



CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

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Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor 5:17 NKJV) Are you in Christ? If so, then praise God, you are a new creation. Your old life has passed away and you are new in Him.

But you can't stop there. **God expects a certain way of life from you.** The New Testament gives us much instruction as to how we should live as believers. Today we're going to look at some of that instruction.

As we do so, it's vitally important to understand and remember that **you are already new in Christ.** When the New Testament instructs you to love, you must understand that in Christ, that is who you already are! In Christ, it is your nature to love. To love is one of the characteristics of the new creation, and you are a new creation. So **the instruction is not just instruction telling you how to live, it also shows you who you are in Christ.** What you have to do is daily make decisions to obey God; by the power of the Holy Spirit lining your life and conduct up with who God has already made you to be in Christ.

The Promised Land belonged in its entirety to Israel from the moment that God promised it to them. But they had to conquer it little by little, to make it their own. In the same way, you are already a new creation, holy and pure before God. But you have to learn to walk in that new creation. How do you do that?

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:22-24 NIV) We have to recognize that we died in Christ, and so lay aside our old way of living. And we have to recognize that in Christ we were raised to a new life, and so choose to live according to the new life He's given us, to live according to the Spirit of Jesus who lives within us.

Jesus said we must daily take up our cross and follow Him. The cross is a symbol of death. Daily we have to die to our old way of life; and to our own desires, in order to line ourselves up with the new creation, with God's will. We die to our old self and by the power of the Holy Spirit we live unto Him as new creations.

God brings us into circumstances that give us the opportunity to choose to lay aside the old and walk in the new, recognizing that as we died in Christ and were raised to new life in Christ, so in Him we can die to the old man and our own will, and live unto God's will. This is what it means to take up our cross daily and follow Christ.

In the New Testament God clearly shows us what He expects of us in terms of our way of life and our character. As we look at the things He wants us to lay aside, we remember that in Christ our old self died, so we are free not to walk in the old way. And as we look at the things He wants us to walk in, we remember that in Christ we are already those things. Our part is to choose to walk in them, and then by the power of the Holy Spirit our lives will express who God has made us to be.

Let's look then at God's instructions for our lives, which show us who

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we are and who we are not.

(Ephesians 4:25-5:7) *Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.* It is not in the nature of the new creation to lie. Lying means **any kind** of deceit, pretence or untruth. "Take heed of every thing contrary to truth. No longer flatter or deceive others. God's people are children who will not lie, who dare not lie, who hate and abhor lying." (Matthew Henry)

**GOD'S PEOPLE
ARE CHILDREN
WHO HATE AND
ABHOR LYING.**

26Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: It's not necessarily wrong to be angry. In fact, **certain things should move us to anger.** Jesus got angry on occasion when people were dishonoring His Father. But He was never controlled by His anger. In your anger do not sin. **Be controlled by your submission to the Father and not by your anger.** "Take heed of anger and ungoverned passions. If there is just occasion to express displeasure at what is wrong, and to reprove, see that it be without sin." (MH) Don't take your anger further than it should go.

A good picture of this is to not let the sun go down on your anger- in other words, give your anger, and the reasons for it, to God before you sleep. This applies especially to husbands and wives. If you're angry with your spouse, and you go to sleep angry, that anger will be sealed in your heart and it will infect your relationship the next day. Get the issue sorted out before you go to sleep. Many times my wife and I have talked until the early hours of the morning to get something resolved between us. And if you can't get it resolved that night, at least choose to cast the burden on the Lord before you sleep, and so quit being angry. His Holy Spirit will be active to resolve the area as you walk in obedience to Him when the sun comes up.

27Neither give place to the devil. "Place" means "occasion for acting, opportunity." Who gives the devil place? We do. When we choose to walk in the old way, when we don't obey our Father, we give him opportunity to come in to steal, kill and destroy in our souls, in our lives, and in the lives of those around us. I don't want to give the devil **anything!** Do you? Don't give him opportunity!

28Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. You are a new creation. Don't do the old things any more. If you were in the habit of cheating and stealing before you came to Christ, now you need to stop. Instead, take responsibility for your life by working in an honorable job, or if you're still young, by studying hard so that later you can work. Learn not just to provide appropriately for yourself and your family, but also to give to the needy. Working this way will give you great dignity.

29Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. "Corrupt" means "useless, rotten." Don't bad-mouth people. Don't speak unclean things. At times you may be tempted to let that word slip out of your mouth. Learn to control your tongue. Learn to walk in the new man. As new creations, our nature is to speak things that will build ourselves and others up.

30And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. "Grieve" means "to offend or sadden." Did you know you can do that to the Holy Spirit? How? By walking in the things just mentioned : lying, corrupt communications, uncontrolled outbursts of anger, stealing, and so on. When we walk in the things of the old self we offend and sadden the Holy Spirit.

31Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: Why should you lay these things aside? Because they are part of the old nature. They are not who you are any more. Notice that it says "all." **What does the word, "all" mean? It means all!** All bitterness, all wrath, anger, clamour and evil-speaking. Without exception.

"Wrath" means bad temper, outbursts of anger, and uncontrolled anger. **No more excuses for that bad temper...**

What if you do have an outburst of anger? Don't pretend. Admit to God, "I was wrong. I lay this aside. Show me why and let's deal with the root. I need to renew my thinking in this area."

For example, many years ago, although I was already a Christian, at times I would fall into outbursts of anger. At those times, some very dirty words used to come out of my mouth. I didn't know why, and I didn't know how to correct my problem. But each time I sinned like that, I repented for having allowed myself that outburst of anger, and I carried on with the Lord. Over time, God showed me the root of the problem. It was this: at times I felt very alone in my problems and struggles. Because I felt alone, I got angry with myself for not being able easily to resolve my problems, and I got angry with God for not helping me in a more obvious way. Seeing the root, I was able to begin to renew my mind. When I found myself in trials and problems and was tempted to get angry, I reminded myself that God was with me and accepted me just as I am, and that therefore I could trust Him and didn't need to worry. As I did this I was able to lay the axe to the root of my anger. So, the healing of this area of my soul began as I recognized that my anger was sin, part of the old man, and I repented each time I fell into it. The complete healing came as I allowed God to show me the root of the problem and I renewed my mind in that area.

Don't wait till you understand why you sin before you repent. Repent first and then trust God to show you the root.

"Anger" here includes the sense of taking "vengeance." It is not wrong to be angry at wrongdoing. But it is God that will take vengeance and we must leave room for Him to do that. *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.* (Romans 12:19 NASB)

"Clamour" means uncontrolled yelling and shouting, coming from a sense of agitation and lack of trust in God.

"Evil-speaking" means speaking evil of others in order to damage their reputation (even if we think what we're saying is true.) A lot of gossip includes evil-speaking (wanting to make ourselves feel better than another, hence speaking ill of them to others.)

"Malice" means ill-will. The desire to injure another. It includes the sense of "evil that's not ashamed to break laws."

We must lay all these things aside because they belong to the old nature, not to who we are now in Christ.

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. God wants us to love one another. Being kind to one another is an expression of that love. "Kind" means good, pleasant, nice. "Be ye kind one to another. This sets forth the principle of love in the heart, and the outward expression of it, in a humble, courteous behaviour." (Matthew Henry)

"Tenderhearted" means being understanding, compassionate, loving hearted. The greek word used here also means, "having strong bowels"! This indicates that to be tenderhearted does not mean being weak and wimpish. It takes strength and courage to choose to be understanding and to love your neighbor even when it's hard to do so.

Forgiving one another. "Mark how God's forgiveness causes us to forgive. God forgives us, though we had no cause to sin against him. We must forgive, as he has forgiven us." (Matthew Henry).

Forgiving a brother in Christ doesn't necessarily mean that we shouldn't be honest with the brother about how he wronged us. It means that we don't hold a grudge. Obviously there are times when we must forgive without even mentioning the wrong done to us, but there are also times in which for the good of the one who sinned, we need to mention what happened. Christ forgave us, but we had to face our sin to recognize our need to be forgiven.

5: 1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; "Follower" literally means imitator. As a child imitates his father, so we as dear children should imitate our Heavenly Father. In Christ we are new creations, created in the image of God in righteousness and holiness. So let's walk as new creations!

