

# Unit 3

## Proof of Christian Maturity

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# Lesson 8

## Evidence of Christian Character

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We are nearing the end of our study. This final unit will deal with evidences that we are growing into a position of Christian maturity. Several lessons back, I told a story of boys measuring their growth against a mark on the wall. The mark represented their father's size. It is normal and important that we have measurements against which to check our progress.

The word *evidence* means "something that will furnish proof." The Scriptures contain many clear teachings on Christian evidences. You know that 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 or magistrate or (in some instances) a jury of persons must weigh the evidence. They have the responsibility of judging whether or not the evidence is sufficient for a decision.

Someone once asked, "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" That is a very serious thought, isn't it? In a sense the world at large is like a jury. Even unbelievers recognize whether or not Christians live up to what they profess or say. 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

Growing Up to Look Like 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:

- State how the life of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit help the believer toward complete maturity.
- Explain how victorious believers overcome the difficulty that would prevent their spiritual growth.

### learning activities

1. Read the lesson in this textbook.
2. Look up in the glossary the definitions to any key words that you do not understand.
3. Answer the study questions in the lesson development, referring as needed to the textbook. Check your answers with those given at the end of this lesson.

4. Take the self-test at the end of this lesson, and check your answers carefully. Review any items answered incorrectly.

**key words**

character	knowledge	victorious
enable	manifestation	
intimate	observe	

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**lesson development**

**GROWING UP TO LOOK LIKE JESUS**

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

Believers are born again into a new family, as we have seen. The newborn spirit (seed) within them contains the likeness of God. Like babies growing into the likeness of their families, believers should grow into the likeness of God. That likeness was seen in Jesus Christ. Jesus was God living in human form. He set a pattern that 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 clearly review the goal of our Christian growth. Romans 8:29-30 is one of the clearest pictures of this in the Bible:

Those whom God had already chosen he also set apart to become like his Son, so that the Son would be the first among many brothers. And so those whom God set apart, he called; and those he called, he put right with himself, and he shared his glory with them.

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 important description of the goal toward which we press is found in Ephesians 4:13:

And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ’s full stature. (Italics added)

Notice that the “knowledge of the Son of God” is an important 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 or her. But in a third and still more important way, we can know a person intimately, such as we know a close friend.

**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, this heart cry of Paul can also illustrate our desire to know Christ intimately as a means toward maturity in His likeness. We need to seek the most intimate knowledge of Christ as an aid to Christian maturity.

Paul was willing to live with *growth and growing* as a constant goal. In Philippians 3:12 he states, “I do not claim that I have already succeeded or have already become perfect. I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to himself.” Yet a few verses later (Philippians 3:15), Paul puts himself in a mature category: “All of us who are spiritually mature should have this same attitude. But if some of you have a different attitude, God will make this clear to you.”

This should greatly encourage us. The apostle Paul was able to say, “In one way I am mature. Yet I have not reached the full purpose of my call. I am not yet perfect.” We know that we can say of even a child, “Johnny is a very mature seven-year-old.” We mean that in comparison with the normal growth of seven-year-olds, he is mature. Yet he would not be mature compared with twenty-year-olds. Let us understand that we can be mature—growing as we should—and yet desire with all our hearts to come more fully to the goal of a total likeness to Jesus Christ.

### **Characteristics of Jesus’ Life**

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

Again, we say that our goal is the likeness of Jesus Christ. God intends for us to become like His Son. We can know about this likeness. Jesus Christ lived among us. (We have already referred to Jesus’ life in human form.) He grew and learned and developed in His human role. He grew physically, mentally, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). He accepted the role of a servant in order to fulfill God’s purpose for Him. All of this we have studied.

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 that distinguish us from others.”

When we see a person’s character, by words or deeds, we see the essential person. The children of God have basic characteristics. They may be from different nations, speak different languages, and have different colors of skin. Yet when an outsider studies true Christians, all of them will show the same traits. This proves that all of them belong to the family of God.

To study the character of Jesus would be a lifelong effort. I hope it will be just that for you. For this study let us simply call to your attention several primary aspects of His character. The first trait we see in Jesus is His *selflessness*. He lived His life entirely to the glory and credit of the Father. John 1:14 tells us that as Jesus lived among us, “we saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father’s only Son.” When people saw Jesus, they saw the glory of the Father.

