

Introduction:

Thus far in our Practical Christianity series, we've discovered Christianity to be both wicked smart and insanely practical. Practically speaking, we started a backpack brigade to minister to the homeless and a clothing ministry to the underserved. Last week we talked about caring for our bodies and took on the John Wesley challenge: "Exercise every day for 1/2 hour a day." I believe this series has been transformative and we have more segments to go, but today, we take a mini excursion to talk about the source of practical Christianity.

Doing From Being

Aristotle taught that "we are what we repeatedly do." In some senses, he is correct. For instance, when Jesus says, "The world will know you're my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:35), he didn't mean it would know we are his followers if we said loving things to one another. Sure, words are nice, but Jesus was confident that when the world sees us repeatedly do loving acts for one another, it would take notice and think something like, "They are Jesus-like in how they treat each other." However, doing emanates from being. To wit: kind people do kind things while angry people do angry things. Good people, good things, bad people, bad things. You get my drift. All doing comes from being, which is why our Lord is just as interested in *what* we do as *why* we do it. At the end of the day, the "why" reflects our character, and character is the source of our doing (e.g., fruit comes from root).

Character of Christ

Jesus saved us not only that we might avoid a hot and miserable eternity, but also that we might become like him, or as CS Lewis coined, "little Christs." Becoming "little Christs" means being continually transformed in our character. Two texts that speak to this dynamic are Romans 8:29 and I Corinthians 3:18:

Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

We, who with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Obtaining the character of Christ is our persistent pursuit. It's like the marketing slogan of Lexus, which promises its cars are the result of "The Endless Pursuit of Perfection" (Matthew 5:48). It was Paul's labor of "parental" love in Galatians 4:19 **[SLIDE 5]**

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth
until Christ is *fully formed* in you.

The more we transform into the character of Christ, the more we reflect the character of our heavenly Father, which is precisely what Jesus did. Listen to Hebrews 1:3, the only place in the New Testament where the Greek word "character" is found **[SLIDE 6]**

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation (character) of his being.

[SLIDE 7] In the ancient world a "*charasso*" was an engraving/cutting tool, so, figuratively speaking, to have someone's "character" is to be "engraved from the same mold." Translators like to use words such as "impression, representation, image, likeness, exact copy, and precise reproduction" to describe Jesus' emulation of the Father's character. On Hebrews 1:3, the early Greek Fathers commented **[SLIDE 8]**

Jesus is the ultimate radiance of the Father. The supreme effulgence, displaying his glory as the second Person of the eternal Godhead.

When Philip asked Jesus to show him the Father, Jesus replied, “Anyone who has seen me, has already seen the Father” (John 14:9). Jesus meant that he had perfectly displayed the character of his Father in everything that he did, said, and thought. This was possible because Jesus and the Father are “One,” and as God’s Son, the “Fruit doesn’t fall far from the tree.” Although “Cut from the same cloth” or “Chip off the old block” better reflects the word “charasso” (John 10:30). What then is the character of Christ? Or better put, the character of the Trinity? Paul summarizes it for us in Galatians 5:22-23

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Image v Character

Image is who you are in public (projection of your essence), while character is who you are in private, i.e., the true you. Image is who you are on the outside, character, the inside. Jesus is the only Person who had seamless integrity between his public and private life.

The Character of a Methodist

One of John Wesley’s most popular writings was called, “The Character of a Methodist.” In it, he lists a dozen or so character traits Methodists possess (and Christians). Things like joy in God, “holiness of heart and life,” and service to others, headline his rather lengthy list. What gets little emphasis, however, is how much Wesley wanted all Christians to share his passion for the church.

I want the whole Christ for my Savior, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship, and the whole world for my mission field.

Commitment to Church is Christlike Character

Imagine what our world would be like if we worked as hard on our character as we did our image, especially our politicians! One of the best and most practical ways to develop Christ-like character is to be deeply committed to your local church. This is so for two reasons.

#1 The Church’s mission is to make disciples. By sheer design, disciple-making IS character formation and development and why the mission is to make disciples, not mere believers, and attenders.

#2 We become what we are committed to and what we are committed to speaks to our character. For instance, people committed to robbing banks become bank robbers. Would we say bank robbers have good character? Liars are committed to lying and alcoholics to alcohol. How would you rate their character? Conversely, a husband that lovingly dedicates himself to his family, has good-to-great character. It may be natural law, but people committed to good things, generally have better character, than those who don’t. We might even say that those who are not committed to good things, have at best, character flaws, and at worst, bad character. Simultaneously therein lies the greatest character flaw and area of greatest character development for the Christian today. Over seventy years ago Dr. Elton Trueblood lamented:

The greatest single weakness of the contemporary Church is that millions of its supposed "members" are not really involved at all and, what is worse, do not think it strange that they are not.

Conclusion

I think it's extremely strange they are not because what better place is there to commit your life? As his redemptive and missional community, the Church is the second greatest thing in heaven and the greatest thing on earth. It is his "body, bride, and temple," and something that he, of perfect character, lovingly sacrificed his life for (Ephesians 5:22). Throughout my long pastorate, I have heard every excuse for why people don't flat-out commit to the church. I just wish they'd be honest and say, "I'm not committing because my lousy character makes me value everything over what Jesus loves the most." Joel Osteen, a person with whom I have few agreements, got it right when he said:

**You can be committed to church and not be committed Christ,
but you can't be committed to Christ and not be committed to the church.**

The only way we can pull off all the amazing things God has laid on our hearts is that more of us commit more. And with that, my dear friends, I leave you to contemplate your character!