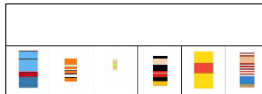


Self Stable

Christian Consistency

September 29, 2024

Today we're questioning the consistent *qualities at the core of our character* – cuz *what we find* defines *who we are* and *who we are* decides *everything else!* And the *best way* to see deep down *inside ourselves* is to carefully *consider* how we *come off* to *others*. Which means, the more *fellowship we have*, the more *simply we can answer this: what makes you, you?*



But before we get to *that*, lets play a *game*: I want you to try and name the following (mostly) Disney characters from these simple blocks:

Here's the point: **we're recognized by our consistent qualities**. *Do you think you could find Waldo if he got contacts and wore a tuxedo?!* No, the whole *stripes and spectacles* thing is part of what *makes him Waldo*. Which is why we can count on his outfit to stay the *same* whether he's at the *circus* or in *space*. **It's his telling trait**. And *everybody* and *everything* has 'em.

However, in *reality*, **our telling traits aren't physical, they're spiritual**. Cuz whether you're *Christian* or *secular*, we all *agree* it's our *beliefs* and *behaviors* that *tell us* who we *truly are* – because **we're defined by the qualities of our character that stay the same despite the situation**.

And since those *immaterial* attributes are inherently *invisible*, what's *really weird* is how **we're wired to trust our perception of the character we can't see over the physical presence of the one we can see**. *But we do!* And we *prove* it each time we say things like, **"You're not acting like yourself"** **"You feel distant"** or **"Hello? Is anybody home?"** Cuz with each comment we're *confirming* we know **the real you is something separate from what we see**.

And since that truth is both *obvious* and *mysterious*, humans have been obsessed with creating *studies*, *philosophies*, and even *movies* that explore the concept. In fact, there's a *list* on IMDB of 158 *body swap* movies like *13 Going on 30*, *Freaky Friday*, and *Big* that *all* play off the idea that **what we see isn't always who we are**. And in every one I've every seen, the *only way* to *sort things out* is finding some *friend* or *family member* who knows the swapped soul *so well* that the *invisible* character they *recognize* *overrides* the impossible *appearance* they *see!* And that just goes to *prove*: **outside perspectives can be good sources of inside information!** *Others* can help *us* see ourselves:

[Cuz] The way of fools seems right to *them*, but the wise listen to advice. – Proverbs 12:15 NIV

[Since] The *heart* is *deceitful* above all things and beyond cure. [So,] *Who* can understand it?

[Well,] "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind" [But] – Jeremiah 17:9-10 NIV

Now *you are* the *body* of *Christ*, and *each* one of you is a part of it. – 1 Corinthians 12:27 NIV

Therefore each of you must put off *falsehood* and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we *are* all members of one body. [and should be *recognized* as one *spirit*] – Ephesians 4:25 NIV

Because we're recognized by something! You have *some character traits* hidden in your heart and mind that friends and family *use to define you*. So if you want to know that you *are* who you *thought* you were – it would be *wise* to hear them out. Find out *which* one of your qualities is so *consistent*, that people could use *it* to recognize you in another body. Ask *what* could you be *reduced* to and *still* be *recognized*? Is it your specific sense of *humor*? Your uniquely sincere *sympathy*? Your particular brand of *passion* or distinctly different *intellect*? Really *think* about it and *investigate* it; one of the most *important* questions you can ask is, **What are you known for?**



Cuz as Christians, we know what we *should* be known for – it's right there in our name: *Christ*-ians; our **consistent quality should be Christlikeness**.

[Cuz *consistency* is part of what makes *His quality* so recognizable] Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. – Hebrews 13:8 NIV



[So,] *Follow* God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us – Ephesians 5:1-2 NIV



[Cuz *that's the key quality*] But I fear [says Paul] ... your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. – 2 Corinthians 11:3 NKJ



[But it really *is* this *simple*:] By this everyone will know that *you are* My disciples, if you love one another." – John 13:35 NIV



We should be known for our love. And Jesus showed what we'd look like if *love was the consistent quality* that defined *us*. Meanwhile, *others* help us see *what* consistent quality currently *does* define *us*. But with those *two* points, our life's path lights up! Cuz our whole purpose in life is just making our way from where we're *at* to where we *should be*. So **the way Jesus loves becomes our goal and guiding light**.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. – James 1:17 NIV

And don't you just *love* that picture?! The *light* stays the *same* – but depending on *where we are*, it has different *effects*. It can *cast* shadows that *scare* us or *shed light* that surprises us. But as we learn to appreciate all of its *different dimensions*, in the end, the consistent quality becomes *clear*: **light is revealing!** And the *more* we *have*, the *better* we can see who we're *supposed to be*.

