

LESSON 8 Evidence of Christian Character

We are nearing the end of our study. This final unit will deal with evidences that we are growing into Christian maturity. It is important to have measurements to check our progress against. The word *evidence* means “something that will furnish proof.” Evidence is often presented in a court of law. It is the proof of the guilt or innocence of the person on trial. A judge, magistrate, or jury of persons must weigh the evidence. They have the responsibility of judging whether or not the evidence is sufficient for a decision.

Scriptures contain many clear teachings on Christian evidences. In a sense the world is like a jury as even unbelievers recognize whether or not the Christian lives up to what he professes or says. This lesson deals with the most convincing evidence of mature Christian life: the believer’s manifestation of Jesus’ character in his or her life.

lesson outline

Resembling Jesus

Reviewing the Goal

Characteristics of Jesus' Life

Being Like Jesus

Choice of Will

Surrendering to the Holy Spirit

Type of Lifestyle

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson, you should be able to:

- Identify our pattern for spiritual growth.
- Distinguish between partial and perfect (complete) Christian maturity.
- Identify traits of Jesus' character.
- Explain why it is difficult for the believer to be like Jesus.
- Explain how the believer is enabled to be like Jesus.
- Relate the believer's surrender to the Spirit to his being like Jesus.
- State who produces in submissive believers the spiritual growth that develops from attitudes described in the beatitudes.

learning activities

1. Read the lesson.
2. Look up in the glossary the definitions to key words you do not understand.
3. Do the exercises in the lesson development, referring as needed to the lesson.
4. Take the self-test at the end of this lesson, and check your answers carefully. Review those items answered incorrectly.

key words

character
enable
intimate

knowledge
manifestation
observe

victorious

lesson development

RESEMBLING JESUS

Objective 1. *Identify our pattern for spiritual growth.*

The newborn spirit (seed) within the new believer contains the likeness of God. Like a baby growing into the likeness of its family, the believer grows into the likeness of God. That likeness was seen in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus was God living in human form. He set a pattern which gives every believer a model and standard for spiritual growth.

Reviewing the Goal

Objective 2. *Distinguish between partial and perfect (complete) Christian maturity.*

Let us review the goal of Christian growth:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30)

What we have already studied in this course has helped to define what it is to become like God's Son. In this lesson, we are presenting the highest Christian evidence of all. This is the reflection of the character of Jesus Christ in our own character and lifestyle.

Another description of the goal toward which we press is found in Ephesians 4:12–13:

The body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Notice that the "knowledge of the Son of God" is a factor in becoming a mature person. There are three basic levels of knowledge. We can know facts about someone we have not met; we can know a person better through having met him; and we can know a person intimately, such as we know a close friend.

Application

1 Which of the three levels of knowledge do you think Paul referred to in Philippians 3:10? (Remember that this passage was written from prison near the end of Paul’s life and ministry.)

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Now compare your answer with the detailed one given in the answer section. Hopefully, Paul’s heart-cry also illustrates our desire to know Christ intimately. We need to *seek* the most intimate knowledge of Christ as an aid to Christian maturity.

Growth was a constant goal for the apostle Paul. In Philippians 3:12 he states, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” A few verses later, Paul writes, “All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you” (Philippians 3:15). This should greatly encourage us. We can be mature—growing as we should—yet seek the goal of likeness to Jesus Christ.

Characteristics of Jesus’ Life

Objective 3. *Identify traits of Jesus’ character.*

Jesus Christ lived among us. He learned and developed in His human role. He grew physically, mentally, and in favor with God and people (Luke 2:52). He accepted the role of a servant in order to fulfill God’s purpose for Him.

Look back in Lesson 2 and review this material. Please do not go on until you have done so.

Our purpose now is to see what Jesus was in His character. *Character* is “the parts or features of our essential nature which distinguish us from others.” When we see a person’s character, by their words or deeds, we see the essential person.


The children of God have basic characteristics though they may be from different nations, speak different languages, and have different skin color. Yet, when outsiders study true Christians, the observers can see common traits among the Christians. This commonality shows that Christians belong to a common group—the family of God.

To study the character of Jesus is a lifelong effort. For this study, let us look at several primary aspects of His character. First is Jesus' *selflessness*. He lived entirely to the glory and credit of the Father. John 1:14 writes, "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father."

Application

2 Philip asked Jesus to show him the Father (see John 14:8). Jesus answered that anyone who had seen Him had seen the Father. In John 14:10, what did Jesus say about His words and work?

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- 3 In Hebrews 1:3, Jesus is described as reflecting
- a) a borrowed nature.
 - b) earthly glory.
 - c) God's glory.




