

# How We Make Disciples: Reviewing the Three C's Series

## Character: Be Like Jesus (1 Cor. 14:20)

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By  
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### At A Glance:

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- II. Command
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*These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.*

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# Character: Be Like Jesus

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Fake Nice

1. Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone being “fake nice” to you? Perhaps you could tell someone wasn’t being honest or they are trying to manipulate you. When someone is being “fake nice,” they can be pleasant to interact with while face to face, but they actively try to harm you behind your back. Some people will even give you compliments or say nice things about you, but you can tell they don’t mean it. I know I have. I’m sure many of us have experienced situations and people like this at some point in our lives.
2. I’m not talking about being kind to people who are difficult to be around or doing what is socially acceptable for the situation, even if you don’t really like a person. Being “fake nice” is different. It involves pretending to be someone or something they aren’t and having no intention of becoming. It means putting on a show and acting as if something is true when it is not. Those who are “fake nice” play games with other people for their own benefit or amusement. Instead of acting authentically and speaking truthfully, those who are insincere act one way while being someone else.
3. If you’ve experienced a person or situation like this, how did it make you feel? Being insincere always has a negative effect on the relationship. It is challenging to build a good relationship with people who do this. The relationship usually becomes difficult to maintain. Interactions with people who do this are often quite complex and it can be confusing trying to figure out how to respond to them. When you know someone is being insincere, it is easy to get caught up in pretending something is true when you know it is not.

B. Being “fake nice” can become a problem for people in their approach to God too. The Bible addresses this spiritual issue many times from several different angles. Playing games with God, pretending to be someone we are not, is a problem that greatly displeases God. It also never works because God knows all. At one point in the history of the people God set apart to serve Him, He addressed this problem by telling them He doesn’t take pleasure in their sacrifices, their offerings are hated, He can’t endure their religious festivals, and He will not listen to their prayers.

C. Why is God saying all these things? Because God’s people are not who they should be on the inside, which is why God tells them, “cease to do evil, learn to do good” (Isa. 1:16-17). Character matters greatly to God. God wants people to have their hearts set on Him (“<sup>29</sup> Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!” Dt. 5:29). This single verse sums up all God’s desires for humanity. The rest of the Bible simply expands on what this means.

D. That which is most important to God in all religion and worship is the condition of a person’s heart. Authentic Christianity is lived from the inside out. God is only pleased when our

character and heart is rightly oriented before God. The importance and role that character plays in our relationship to God can't be overstated. It is the main thing God cares about.<sup>1</sup> Even if people do the right actions, it doesn't matter if their heart isn't right.

## II. Command

- A. Community Alliance Church makes disciples as we attempt to expand the kingdom of God on earth by focusing on the second main sphere of life that is involved in a life of discipleship: character. Authentic Christianity not only requires our perspective and way of thinking to be transformed, but it also changes who we are as a person. We've already covered the first C in our discipleship plan (convictions) in the first two messages of this series. Now we are going to focus our attention on the second C which is "character".
- B. A large part of character is built from the direction of our heart affections. The primary question when it comes to character, as implied by Jesus, is, "What do I love?" (Mt. 6:24). Jesus pointed to two major loves (perhaps the two most common ones) that people's heart affections moved toward which then greatly determines the course of their life. Jesus says people will either love money or God, but not both. One will be sacrificed for the sake of the other. Jesus correctly identified God as the proper main object of our heart affections (Mt. 22:37). Disciples are to follow the example of Jesus' affections by loving righteousness (Heb. 1:9) as well as the fear of God (Isa. 11:3).<sup>2</sup> Love for God, righteousness, and respect for Him are the most important and foundational building blocks of Christian character.
- C. It is in the context of our heart affections that disciples are commanded, "<sup>12</sup> So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;" (Col. 3:12). Disciples are commanded to be a specific kind of person on the inside. Followers of Jesus are told to take on an internal posture that has certain qualities. There is to be internal affections for what is good, such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. The heart of disciples are to be drawn to these qualities.
- D. God's command is, "put on a heart of..." (v. 12). This is not a recommendation or a suggestion, it is an imperative—a divine order that carries a moral obligation. God tells us to be a certain kind of person. He is telling us what our character is to be. The life transformation that happens by the power of God affects one's innermost being. God changes the deepest part of our identity and nature. True godliness is something that happens in the inner self. God's word is instructing us to become a specific type of person. If our lives are going to please God, they must be authentically lived from the inside out, since God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

## III. Goal

- A. If a disciples' character is being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit as they follow the example and standard of Jesus, what will be the result? The outcome of a person's character being shaped the way God desires it is the result: "<sup>1</sup> Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. 7:1). This verse provides the aiming point of character development. The goal is to

<sup>1</sup> Mark 7:6-8

<sup>2</sup> Pursuing the righteousness of God is the disciples' highest priority in life along with His kingdom (Mt. 6:33). Character development is one of the two highest priorities in the Christian life.

please God in all aspects of our lives while developing and maintaining the right attitude toward God. To be holy and righteous in our soul is the aim of the Christian life. The motivation behind pursuing this goal is close and genuine fellowship with God (2 Cor. 6:16-18). Disciples want to have godly character so they can enjoy close contact with God. They feel comfortable in His presence and enjoy the benefits of being near God. There are three aspects of godly character development mentioned in this text.

