

Knowing Him

Consistent Character 2

If our definition of Christian character is accurate, and it indeed "is the sum of [our] disposition, thoughts, intentions, desires, and actions." If we assume that this disposition is in accordance with God's desire for us. And that our thoughts are thoughts He would want us to think, and our intentions are intentions He would want us to have. That our desires are, not natural desires, but the kind of desires that lead us to Godliness. And that our actions are therefore be right and Biblical... Would this not require an internal change?

Consistent Christian character must have some beginning. It must be the result of something - and continue based on some commitment or focus. I am going to propose this morning: that the beginning is coming to faith in Christ and that commitment is a result of daily walking in relationship with Christ.

Let's start by understanding that there is something before consistent Christian character.

Ephesians 2:1-7 gives us a glimpse into life before:

1. And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;
2. Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:
3. Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

We were dead, but we were the walking dead, chained to sin, walking only in sin, following only the course that the world's system had set out for us.

The way of the enemy was our way. His path was our path.

We were motivated by our sinful flesh - its desires and its appetites. We were walking as those others around us were walking - apart from God and on our own in the world.

And then the wonderful phrase, the miraculous phrase, the phrase that changes everything appears in verse 4 of Ephesians 2, which says:

4. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,
5. Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)
6. And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:
7. That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

This is why so many who would seek to develop good habits (the kind which we spoke about last week), habits that would make them better people by some religious definition, but are doing so apart from Christ can't help but miserably fail.

Their failure is a result of their lack of new life in Christ!

No amount of good habits - ever - can make a dead man alive. It is only Christ that can quicken.

And, by the way, whatever character we begin to show as a result of knowing Christ will not only be because of Him (7b "through Christ Jesus"), but it will also reflect Him (7a "he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace").

2 Corinthians 5:14-17 helps to make this clear:

14. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

15. And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

16. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

17. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

There is no person that is not walking in death. Anyone who will be made alive will be made alive by Christ. Those who are no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him.

Are we now seeing the beginning of consistent Christian character? Being made a new creature by Christ and no longer walking in that old way, but rather in a new way? Not according to our desires, but according to His?

We can find out how this happens if we read further in Ephesians 2:

8. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9. Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

This new life comes as a result of the grace, through faith in Christ alone. It is a gift, never, ever a result of works.

But it leads to good works - as we begin the walk (not of a dead man, but) of a person who is alive through Christ, developing the kinds of habits and commitments and attributes that will constitute this consistent Christian character.

Notice very carefully the author of this character, for it is (again) not ourselves (10a "for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus").

We may be tempted to wonder, then, how we are to regard the things that come before?

Let's look for help in Philippians 4:4-7, as Paul writes:

4. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:
5. Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;
6. Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.
7. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

Saul, before God intervened in his life on the road to Damascus, had a foundation that he was building upon - a religious foundation. He was a commandment-keeper, he had a heritage (was one of God's people), held himself to the high standards of that heritage, had zeal (exceeding zeal) in doing so, and was blameless.

These are the things that, when he was walking according to the world's system, he counted as gain. He may have even been regarded by the world as a person of "character" - at the very least, the most religious of persons.

Yet he counted all this - as loss for Christ.

But what for?

The next three verses in Philippians 3:8-10 tell us:

8. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,
9. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:
10. That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

The old life, with its traditions, heritage, pretense, and even discipline, was counted loss (dung) for "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus."

Because Paul's own righteousness was worthless - even if it was a law-following righteous. The only worthy righteousness is the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed to us and can be seen through us, because we have none of our own. It comes about only by faith.

And this faith, this walk is one of growth in knowledge of Him. It is a walk that is victorious over sin in the same way that Christ was victorious over death and the grave. It will often mean for us, that which it meant for Paul, to partake in the sufferings of Christ. For at the very beginning of his journey of character in Acts 9, his brother Ananias was told:

15. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16. For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

This participation in the power and suffering of the Lord constitute the next steps in our growth in relationship with Him.

They mean much for our character.

The question is: are you one of the walking dead or the living?