

CHRISTLIKENESS: A SIMPLE OBEDIENCE

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Opening: Beverly Hillbillies Clip

In this passage from 2 Corinthians, Paul writes that **“we are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”** 2 Corinthians 3:18

Paul arrives at this position after contrasting the old and new covenants.

⁷ Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? ⁹ If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! ¹⁰ For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. ¹¹ And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! 2 Cor 3:7-11 (NIV)

William Barclay points out that the old covenant was written down, read to the people, and they agreed to it. The new covenant is based on the power of the life-giving Spirit.

A written document is always something that is external; whereas the work of the Spirit changes a man's very heart. A written code can change the law; only the Spirit can change human nature. pg 190

It is this life-giving Spirit that transforms us into Christlikeness.

So, before we go any further, this truth stands out – Christlikeness is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer.

Paul says the Holy Spirit gives witness to the work of God's grace in our hearts:

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Romans 8:16 (NIV)

John A. Knight writes *In His Likeness*: “The witness of the Spirit is not some esoteric, emotional, or mystical experience. It is the communication of God to man that he is ‘accepted in the beloved.’” pg 124

¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹⁴ because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

**16 "This is the covenant I will make with them
after that time, says the Lord.
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds."**

Heb 10:10, 14-16 (NIV)

Knight concludes his book by saying, "In His likeness" – the legacy of every believer. Let us claim our inheritance, walk in obedience and faith, and pray with burning desire:

*Oh, to be like Thee! blessed Redeemer,
This is my constant longing and prayer.
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.*

We were waiting for the coffee café in the Colorado Springs airport to open. It was 4:30 in the morning. I was struggling to keep my eyes open; he was wide-eyed. I was dragging; he had a bounce in his step. I was in a suit; he was in uniform.

"Where are you headed?" I asked. With a broad smile, he said "I am going to Pennsylvania to surprise my finance." I asked, "Where have you been?" He replied, "I just returned from Iraq." "How long were you there?" "Twelve months, sir." "We got home last night, and I just stayed at the airport. My girl doesn't know I am home and I am going to surprise her today."

We moved into the café and placed our order.

“Are you going to stay in the Army?” “Yes sir. I am moving up.”

He proudly said, and I could see the Sergeant stripes on his uniform. “I just go where they tell and do what they tell me to do. It’s as simple as that.”

I paid for his coffee and roll and we parted ways. “Good luck, I said.” “Thank you, sir.”

I thought about this young man – so bright, so delightful, such a credit to the uniform and our country. But what really stuck with me that morning was his simple obedience, “I just go where they send me and do what they tell me to do. It’s as simple as that.”

What does Christlikeness look like? While there are many noteworthy characteristics of Christlikeness I would like to begin with this: Christlikeness is a simple obedience to the will of the Father.

Now, simple does not infer easy, uncomplicated, undemanding, or trouble-free. Rather, I use the word in relation to our Lord’s straightforward agreement with the will of the Father.

Henri Nouwen, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, writes: In Jesus Christ, God did not manifest his compassion simply by becoming a suffering servant, but by becoming a suffering servant in

obedience. Obedience gives servanthood its deepest dimension.

Jesus said did not go anywhere, say anything, or do anything unless the Father guided him.

Jesus said to his followers: **For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.** John 6:38

As Jesus faced the cross, he told the disciples gathered in the Upper Room: **31 but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.** John 14:31 (NIV)

In Luke 9:51 we read: **As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.** Luke 9:51 (NIV) The KJV: he stedfastly set his face. The NASB: He was determined to go.

In Gethsemane we hear the cry of our Lord's heart to know and follow the will of the Father at all costs:

38 Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

42 He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken

**away unless I drink it, may your will be done."
43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping,
because their eyes were heavy. 44 So he left them and
went away once more and prayed the third time,
saying the same thing. Matthew 26:38, 39, 42-44 (NIV)**

To be Christlike is to have a simple obedience to the will of the Father.

There is no doubt that the word obedience conjures up a mixed bag of feelings.

- We think of the order to do something when we really don't want to do it.
- We think of the authority figure telling us that we should do this for our own good.
- We think of the guilt we felt when we did not perform our faith up to others expectations.

So, whenever we hear the word obedient – we tend to recoil in a defensive posture, waiting for the hand of discipline to come down upon us.

Nouwen writes that the word obedience means “to listen.” Obedience, as it is embodied in Jesus Christ, is a total listening, a giving attention with no hesitation or limitation, a being “all ear.”

When used by Jesus, the word obedience has no association with fear, but rather is the expression of his most intimate, loving relationship. It is the relationship with his caring Father.

Simple obedience is informed by trust in God and faith that he desires the very best for our lives.

In Luke 12 Jesus said to his disciples:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.

23 Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.

24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!

25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

27 "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the

fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!

29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.

30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.

31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Luke 12:22-31 (NIV)

Jesus is teaching us that we can trust God – we can put our faith in His will for our lives.

He told his disciples: **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."** John 14:1

In his book *Lion and Lamb: The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus*, author Brennan Manning writes:

Childlike surrender and trust, I believe, is the defining spirit of authentic discipleship. The supreme need in most of our lives is often the most overlooked: an unfaltering trust in the love of God no matter what goes down.

Paul put it this way:

12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:12-13 (NIV)

Manning continues: The dominant characteristic of an authentic spiritual life is the gratitude that flows from trust **and** biblical trust grows out of love. My trust in God flows out of the experience of his loving me, day in and day out, whether the day is stormy or fair, whether I'm sick or in good health, whether I'm in a state of grace or disgrace. He comes to me where I live and loves me as I am.

Manning tells of Edward Farrell, a priest from Detroit who went on a two-week summer vacation to Ireland to visit relatives. His one living uncle was about to celebrate his eightieth birthday.

On the great day, the priest and his uncle got up early. It was before dawn. They walked along the shores of Lake Killarney and stopped to watch the sunrise. They stood side-by-side for a full twenty minutes and then resumed walking.

The priest glanced at his uncle and saw that his face had broken into a broad smile. The priest said, "Uncle Seamus, you look very happy." "I am." Then the priest asked, "How come?" And his uncle replied, "The Father of Jesus is very fond of me."

I have lived long enough and gathered a sufficient amount of experiences to tell you that life is anything but simple.

I have had challenging assignments, discouraging events, disparaging critics, and tests of my faith.

At the end of the day – no matter how dark the night – I have had this deep settled conviction that I can trust God above all else.

What does Christlikeness look like? Christlikeness is a simple obedience to the will of the Father.