2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

**THERE ARE NO
EXCUSES FOR
BAD TEMPER.**

Jesus sacrificed Himself on our behalf. To whom did He sacrifice Himself? To God. He sacrificed Himself to please His Father (John 3:17). He saw what the Father wanted for us, and He paid the price to make it possible for the Father to have His way in our lives. His primary motivation in going to the cross was simply to do His Father's will.

So how do we love as Christ loved? By identifying ourselves with God the Father's interests in a person, and paying whatever personal price is necessary to see God have His way in that person's life. Loving someone doesn't mean just being nice to them or doing what *we* think is good for them. It means finding out what God wants in that person's life, and by following the leading of the Holy Spirit, doing our part to see that God gets what He wants- which is ultimately the best for that person. When we love this way we may be misunderstood and even accused of not loving. This is sometimes part of the cost and sacrifice of loving as Christ has loved us. *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments* (1 John 5:2)

3But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints... "Fornication" means any kind of illicit sexual intercourse. That means, having sex with anyone apart from your husband or wife. The only sex that is permitted and encouraged by God is sex between a husband and his own wife. Every other form of sexual activity is fornication (sleeping with someone you're not married to, masturbation, pornography, homosexuality, etc.) And remember that Jesus said that if you even look on a woman to lust after her, you've already committed adultery (fornication) with her in your heart. Don't do it. If you've been doing it, stop.

"Uncleanness" means "the impurity of lustful living." "I want what I want, and I want it now."

"Covetousness" is "a greedy desire to have more."

We live in societies that praise fornication, uncleanness and covetousness. But let them not be once named among the people of God.

"Let it not be named", in other words, don't let there even be a hint of that kind of behavior. Why? Because we are saints and those things are absolutely not appropriate for saints! **If you are tolerating even a hint of any of those things in your life, including your thought life, lay them aside.** Don't walk in slavery to things that God has set you free from in Christ.

If you were a bride with a beautiful white wedding dress, or a groom with a well cut suit, why would you choose to smear it with oil before the wedding?

4Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. There should not be even a hint of these things either:

"Filthiness" means "obscenity"

"Foolish talking" and "jesting." It's not wrong to have a sense of humor, to joke and laugh. Thank God for laughter! But this is speaking about crude or inappropriate talk, which is not convenient, that is, not fitting.

5For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Note the word, "no"- "no whoremonger," etc. The word "no" means "without a single exception." **None** of these kind of people have **any** inheritance in the kingdom of God.

"Whoremonger" carries the same meaning as the word "fornicator".

"Unclean person" means someone unclean in thought and life.

"Covetous man" means someone who is greedy for gain.

"Idolator" means a worshipper of false gods. Those false gods may be the gods of money,

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of prosperity, of false ideas about God, of the world's way of seeing things, and so on. As James wrote, *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.* (James 4:4 NIV) Idolators are friends of the world in the way they think and the way they live.

In Christ we are not these things! So let us not even allow a hint of them in our lives.

6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. "Vain words" mean empty words, devoid of truth. There's plenty of people trying to deceive others through vain words. There's plenty of deception coming from the world culture and from various religions. They teach that these things are not just acceptable but are also agreeable. Some cultures teach that you are more manly if you fornicate. Others teach that the more unclean a comedian is, the funnier he is. Many religious leaders teach that gain is godliness, and practice their religion as a means to get rich, to make money and get power over others. They're lustful, greedy deceivers. **God's wrath is coming on the people of the world because of these things!** He hates these things! He is angry with the wicked every day! (Psalm 7:11)

The wrath of God is coming on the children of disobedience due to these sinful lifestyles. If you are in Christ, are you a child of disobedience? No, you're a child of obedience. Live like one!

7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them. So don't have anything to do with these lifestyles. **Love what He loves and practice it. Hate what He hates and have nothing at all to do with it.**

(Colossians 3:5-17 NKJV) *5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. 8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, 11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. 12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*

In these passages we've seen the character of the old self, and the character of the new creation. We are new creations, so let's choose to walk as new creations, by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. 22 Abstain from all appearance of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22)

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"IF ANYONE THIRST, LET THEM COME TO ME AND DRINK"- JESUS
(JOHN 7:37)