In Hebrews 1:3 Jesus is referred to as "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." Even evil spirits recognized that He was the Son of God. (See Matthew 8:29, Mark 1:24, Mark 3:11, and Luke 4:41.)

Application

4 Acts 19:11–16 implies that the demons saw God in Jesus Christ and in another teacher who was merely human. Who was this human person in whom demons recognized God's likeness?

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In addition to Christ's selflessness, there were two prominent characteristics of Jesus' life that are patterns for us. Both of

them are found in Philippians 2, where Jesus is shown taking upon himself not only human nature but also, by a choice of His will, the role of a servant.

Application

5 Read Philippians 2:5–11. Circle the letter before the two characteristics of Jesus described in verse 8.

- a) Kindness and goodness
 - b) Meekness and tolerance
 - c) Joy and love
 - d) Humility and obedience
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These qualities of the character of Jesus Christ are apparent throughout His ministry. We find many of the character traits of Jesus more indirectly. As you study His life, you see the characteristics of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control.

Application

6 Read about Jesus' life in John 8:1–11, and list three character traits of Jesus found in this story.

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The traits we have listed above are some of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. They are what we will produce when we yield to Him rather than our human nature. These traits are like windows of our soul through which God reveals himself to the world. Jesus had all the windows of His human spirit open for showing the Father to the world.

BEING LIKE JESUS

Objective 4. *Explain why it is difficult for the believer to be like Jesus.*

To be like Jesus is both natural and difficult. It is natural because the “seed” or nature of God is in us when we are born again by the Holy Spirit. This seed manifests God’s likeness as it grows in us. Paul expressed this truth: “He predestined us to be adopted as his

sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will” (Ephesians 1:5). It is difficult to be like Jesus because “the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Galatians 5:17).

Choice of Will

Objective 5. *Explain how the believer is enabled to be like Jesus.*

Philippians 2:7 says Jesus “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”



While there is in every believer the seed of God’s likeness, the believer must allow God’s nature shine through. Ephesians 3:16 and 19 give important insights on how the believer makes this decision:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, . . . and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Application

7 Read Ephesians 3:14–18. In the spaces below write phrases from this passage which involve a *decision of the human will*. The first one, for example, is in verse 16: “strengthen you with power.” (Do not repeat this example in your answer.)

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It is God’s wish that all the virtues and characteristics in the phrases you have listed be ours. One notable goal for the Christian is “to live a life worthy of the calling” (Ephesians 4:1).

Thus, there is a standard, and the individual believer must *decide* to live up to that standard.

Application

8 According to the last part of Ephesians 4:13, what is the standard for the believer?

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9 In Ephesians 4:2 are at least four character traits which we are urged to show. Circle the four letters below for the traits mentioned in this verse.

- a) Tolerance
 - b) Faith
 - c) Love
 - d) Peace
 - e) Gentleness
 - f) Patience
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This principle of the believer's *will* determining the character traits is found in many Scriptures. Read the book of Ephesians, and you will see how many times an appeal is made to your will. For instance, there is "Put on the new self" (4:24); "Be very careful, then, how you live" (5:15), "Put on the full armor of God" (6:11), and so on.

The passage below shows that God provides, but we must *will* to do something to manifest the character of Christ:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who *called us by his own glory and goodness*. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and *escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires*.

For this very reason, *make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love*. For if you *possess these qualities in increasing measure*, they will keep you

from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:3–8, italics mine)

Reread this passage, noting the italicized words.

In this passage, the believer has the responsibility to add virtuous traits to his or her life. Yet we are told that God has given us precious gifts and the divine nature itself. The power to be like God is realized through our new birth and our own free will. This balance between God’s gift and our work is seen in another: “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:12–13).

Salvation can best be described as wholeness: the completion of the plan of God for each person. We must work, but God must make us willing and able. Praise God for that wonderful balance!

Surrendering to the Holy Spirit

Objective 6. *Relate the believer’s surrender to the Spirit to his being like Jesus.*

We have studied the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Lessons 4 and 6. Remember that it was the Holy Spirit who enabled Jesus to fulfill His human role. Jesus was led and anointed of the Spirit. The character of Jesus can only be ours through the Spirit’s control of our lives. The apostle Paul writes to the Galatians: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

When the Holy Spirit is in control of the believer’s life, He produces the character of Christ in it. The following chart will help you visualize the nine *windows* of Galatians 5:22–23 through which Christian character is seen.

