



Character

“Character” may be defined as “the moral or ethical quality of a person.”¹ The character of a person is an important “life matter.” What does the Bible say about character?

The Origin of Good Character

The origin of good character is God. God is perfectly good and he is our Creator. God created humans “in his own image” (*Genesis 1:26-27*).² The “image of God” in humans included the reflection of God’s goodness.³ God’s original creation was “very good” (*1:31*).

The Origin of Bad Character

The first humans sinned⁴ against God. Thus their relationship with God was broken and the *image of God* in humans was severely damaged.

📖 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Romans 3:23*) “All have turned away ... there is no one who does good, not even one.” (*3:12*)⁵

The propensity (inclination, tendency) to sin is inherent in *fallen* human nature (*7:18*).



The Perfect Human - Jesus Christ

Into this world of bad character, God the Father sent his Son – Jesus Christ.

📖 “...Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” (*Philippians 2:5b-7, NIV*)

📖 “[Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God” (*Colossians 1:15*). “The Son (Jesus Christ) is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (*Hebrews 1:3, NIV*).

📖 Christ was “tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin” (*Hebrews 4:15, NIV*).

God’s Purpose for His Children⁶

God purposed to redeem (rescue) humans so that their relationship with God could be restored, and the *image of God* could be renewed in them. Since Jesus Christ is *the* perfect human, and *the* image of God, becoming “like Christ” is the way of renewal. This renewal is a process of transformation (*2 Corinthians 3:18*). This renewal will be completed by God’s grace.

📖 “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (*Romans 8:29a, NIV; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:45-49*)

Christ-likeness is God’s purpose for his children.

¹ This is one definition. Other definitions are broader with ‘moral character’ being one aspect of character. A person’s moral character can be good or bad, but the word ‘character’ is often used to mean ‘good character.’

² The ‘image of God’ is often described as the reflection of God’s ‘communicable attributes,’ such as spiritual life; moral consciousness; ability to think abstractly, appreciate beauty; creativity; capacity to relate to God and other humans, and to represent God, including the responsibility to exercise dominion over the earth (*Genesis 1:26*).

³ The *pure* ‘image of God’ includes reflection of God’s communicable moral perfections.

⁴ The first humans’ sin is recorded in *Genesis 3*, resulting in ‘the Fall’ of mankind. In general, sin may be defined as ‘any attitude or action that is opposed to God’s authority and moral will.’

⁵ Of course, some people behave much better than others! However, the standard of ‘good’ is set by God’s holiness.

⁶ People become God’s children through faith in Jesus Christ (*John 1:12-13*). Redemption is only ‘in Christ.’

The Path to Christ-Likeness⁷

- ⊃ Christ-likeness begins with the “new birth” (*John 1:12*). “if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation: The old has gone, the new is here!” (*2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV text note*)
- ⊃ Christ-likeness is enabled by our salvation (in Christ) from the controlling power of sin. “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” (*Romans 6:18*)⁸
- ⊃ Christ-likeness is empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit. “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (*Galatians 5:22-23, NIV; cp. John 15:5*)
- ⊃ Christ-likeness requires our effort.⁹ “You ought to live holy and godly lives ... make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with [God].” (*2 Peter 3:11b, 14b*)
- ⊃ Christ-likeness involves God’s use of His word, people, and circumstances (including suffering) to mold us. (*Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:10-17; James 1:2-4*)
- ⊃ Christ-likeness is a process of growth, and is not completed until the end of our present earthly life. (*2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2-3*)

Becoming Like Christ in Daily Life

1. Read Colossians 3:1-17.¹⁰ According to verses 1-4, what is the Christian believer’s position? What is true of the believer in the past, present, and future?
2. What do you think it means to “set your hearts on things above” and “set your minds on things above”? What is the difference between “things above” and “earthly things”?
3. Based on verses 5-10, what kinds of things must believers “put to death” (get rid of)? *How* can we “put to death” wrong attitudes and behaviors?
4. Based on verses 12-14, what are believers to “put on” (clothe themselves with)?
5. *How* can we “put on” these good characteristics, which are Christ-like characteristics (*vv. 13-17*)? What are practical ways we can do this?



Reflection/Application

- Do you need to get rid of wrong attitudes and behaviors? Do you want to develop better character? Do you want the power to change? For truly good character (that is, Christ-like character), the first step is the “new birth” received through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Brothers and sisters, invite the Holy Spirit to convict you of your sins, and confess them to God (*1 John 1:9*). Read and reflect on Romans 6-8, 12:1-2, and Colossians 3:1-17, and make specific commitments to “put off the old” and “put on the new” by God’s grace in Christ.

⁷ We *do not* become God or gods! But Christians are to be ‘godly’ – reflecting God’s values, attitudes, & character.

⁸ Romans 6-8 is a monumental passage on victorious Christian living. It’s a ‘must read!’ Because the Christian has been united with Christ in his death and resurrection, the Christian has died to the controlling power of sin, and has been raised to a new life characterized by Christ’s righteousness and resurrection power over sin and death.

⁹ Remember that Christ-likeness is a work of God! However, human effort ‘in Christ’ is part of the process. Also, genuine Christianity is not merely an ethical system following Christ’s example; it is a relationship with God!

¹⁰ For a detailed study of this passage, see ‘The New You’ under ‘The Sufficiency of Christ’ on the ICF website.