

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

APRIL 2020

Christian Character

The New Testament heavily emphasizes *who* the Christian must *be*. Notice some of the characteristics the Holy Spirit teaches we must make a part of who we are.

1 Peter 1:15-16 commands us to be holy: *but just as He who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all of your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy; for I am holy."*

Holiness involves being set apart from evil for the glory of God. The phrase "in the world, but not of the world" should describe us. There is a drastic difference between the lifestyle of the faithful Christian and that of the majority. We must allow God's Word to direct and transform our thinking, instead of conforming to the world (cf. **John 17:15-17**).

Scripture also teaches that we must be meek. Jesus taught, "*Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth*" (**Matt. 5:5**).

Meekness involves allowing ourselves to be directed by God (**Jas. 1:21**). Meekness is related to submissiveness, gentleness, and humility. Meekness is *not* being gullible or being a "push-over."

Being meek works hand in hand with being steadfast and immovable (**1 Cor. 15:58**). While steadfastness involves *refusing* to change in ways that push us *away* from God, meekness involves *pursuing* changes that draw us *closer* to God. The attitude of meekness is one that accepts God as our Master, yields to His guidance, and yields to *others* when it is appropriate.

Scripture also teaches that we must be humble. In **Colossians 3:12**, Christians are commanded to "*put on*" "*humility*."

Humility involves not *esteeming* self or *exalting* self too highly. It involves having a proper view of self in relation to God and others. A good description of directing humility toward others is in **Philippians 2:3**: *doing nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself*;

Being meek and humble is linked to being gentle. Among the things Titus was told to remind Christians is "*to speak evil of no man, not to be contentious, to be gentle, showing all meekness toward all men*" (**Titus 3:2**).

While truth must not be sugar-coated, this does not excuse a contentious, "hot-headed" attitude. Even restoring the erring one must be done in a "*spirit of gentleness*" (**Gal. 6:1**).

Treating others with gentleness requires us to be temperate. **2 Peter 1:5-6** commands us to "*add*" "*temperance*" (or "*self-control*").

Self-control involves having an inner mastery over one's desires and passions. For instance, controlling one's *anger* is needful to avoid being quick-tempered and thus speaking rashly toward others in fits of wrath (**Eph. 4:26**; **Jas. 1:19**). Controlling one's sexual desires is needful to avoid fornication, lasciviousness, and lustful thoughts (**Matt. 5:27-28**).

Another thing we must *be* is patient. After commanding self-control in **2 Peter 1:6**, the inspired apostle commanded patience.

Patience should be directed toward others (**1 Cor. 13:4**). Generally when Scripture speaks about patience, though, it involves continuance in doing what's right, especially through trials (cf. **Rom. 12:12**). It is linked to endurance and perseverance. It is the opposite of the seed that fell in rocky places

in Jesus' parable of the sower (i.e. shallow and shaky faith that stumbles when trials come) (**Matt. 13:20-21**).

An additional thing **2 Peter 1:6** teaches we must be is godly.

Godliness does not necessarily mean godlikeness, though there *are* some characteristics of God we must imitate. Godliness, though, foremost involves reverence and godly fear. It leads to a proper *respect* for God that recognizes and accepts His authority (**Heb. 12:28**).

Another thing Scripture teaches we must be is sincere. The apostle Paul's prayer for the Philippians included praying that they "*be sincere*" (**Phil. 1:10**).

Our service to God most not be a mere pretense. There is a stark contrast between the one who "goes through the motions" in his or her service to God and the one who has truly made pleasing God the focus of his or her life. We must not be half-hearted in our service to God, but fully and genuinely surrender our will to His.

The sincere child of God will also be repentant. The need for a repentant heart is seen in the condemnation of an *unrepentant* heart in **Romans 2:5**.

Being repentant involves eagerly making correction when sin exists. Those who are repentant avoid the tendency to try to justify sin, "hide" sin, or minimize sin's severity. The one who is repentant will feel a great *need* to be right with God above all, and will thus eagerly seek to discover sin when it exists and pursue the forgiveness God offers.

Scripture further teaches that we must be zealous for good works (**Titus 2:14**).

While it's true that zeal can cause more harm than good if misdirected (**Rom. 10:2**), knowledge without zeal is no better than zeal without knowledge. We must not be apathetic

in our service to God, but have a fiery passion for doing the things He commands.

The one who zealously comes to God on His terms should be joyful (**Phil. 4:4**). The blessings of living in Christ provide a basis for a much deeper and more permanent sense of joy than anything the world offers.

Such joy is in many ways rooted in being thankful, as **Colossians 3:15** commands. No matter what difficulties we face, life is much better than we deserve if we are faithfully serving God. The blessings He provides to the obedient are unmerited, and these blessings far outweigh temporal hardships.

Scripture further teaches that we must be courageous (**1 Cor. 16:13**), kind, forgiving, tenderhearted (**Eph. 4:32**), selfless (**Phil. 2:4**), honest (**Col. 3:9**), and compassionate (**1 Pet. 3:8**), among other things.

It is critical for each of us to take personal responsibility to make these things a part of our lives. The idea that "we can't change who we are" is foreign to Scripture. The Holy Spirit through Paul *commands* us to "*put on*" those character traits listed in **Colossians 3:12-15**. The inspired apostle Peter *commands* Christians to "*add*" those qualities listed in **2 Peter 1:5-7** to our lives. Claiming "I just can't help my quick temper" doesn't negate the fact that the Holy Spirit commands Christians to be "*slow to anger*" (**Jas. 1:19**). Claiming "I'm just not a patient person" doesn't change the fact that the Holy Spirit commands us to add patience to our lives (**2 Pet. 1:6**).

These commands are not optional or impossible to obey. They do, though, require diligence (**2 Pet. 1:5**) and deliberate pursuit. May we diligently pursue the character God commands, allowing Him to transform us into people who imitate His perfect Son.

- **Michael Hickox**

The Sincere Milk of God's Word

www.thesinceremilkofgodsword.com

For questions, comments, or to request a Bible study, please contact MichaelDHickox@gmail.com