- B. First, character involves disciples' endeavoring to "cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit". Disciples use the resources and tools of God to cut everything out of their life that is harmful to themselves and others. Anything that morally pollutes us is removed through developing the inner dispositions of Jesus. Whatever corrupts the use of our physical body or the functioning of our immaterial soul will be overcome. Internal purity, called integrity, is part of the goal of character development.
- C. Second, our character should be "perfecting holiness," which means to put all the pieces together, so our character is complete without any missing parts or elements.<sup>3</sup> Disciples with mature, godly character will be patient as well as kind. To be kind without also having patience is to be missing an element of holiness. They will not love God but lack a fear of God. All the essential character qualities of godliness will be possessed by the mature disciple. "Holiness" is the quality of being personally dedicated to God.<sup>4</sup> Their lives are devoted to Him and directed toward Him. God is the central focal point for the mature disciple. Character growth leads to disciples who have everything they need to live for God.
- D. Third, all this internal progress produces a specific attitude toward God: "in the fear of God". Godly character results in an all-encompassing attitude of respect and awe for God. Mature disciples with developed character will be taken captive by God. They are amazed at Him. They will want to learn more about Him with increasing desire. This makes disciples want to please God and strongly avoid disappointing, hurting, or offending Him. Due to their deep affection for God, they will live to stay on His good side and do what makes Him happy. Living with a proper attitude before God all the days of our lives is important.

#### IV. Description

- A. Even when we realize our obligation to have godly character and possess a vision for what this means, disciples still need to understand how to develop character if this goal is ever going to be achieved in our lives. In fact, this practical element seems to be the most difficult. There are plenty of disciples who want to possess the heart and character of Jesus, yet they don't know how to produce it in their lives. To learn how to do this, we need to know how character growth works.
- B. Our hearts are either drawn toward an object or repelled away from an object. This is how human nature works. Our hearts either yearn for something that we think is desirable and beneficial or want to get away from what we think is unappealing to us. When our hearts travel in either direction, it can do so in varying strengths. Humans can have a slight aversion to something or they can have a strong love for something that is the primary motivation of their

<sup>3</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 2 Corinthians 7:1 "perfecting"

<sup>4</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 2 Corinthians 7:1 "holiness"

lives. We might absolutely love our spouse, for example, and we could absolutely hate it when other people chew with their mouth open. Depending on what the point of reference is, we can land anywhere between a weak personal preference to a strong all-encompassing passion.

- C. When it comes to our character, we must learn to value the right kinds of things so our heart will have affection for that which matters most and is good. We need to train our hearts to be drawn to the things God values and develop a repulsion for evil. Disciples move from misplaced affections to well-placed values in character growth. Knowing how this works, we still need to answer the question of how. Jesus explains a key factor in character development when He mentions how the human heart works:
- <sup>19</sup> Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; <sup>21</sup> for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Mt. 6:19-21)
- D. Jesus knew people value wealth and possessions (earthly treasures) in their natural state. However, Jesus wanted to move affection from earthly values to heavenly ones.<sup>5</sup> He even provided good reasons for doing so. Jesus set earthly treasures and heavenly treasures side by side, compared them, and demonstrated why living for and valuing heavenly treasures is the better option. While these heavenly treasures are better, it is difficult for people to value them because they aren't received immediately, and they aren't physical—perhaps some are physical in eternity, but most heavenly treasures are not.<sup>6</sup> People can't doubt that heavenly treasure even exists. It is a challenge to sacrifice what is concrete for that which appears abstract—even if the abstract is better. Jesus is attempting to influence people's character by challenging and changing their values.
- E. The all-important statement Jesus makes when it comes to the "how" of character development is, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (v. 21). When people talk about their passions, they are telling you what they value. Our character is greatly shaped by what we value—the things we prioritize and that are important to us personally. What we value is largely based on what brings the greatest benefits to our lives (or at least what we think brings the greatest benefits to our lives). Our heart follows our treasures—what we value. The way to transform our hearts is to change the objects of our affections, or what Jesus calls our treasures. To think we can change our heart without also changing what we value is a losing strategy.
- F. If disciples want a heart that loves God and is set on Him, they must first learn to see how valuable and wonderful He is. Disciples devoted to God must understand how beneficial it is to know and love God. They must treasure what He treasures so that their heart will be conformed to His. This shaping of a disciples' character happens indirectly. Character can't be shaped through a direct act of the will. A person can't simply decide to love righteousness. A

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<sup>5</sup> For specific examples see Matthew 19:20-24 and Luke 12:16-21. Zaccheus is a positive example (Lk. 19:8-10) as well as the disciples (Lk. 18:28-30).