**2** In John 14:8 Philip asked Jesus to show him the Father. Jesus answered that anyone who had seen Him had seen the Father. What did Jesus say about His words and work in John 14:10?

- .....
- 3** In Hebrews 1:3 Jesus is described as reflecting
- a) a borrowed nature.
  - b) earthly glory.
  - c) the brightness of God’s glory.

In Hebrews 1:3 Jesus is referred to as “the exact likeness of God’s own 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.)

4 Acts 19:11-16 implies that the demons saw God in Jesus Christ and in another teacher who was merely human, but who, nevertheless, was a godly person. Who was this merely 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 named in Philippians 2. This is a passage we have already studied. In it, Jesus is shown taking upon himself not only human nature but, also by a choice of His will, the role of a servant.

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

These qualities of the character of Jesus Christ are very apparent throughout His ministry.

We find many of the character traits of Jesus in a more indirect manner. As you read and study His life, you see the characteristics of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control.

6 Read the story about Jesus' life in John 8:1-11. Now list three character traits of Jesus found in this story.

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This exercise on John 8 is interesting. You can find many other Bible stories with which to do similar exercises.

The traits we have listed above are, as you remember, called the "fruit of the Holy Spirit." They are what we will produce when we yield to Him rather than our human nature. They are like windows of our soul through which God reveals himself to the world. Jesus had all the windows of His human spirit open to show 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 very "seed" or nature of God is in us when we are born again by the Holy Spirit. This seed will manifest God's likeness as it grows in us. Paul expressed this truth: "Because of his love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his sons—this was his pleasure and purpose" (Ephesians 1:5). It is difficult because "what our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants. These two are enemies, and this means that you cannot do what you want to do" (Galatians 5:17).

### Choice of Will

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

You remember that Philippians 2:7 says of Jesus, "Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant." The human spirit, including the will



or volition, is the highest gift for humanity. There is in every believer the seed of God’s likeness. Yet the believer must decide to let God’s nature shine through. Ephesians 3:16, 19 gives important insights on how the believer makes this decision:

I ask God from the wealth of his glory to give you power through his Spirit to be strong in your inner selves . . . Yes, may you come to know His love—although it can never be fully known—and so be completely filled with the very nature of God.

7 Now read Ephesians 3:14-19. In the spaces below, write some phrases from this passage that involve a *decision of the human will*. The first one, for example, is in verse 16: “. . . give you power . . . to be strong.” (Don’t repeat this example in your answer.)

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It is God’s wish (through the apostle) that all the virtues and characteristics in the phrases you have listed be ours. Again, however, the choice is up to the believer. A few verses later (Ephesians 4:1), we have the real issue described: “I urge you, then—I who am a prisoner because I serve the Lord: live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you.”

There is a goal for the Christian life. There is a standard. The individual believer, however, must *decide* to live up to that standard.

8 What is that standard according to the last part of Ephesians 4:13?

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9 In Ephesians 4:2 there are at least five character traits that we are urged to show in our life. They are marks of the Christlike life. Circle the letters below for the five traits mentioned in this verse.

- a) Tolerance
- b) Kindness
- c) Love
- d) Peace
- e) Gentleness
- f) Patience
- g) Humility
- h) Joy
- i) Meekness
- j) Longsuffering

This principle of the believer’s *will* determining the character traits he or she allows to shine through is found in many Scripture passages. When you have an opportunity, go through the book of Ephesians verse by verse. You will notice how many times an appeal is made to your will. “You must put on the new self” (4:24); “So be careful now how you live” (5:15); “Put on all the armor that God gives you” (6:11); and so forth. For this study, however, we will look to one more Scripture. This passage shows us that God provides, but we must *will* to do something in our own lives about our manifestation of the character of Christ. It is a long passage, but we will put it in the text:

God’s divine power has given us everything we need to live a truly religious life through our knowledge of the one who *called us to share in his own glory and goodness*. In this way he has given us the very great and precious gifts he promised, so that by means of these gifts you *may escape from the destructive lust* that is in the world, and *may come to share the divine nature*. For this very reason *do your best to add goodness to your faith*; to

your goodness add knowledge; to your knowledge add self-control; to your self-control add endurance; to your endurance add godliness; to your godliness add brotherly affection; and to your brotherly affection add love. These are the *qualities you need*, and if you have them in abundance, they will make you active and effective in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:3-8, italics added)

Now, reread this passage, noting the italicized words.