Windows of Galatians 5:22–23		
Love	Joy	Peace
Patience	Kindness	Goodness
Faithfulness	Gentleness	Self-Control

Application

10 Write in this space the positive command to us in Ephesians 5:18.

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The more we let God's Spirit control us the more like Jesus we will be in character and life. Sometime, read the book of Acts and underline each place that tells of someone's being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Type of Lifestyle

Objective 7. *State who produces in submissive believers the spiritual growth that develops from attitudes described in the beatitudes.*

The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most notable of Jesus' sermons. The sermon consists of brief statements called *beatitudes*. *Beatitude* is a word which means "the utmost happiness or bliss." Hence, in these short statements, Jesus described happy or blissful living.

Each of the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–10 describes an attitude of heart and character which the Holy Spirit will produce in believers who allow Him to do so. Let us examine the beatitudes.

Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor (v. 3). The Holy Spirit will help us to be constantly aware of our need. This attitude of dependency on God will produce rich rewards.

Happy are those who mourn (v. 4). This refers to an attitude of sorrow concerning anything that will keep Christ from being glorified in our life. It is the *godly sorrow* of confession and repentance.

Happy are those who are humble (v. 5). The nature and attitude of Jesus shows humility and submission to the will of God. Humility is the most easily recognized characteristic of a servant of Christ.

Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires (v. 6). This is obedience. The actions of the lover of God must be: “Here I am...to do your will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7).

Happy are those who are merciful to others (v. 7). Here is the outgoing attitude of the forgiveness and grace of God. There can be no bitterness and resentment in the heart. Again, this is an obvious quality of Christ’s life.

Happy are the pure in heart (v. 8). If the heart is not occupied with desires of human nature, our vision of Jesus’ reality will be greater.

Happy are those who work for peace (v. 9). Here is the characteristic of a sharing that pours out concern and compassion to others.

Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires (v. 10). Here is the quality of rejoicing in all things. The believer can recognize the Father’s loving care in every experience.

Application

11 As you read Matthew 5:3–10 again, write in your notebook the part of each verse that shows how God will reward those who are described in each beatitude. (Response to verse 3 is provided as an example.)

Verse 3: The kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

The evidence that most demonstrates Christian maturity is the character of Christ in one’s life. The Bible says that believers were first called Christians in the city of Antioch (Acts 11:26). Up to that time and for several more years, they were simply known as “the people of the Way.”

Antioch was the slave capital of the world, and slaves bore their master’s names. Perhaps the unbelieving world saw these believers as slaves of Christ. Nevertheless, there is no greater honor than being called a Christian, for a Christian is a servant

of the Lord Jesus Christ, who both does the Lord's bidding and conforms to His nature.

self-test

TRUE-FALSE. Write **T** in the blank space if the statement is true. Write **F** if it is false.

-1 Evidence means something that furnishes proof.
-2 Knowledge of God's Word is necessary to become a mature Christian.
-3 The apostle Paul claimed to have already succeeded and become perfect.
-4 Character is the parts or features of our essential nature which distinguish us from others.
-5 The beatitudes describe attitudes of heart and character that the Holy Spirit will produce in the believer.

SHORT ANSWER. Write the proper to the questions on the lines provided.

6 Place an **X** beside the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22–23.

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| a) Goodness | i) Healings |
| b) Miracles | j) Faithfulness |
| c) Peace | k) Gentleness |
| d) Being | l) Self-control |
| e) Tongues | m) Love |
| f) Patience | n) Wisdom |
| g) Kindness | o) Joy |
| h) Faith | |

7 Evaluate yourself on the following characteristics of Christian maturity. Check **S** for strong, **M** for medium, **W** for weak, and **N** for need to grow.

Characteristics	S	M	W	N
Love
Joy
Peace
Patience
Kindness
Goodness
Faithfulness
Gentleness
Self-control
Knowledge
Godliness

answers to the study questions

- 1 Paul referred to the third or intimate level. He knew the facts of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:6–10). He knew Christ through personal experience (Acts 9:1–19). But the desire to know the Lord intimately is a lifelong desire which will only be completely fulfilled in the Lord’s presence in eternity.
- 7 through faith” (v. 17), “you, being rooted and established in love” (v. 17), “you . . . may have power ... to grasp” (v. 18)
- 2 That they came from the Father
- 8 The fullness of Christ
- 3 c) God’s glory.
- 9 a) Tolerance
c) Love
e) Gentleness
f) Patience
- 4 Paul
- 5 d) Humility and obedience
- 10 Be filled with the Spirit.
- 6 Kindness, love, and gentleness (Other traits of Jesus may be found here.)
- 11 Verse 3:..... The kingdom of heaven belongs to them.
Verse 4:..... God will comfort them.
Verse 5:..... They will receive what God has promised.
Verse 6:..... God will satisfy them fully.
Verse 7:..... God will be merciful to them.
Verse 8:..... They will see God.
Verse 9:..... God will call them His children.
Verse 10:..... The kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

