Spirit ([Gal. 5:22](#)). It is a requirement of anyone given a trust ([1 Cor. 4:2](#)). A faithful person is hard to find ([Prov. 20:6](#)).
8. **WISDOM.** This has particular reference to the spiritual rather than the natural kind of wisdom. It is related to spiritual understanding ([Col. 1:9](#)) and wise conduct ([Col. 4:5](#)). It comes through the Word of God ([Col. 3:16](#)).
9. **RIGHTEOUSNESS.** We usually think of this as that which is reckoned to us by God through faith in Christ ([Rom. 4:5](#)). However, it is also something that is practiced by believers ([1 John 3:7](#)). It refers to right action before others, for which there will be eternal recognition ([Rev. 19:8](#)). It is the breastplate of the believer's armor ([Eph. 6:14](#)) and considered to be a preeminent virtue ([1 Tim. 6:11](#)).
10. **GODLINESS.** This is the quality of devotion or piety which pleases God and is in the inner ring of important moral excellencies ([2 Pet. 1:6-7; 3:11](#)). It is an attitude of heart that is directed toward God.



11. **HOPE.** This describes a favorable expectation toward what is coming in the future, particularly in relation to God ([1 Pet. 1:21](#)). No believer should be pessimistic when he considers the hope we have laid up in Heaven ([1 Pet. 1:3-4](#)) and the blessed hope of the coming of our Lord Jesus ([Tit. 2:13](#)). Christ will reign and we will reign with Him as joint-heirs. Displaying such a positive outlook has a profound effect upon the faith of others. Therefore, it is a leading character quality ([1 Cor. 13:13](#)).
12. **PATIENCE.** This literally means "abiding under." This quality grows through trials ([Jas. 1:3](#)). It does not surrender to circumstances. It is closely related to longsuffering ([Eph. 4:2](#); [Col. 1:11](#); [3:12](#)). "Longsuffering is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate" (Vine's). Forbearance and endurance are associated words. Active patience is sometimes translated as perseverance ([Rom. 5:3 NASB](#); [2 Pet. 1:6 NASB](#)).
13. **COURAGE.** This is also rendered "boldness." It is a lack of fear to speak what God has called us to speak, to go where He has called us to go, and to do whatever we must in His cause ([Acts 9:29](#); [13:46](#); [18:26](#); [19:8](#); [1 Thess. 2:2](#)). A courageous person perseveres even in great difficulty or suffering.
14. **ZEAL.** This means eagerness, enthusiasm, fervor, and passion in the things of God. It was written of our Savior, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" ([John 2:17](#)). His disciples saw that this was true of Him when He drove the money-changers from the Temple with a scourge. Lukewarmness is abhorrent to our Lord ([Rev. 3:15-16](#)). Passion in the things of God has His endorsement ([2 Cor. 7:11](#); [9:2](#); [Col. 4:13](#)). Zeal must not be misguided or out of order ([Rom. 10:2](#); [Phil. 3:6](#)). Diligence and whole-heartedness are associated character traits ([Col. 3:23](#)).
15. **HUMILITY.** This derives from the word "low-lying" or lowly ([Rom. 12:16](#)). It is regularly associated with the idea of meekness ([Matt. 11:29](#); [Eph. 4:2](#); [Col. 3:12](#)). That it has nothing to do with weakness is seen in its association with our Lord Jesus even as King ([Matt. 21:5](#)). His humility is our example in [Philippians 2:3-8](#). "It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting" (Vine's). It is an inward grace and it is first to be displayed toward God and then toward others. It is opposed to the idea of being contentious, argumentative, unteachable, or uncorrectable. Rather, humility is "easy to be entreated."
16. **JOY.** This has the idea of gladness and delight. It is the gift of Him who is the author of all joy. He wants that joy to remain in us ([John 15:11](#)). It cannot be stolen ([John 16:22](#)). Unlike mere "happiness" or "fun," it is independent of circumstance and can abound even under adversity ([Jas. 1:2](#); [Phil. 2:17](#)). Believers should not be characterized by long faces or gloom; ours is the lasting joy of salvation. It will not be lost when our eyes are fixed upon Him and eternal values.
17. **PEACE.** This means a state of tranquility or quiet within, of rest or contentment even when strife is rampant around us. It is the gift of our Lord Jesus ([John 14:27](#)). It is the antidote to anxiety and will guard our hearts through the Lord Jesus ([Phil. 4:6-7](#)). "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee," is the promise to us ([Isa. 26:3](#)). A worrying believer does not reflect the character of our unruffled and serene God.
18. **KINDNESS.** This is also rendered as goodness and gentleness ([2 Cor. 6:6](#); [Col. 3:12](#); [Gal. 5:22](#)). It is uprightness expressed in deeds (Vine's). This is a reminder that the character of a believer is to be reflected in good works as the fruit of our salvation ([Eph. 2:10](#)). It is well that we learn to show this in speech and attitude. Mercy, which is active compassion, works along parallel lines.
19. **HONESTY.** This can also be thought of as integrity or incorruption ([Rom. 12:17](#); [2 Cor. 8:21](#); [13:7](#)). This trait covers a very wide range of conduct and deals with that which is right, fair, honorable, and ethical. Honesty monitors speech so that we do not give false impressions or make promises which will not be kept or intentionally exaggerate. It applies to our work (promptness, diligence, quality). It touches on our business and social dealings (fairness, concern for others, sensitivity to their feelings). It goes beyond the minimum and leaves the believer above reproach. It rejects partiality or favoritism.