- 10** How many characteristics of a maturing Christian can you count in this passage?
- a) 4
  - b) 8
  - c) 12
  - d) 20

Notice in this important passage that believers have the responsibility to add these virtuous traits to their lives. Yet we are told that God has given us “precious gifts” and the “divine nature” itself. You see, it is a cooperation between us and God’s gift within us. The power to be “partakers of the divine nature” is realized through our new birth and our own free will. We must do something to become like Jesus Christ.

This balance between God’s gift and our work is seen in another important Scripture passage: “Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation, because God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own 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 will 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 being like Jesus.*

We have studied the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Lessons 4 and 6. You remember that it was the Holy Spirit who enabled Jesus to fulfill the purpose of His human role. Jesus was led and anointed of the Spirit. The beautiful character of Jesus can be ours only through the Spirit’s control of our life. The apostle Paul writes to the Galatians, “The Spirit has given us life; he must also control our lives” (Galatians 5:25).

When the Holy Spirit is in control of the believer’s life, He will produce the character of Christ in it. This 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	HUMILITY	SELF-CONTROL

- 11** Write in this space the positive command to us in Ephesians 5:18.
- .....

Remember that *to be filled* means “to be under the control or influence of.” The more we let God’s Spirit control our life, the more like Jesus we will be in our character and lifestyle. Sometime,

read through the book of Acts and underline each place that tells of someone being filled with the Holy Spirit. What a privilege!

### **Type of Lifestyle**

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

One day Jesus went up a hill and sat down to teach the crowd that had gathered (see Matthew 5:1-2). This teaching has been called, by generations of Christians, “The Sermon on the Mount.” Included in this wonderful sermon are brief statements called the *Beatitudes*. *Beatitude* is a word that means “the utmost happiness or bliss.” What Jesus described in these short statements was a type of living that would be truly happy.

Each of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-10 describes an attitude of heart and character that the Holy Spirit will produce in believers who allow Him to do so. These attitudes produce spiritual growth. Let us briefly observe them in self-examination to see how completely we have submitted our hearts to the Holy Spirit.

“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 very 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 the quality of obedience. Just as Jesus said, so must the believer say: “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 keeping 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 inner heart is not much occupied with desires of human nature, your vision of Jesus’ reality will be greater.

“Happy are those who work for peace” (v. 9). Here is the characteristic of a sharing spirit 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 hand and care in every step and experience.

**12** Now, as you read through Matthew 5:3-10 again, write in your notebook the part of each verse that shows how God will reward the people who are described by each Beatitude. (I have written that part of verse 3 for you as an example.) Verse 3: The kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

The greatest evidence that proves a person to be a mature Christian is the character of Christ in his or her life. The Bible tells us 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. Slaves bore their master’s name plus the ending “-ian.” Perhaps the unbelieving world saw these people as “slaves of Christ.” Whether or not that is true, there is no greater honor than being called a Christian. We *know* that Christian refers to “a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.” It means being conformed to His very likeness and 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 that distinguish us from others.
- .... 5 The Beatitudes describe attitudes of heart and character that the Holy Spirit will produce in the believer.

SHORT ANSWER. Briefly answer the following questions in the space provided.

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

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

7 Since the character of Christ in our life is an evidence of Christian maturity, perhaps you would like to evaluate yourself on the following characteristics. Check **S** for strong, **M** for medium, **W** for weak, and **N** for need to grow.

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>N</b>
Love	....	....	....	....
Joy	....	....	....	....
Peace	....	....	....	....
Patience	....	....	....	....
Kindness	....	....	....	....
Goodness	....	....	....	....
Faithfulness	....	....	....	....
Humility	....	....	....	....
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 that will be completely fulfilled only in the Lord's presence in eternity.
- 7** "through faith" (v. 17); "you may have your roots and foundation in love" (v. 17); "you . . . may have the power to understand" (v. 18); "may you come to know" (v. 19)
- 2** They came from the Father.
- 8** The very height of Christ's full stature
- 3** c) the brightness of God's glory.
- 9** a) Tolerance  
c) Love  
e) Gentleness  
f) Patience  
g) Humility
- 4** Paul
- 10** b) 8
- 5** d) Humility and obedience
- 11** Be filled with the Spirit.
- 6** Kindness, love, and gentleness (Other traits of Jesus may be found here.)
- 12** 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.