

## Traits of a Christian

If I asked you what does a Christian look like, how would you answer? Would you stand up and point toward yourself and say, "Like me!" Perhaps you would talk about certain actions that are observable like attending church, giving tithes, or visiting people. Those are good behaviors and certainly not to be dismissed; but is this what God sees?

This morning we will spend a few moments looking at the traits of a Christian. The idea is not so we may look at others to determine if they are Christians. Rather, it is so we may look at ourselves and evaluate how we measure against biblical standards.

We will spend most of our time looking in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Romans. We will add other scriptures as appropriate to reinforce the points we consider. However, before we turn to Romans, there are two passages that we need to share so we understand how God sees us. The first verse is found in 1 Samuel the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter. Saul has been rejected by God so a new king must be chosen. Samuel is being led by God to search for and anoint the new king. In verse 17, let's read what God tells Samuel.

**But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7 NASB)**

If you remember, Saul was head and shoulders taller than most of the men of Israel. He looked regal. God starts off telling Samuel that his (Saul's) physical appearance did not matter. Then God says: **God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.**

Jesus certainly understood this. As He neared the end of His life on earth, Jesus really openly attacked the religious leaders of that day. This brings us to the second passage of our introduction. It is found in Matthew the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter. Jesus has a series of "woes" that He pronounces on the Scribes and Pharisees. In verses 25 through 28, Jesus talks about the outward appearance versus the inward reality.

**"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.**

**"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So, you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matthew 23:25-28 NASB)**

So, with the understanding that God looks at the inward person and that we need to look at our own inward self and not be concerned with anyone else, let us turn to Romans the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter as we look for those inward traits of a Christian.

First trait: humble service.

**Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**

**For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. (Romans 12:1-3 NASB)**

Paul clearly knows that our transformation into the person of God is a growth process. For that growth to occur, we must become humble. This is exactly what Jesus tells us in Luke 14:11 when He said: **For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**” (Luke 14:11 NASB)

Second trait: showing honor.

Once we accept humility as a trait for which we strive, we are ready to bring a unifying love to the body of Christ.

**Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; <sup>ii</sup>give preference to one another in honor; (Romans 12:9-10 NASB)**

Our love should not be a forces or superficial love. It is a love bound by our hatred of evil and holding to that which is good. We are to love each other with a brotherly love. While we are to love everyone, this passage is clearly pointing toward those in our church family. The phrase **give preference to one another in honor**, is actually telling us to outdo one another in showing honor.

Can you imagine how much better the church would be if our competitive spirit was to see who could show other the most honor? This would unify the body of Christ more than any program or paradigm.

Third trait: serving God.

Having mastered humility and learning how to honor and others, we couple this with service to God. This is a continuation from the previous verse and shows the growth as it is an addition to the previously stated traits: **not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; (Romans 12:11 NASB)**

I hope you notice the progression. We are not to let off on one trait as we acquire new traits (**nor lagging behind**).

Fourth trait: rejoicing in hope.

One of the most troubling traits of Christians is their lack of joy. From my observations, Christians are the most unhappy people you will ever meet. They don't smile. Laughter is almost looked upon with disdain. Yet, as we read in Romans the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, we are to rejoice in hope even when things may not be going well with us. Listen to this verse: **rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.**

Is it because we don't have a hope that is grounded in faith? Is it because we are not devoted to prayer? We seem to miss this rejoicing even when we are not in tribulation.

Paul, also speaks of rejoicing. He links rejoicing with prayer and the peace from God that helps us to overcome our anxiety.

**Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-6 NASB)**

Fifth trait: benevolence-hospitality

Within the Christian community (the church), we are encouraged to share our material good and our hospitality. In the early days of the church, we see this shown without question. Read through the first few chapters of Acts.

The flow of rejoicing in hope continues as we are told: **contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. (Romans 12:13 NASB)**

Peter echoes this same theme in his first letter when he says **Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:8-10 NASB)**

How can we have love for our Christian brother or sister and see them lonely or in need without moving to address the situation?

Sixth trait: compassion.

As we read through the gospels, we find that Jesus was compassionate. He healed those around Him. He fed those who were hungry. He talked with those who were the outcast of society. Jesus gave us many examples of compassion. In Romans 12:15, we are called to demonstrate our compassion.

**Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. (Romans 12:15 NASB)**

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul spells it out about our need for compassion when he wrote:

**So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (Colossians 3:12-14 NASB)**

Seventh trait: peace.

A Christian should be a peaceful person. Paul tells us to live in peace with all men. However, he allows that it may not always be possible.

**If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. (Romans 12:18 NASB)**

Again, in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter, Paul speaks of peace and the building up of a unified body of believers.

**So, then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. (Romans 14:19 NASB)**

Eighth trait: not vengeful.

When we read the last eight verses of the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans, we cannot have a belief that Christians should seek revenge for an injustice, whether real or perceived. All of the injustice is handed to God and God will address the wrongs as He sees fit.

**Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:14-21 NASB)**

When you look for the image of a Christian, you should look for these traits. More importantly, we should look for these traits in our own life. Are we living a life where these traits may be seen? If we are lacking in some area, maybe we need to work on continuing our transformation into being more like Jesus in our life.