Means of Developing Christian Character

It would be wonderful to be able to read an inspirational book, take a Christian life course, or attend a meeting for a religious experience and at once have a mature Christian character. Of course, we can see this is not realistic. The prayer of the Apostle Paul was that Christ might be formed in believers ([Gal. 4:19](#)). Such a towering purpose is not something which is achieved in a short time. It is a part of the progressive work of the Spirit called "growth" ([1 Pet. 2:2](#); [2 Pet. 3:18](#); [2 Thess. 1:3](#)). How will this come about in us? Will it be by firm resolve or by trying harder?

Change and growth start with the "God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" ([Phil. 2:13](#)). The Spirit of Christ must work in us mightily ([Col. 1:29](#)). Any failure to grow rests with man and not with God. Growth will require the response of our own hearts in submission, obedience, and faith. It may involve the input of helpers or leaders who will minister to us such as Paul did to Timothy ([2 Tim. 2:2](#)). God, ourselves, and others are all involved. Here are some things to consider in the path of developing moral excellence.

1. **BE AWARE OF CHARACTER NEEDS.** Since the New Testament is filled with lists of positive traits, it is evident that God has placed them there for our attention. Negative traits also listed are simply the opposite side of the coin. We need to see where God is taking us. Begin to mark in your Bible the traits that should be personally added or eliminated.
2. **LOOK UNTO JESUS.** He is our example and the perfecter of our faith ([Heb. 12:2](#)). We tend to become like that which we think about and look upon ([2 Cor. 3:18](#)). The Spirit continually points to Christ as our model. Godliness comes by the true knowledge of Him ([2 Pet. 1:3](#)). We are not helped by looking within ourselves in a morbid way or by comparing ourselves to others.
3. **ALLOW CHRIST'S LIFE TO WORK WITHIN A SURRENDERED VESSEL.** Full surrender to His Lordship, firm reckoning of the death of our old self on the cross with Him, and faith that appropriates His risen life within us unleash transforming power. As we obey Him and draw upon His strength and wisdom, He will produce the fruit of moral beauty fashioned in His likeness. The skilled Potter will fashion our clay gloriously ([Rom. 9:21](#)).
4. **MEDITATE UPON THE WORD.** Fruit is promised to the man who meditates upon God's Word day and night ([Psa. 1:2-3](#)). That Word is transforming and renewing, working in us mightily to build us up ([Acts 20:32](#)). This does not mean skimming through the Word, but diligently applying the Word. Do you regularly "chew upon" the meat of God's Word?
5. **IMITATE THE GODLY EXAMPLE OF OTHERS.** We are primarily to imitate God ([Eph. 5:1](#)), but we are also invited to imitate godly people ([1 Cor. 4:16](#); [11:1](#); [Phil. 3:17](#)). We should follow church leaders who are godly examples ([Heb. 13:7](#)). People need models of written truth. This helps translate Christian character into life. Find a good model and be a spiritual "mimic" or imitator. Stop and think of someone worth patterning your life after.
6. **ALLOW SUFFERING AND PERSECUTION TO MOLD YOU.** It is easy to count a time of trial as a misfortune. However, the Scripture says that we are to count it all joy ([Jas. 1:2-3](#)). This is because trials will perfect our character if we will let them do so. More will be said about the benefits of suffering in a following lesson.
7. **TAKE ACTION ON PROBLEM AREAS.** When things like bitterness, anger, and hurtful speech continue from our lips we are commanded to put them away ([Eph. 4:31](#); [Col. 3:8](#)). When tenderness, kindness, and a tender heart are needed they are to be put on as moral garments ([Eph. 4:32](#); [Col. 3:12](#)). We are to seek the strength of God for enablement, but we are not to hide negligence with pious words like, "I am praying to the Lord to do it." We must be active. We must do ([Jas. 1:22](#)). What needs to be put away? What needs to be put on?

The goal of pastoral care in the church is to present every man mature in Christ Jesus ([Col. 1:28](#)). Infinite development in character will no doubt take place for all eternity, but the beginning point is here and now.



Christ's Character In The Believer

The purpose of this exercise is to help you identify and develop a needed Christian character quality in your life. Read the notes carefully and then complete the following items.

1. Select one character quality from those listed in the section "Qualities of Christian Character." Choose that which you or others see needs the greatest improvement now in your life.
 - The quality I most need to develop in my life is _____
 - What negative trait is opposed to this quality and is present in your life? _____
2. Read the Scriptures listed in the NOTES under the quality you have selected. Using a concordance, find additional Scriptures related to it. Write down each reference and summarize the main idea.

Reference	Main Idea

3. Explain in practical terms why this character quality is essential in your life as a Christian.
4. What efforts have you previously made to develop this quality in your life? What has been the outcome?
5. What specific areas of daily living must be changed or established if this character quality is to grow?
6. In definite, measurable terms, list the actions that you will take to develop the desired quality. What schedule of time will you set for taking these actions?
7. Select a prayer partner who will help you implement these actions and develop the selected quality Give a copy of your plan of action to him and have him monitor your progress regularly.

Accountability

1. My prayer partner is _____.
2. How will he monitor your progress? Be specific [for example, "He will telephone every week at (state time)."]