<sup>6</sup> Jesus says those who sacrifice earthly treasures will receive many more treasures in this life which implies they are not physical (Lk. 18:30).

person must have their eyes opened to the importance of, benefits of, and avoidable pain resulting from a lack of righteousness. Again, our heart is shaped and influenced by our “treasures”.

- G. The work of sanctification is to continue to rearrange our affections until we love more and more what Jesus loves and hate more and more what Jesus hates.<sup>7</sup> As a child’s heart dreams of being a cowboy one day, the adult’s heart rejoices in the satisfaction that comes from being a teacher who helps his students learn important life skills after having outgrown childish desires. We know our hearts, desires, and affections can change. But few people seem know that we can be intentional in directing our hearts. In discipleship, the Holy Spirit takes a heart that delights in that which is offensive to God and molds it to find pleasure in that which is good. This internal movement is the nature of character development. Too often, people don’t experience this transformation because they are too scared to lose the inferior pleasures they are currently experiencing and don’t realize the deeper satisfaction that can be theirs when they have affection for the right kinds of things. A lot of people only think God wants to take away what they enjoy, not replace it with something better.
- H. A disciple’s heart may begin by thinking Bible reading is boring, helpful preaching is irrelevant, participation in church is an inconvenient obligation, prayer is a waste of time, and personal growth is unnecessary. As God’s Spirit transforms a person’s heart, Bible reading becomes exciting and life-giving, preaching is necessary for knowing God, church is a source of encouragement and support, prayer is a vital connection with God, and personal growth is our greatest need. This is what it means for our affections to be changed and our character to be transformed.

## V. Result

- A. What happens when our affections change, and our character is developed around the values of God? Once again, the Bible will tell us in Ephesians 5:26-27. The reason Jesus died was not to save people but to sanctify them. Jesus didn’t go to the cross to get you into heaven but to enable you to function consistently with the life of heaven. Jesus loves the church and sacrificed Himself:
 

<sup>26</sup> so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. (Eph. 5:26-27)
- B. As a person matures in the life of Jesus, their character is described as full of “glory”, “having no spot or wrinkle”, as well as “holy” and “blameless” (v. 27).<sup>8</sup> This is the effect of the work of the Spirit and word of God on God’s people. This list of descriptive terms highlighting the final condition of the character of disciples is quite interesting. This is the kind of person who has fellowship with God and worships Him the way He desires. As the process of spiritual growth happens over the course of our lives on earth, disciples become people who are more distinct, devoted, and morally pure in their dedication to God as they are purged from evil.

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Andrew Davis *An Infinite Journey: Growing Toward Christlikeness* (Greenville: Ambassador International, 2014), 205

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 1:4

- C. Disciples become beautiful, full of splendor, and honorable in their nature, being full of “glory” (v. 27).<sup>9</sup> Those with transformed character are appealing to God. They are not shameful or embarrassing. Rather, they are people who can be appropriately proud of who they are, realizing God is responsible for their new condition. They are dressed in “white robes” through their righteous actions (Rev. 19:7-8).<sup>10</sup> Righteousness is the “dress code” of the kingdom of God. When their spiritual transformation is complete, they have no blemishes in them, “having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (v. 27). This glory is further described as being set apart and dedicated to God and being useful for His purposes (“holy” v. 27). Mature and fully transformed disciples have no moral defects in eternity, as they are “blameless” (v. 27). This passage presents what a complete sanctification looks like in eternity.
- D. Disciples, the church, are glorious and pure in a moral sense—regarding their character.<sup>11</sup> This is what sets them apart as the people of God. While this purification process is only partial in this life, it will be complete in eternity. The imagery of a well-dressed bride pictures what the church is spiritually before God in their final condition. God delights in people who are spiritually mature and sanctified. This should be a strong motivation for spiritual growth! Just as spouses want to make their partner happy, so too do disciples desire to please God.

## VI. Conclusion

- A. God works in the lives of disciples in order to bring them to the place where they have established and consistent character that functions even in the most difficult situations of life, “<sup>3</sup> And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; <sup>4</sup> and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; <sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Rm. 5:3-5). Proven, tested and stable, character is what God is after.
- B. Jesus-like character is the purpose and intent of humanity. It is our reason for existing. It is why God created us in the first place—to have close and genuine relationship with Him. Those who focus their lives on becoming the kind of person God wants them to be will enjoy eternity with Him forever. They will enjoy all the many and wonderful benefits God offers to His people. Disciples with mature character will continually rejoice in the goodness of God.

## VII. Questions for Further Thought

- A. When you think about a good and moral person, what connotations come to mind? Are they positive or negative?
- B. Jesus made it clear that God’s values are different than human values (Lk. 16:14-15). What example does Jesus’ use to make this point? Can you think of other examples?
- C. What reasons get used for resisting or not wanting to develop godly character?
- D. What do you know or what have you experienced about character growth and how it works?

<sup>9</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Ephesians 5:26-27 “glory”

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 22:11-13

<sup>11</sup> Glenn Graham, *An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 496.

- E. How might a person learn to value the character quality of compassion so that it might be developed in their life?