Well, *love* works the *same* way. And last week, Bruce's whole message on God's *forgiveness* showed us how *big* just *one effect* of His *love is*. But, *like light*, **the same love also manifests in a multitude of other ways** like *giving, serving, listening, teaching, praying, and sharing*. And *without* those loving *beliefs* and *behaviors* that *reveal* our *progress*, things can get *dark*! Like Paul says:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can understand all mysteries and *all knowledge*, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am *nothing*. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to *hardship* that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. – 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 NIV

Get the picture? **Words without love are meaningless. Wisdom without love is foolishness.** And **works without love are fruitless.** So, in short, *life lived without love* means **“You’re not acting like yourself”** because **the real you was meant to live a life full of meaning, understanding, and fruit!**

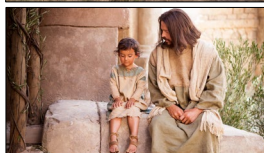
Which means it’s imperative to *confirm* that *love* is at the *core* of our character by *consulting* with *outside* observers. And *that* brings us back to our need for *relationship, fellowship, and discipleship* to *monitor* what’s *manifesting* in the eyes of *others*. Cuz **love must be behind our words, wisdom, and works to be consistent.**



So ask them, **do others SEE the love behind your speech?** Remember, *words* without love are *meaningless* but words spoken in love *leave a mark*. Cuz **words of love always lead to acts of love.** Otherwise, they’re empty.



Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; *keep warm and well fed,*" but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? – James 2:15-17 NIV



Love gives our words meaning because love stirs us to action. And our *action* in turn, gives our words *power* because, talk is *cheap* on its own, but it packs a *punch* if it’s always *associated with action!*



Following up and following through with what we say is called integrity and it’s a *dimension* of love that *builds* the kind of character *consistency* that is so *easy* to recognize, the *invisible* attribute *stands out* and *separates* us from the crowd like *we’re wearing Waldo’s wardrobe!* So,

Let us not **[only]** love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. – 1 John 3:18 NIV

And then check, **do others SEE the love behind your beliefs?** Remember, *wisdom* without love is *foolishness* but wisdom *built* on love is *edifying!* Cuz **only love makes life make sense!** As much as we try to deny it, *every* explanation of existence *without* love just makes us sound *stupid!*

We know that "We *all* possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they *know* something do not yet know as they *ought* to know. But whoever loves God is known by God. – 1 Corinthians 8:1-3 NIV

Loving God means knowing the love of God – and *without* His love to explain why we’re here, we turn to *ourselves* for an answer. And when we *do*, people see *pride* in our *perception* and *holes* in our *arguments*. Cuz without *love* as our *foundation*, all the science in the universe can’t conceive of a *single* satisfying answer to the *one* question we want more than anything: **WHY?**

But **when our beliefs are built on love, our answers aren’t elaborate or extravagant, they’re simple and succinct.** And as *this* dimension of love manifests as *humility*, it keeps our character uncomplicated – and reduces what it takes to make us recognizable. Because when there’s *one* basis for everything you believe – the consistency of your simplicity is all we need to see to know it’s *real* love behind the *wisdom* of the *real* you. So,

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the *humility* that comes from wisdom.— James 3:13 NIV

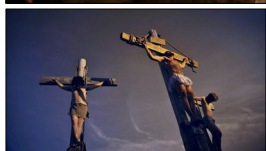
So then check, **do others SEE the love behind your deeds?** Remember, *works* without love are *fruitless*. But love makes *everything we do* profitable for *everyone involved*. Cuz **loving feels good and makes good**. Even though every loving *deed* means *giving away* a piece of ourselves, it also means getting closer to the character of Christ; and



Godliness with contentment is great gain. – 1 Timothy 6:6 NIV



When *what we do* becomes a function of *how we love*, **our deeds don't just identify us, they connect us and enrich us because they unify us**. And as each individual member joins the body of Christ, the riches of God's love are *multiplied*, not *divided*.



Jesus came to *earth* and went to the *cross* to prove the **power of what we do relies entirely on why we do it**. And when *God's love* is the *core* quality of someone's *character*, this *broken world* see their deeds *unnatural* and *unforgettable*. So *now*, if Christians *do* what we're *supposed to*, everyone ought to something *supernatural* in *our* character – and *our* lives should feel *just like* one of those *body swap* movies. Because as Paul explains:



I no longer live, but *Christ* lives in me. – Galatians 2:20 NIV



And in *our* movie, our *job* is to reconnect *Christ* with everyone He loves by using *our* lives to show them His *character* lives in *our* body. We're supposed to consistently display Christ's *defining love* until His invisible qualities overrule *our* impossible appearance and *they* recognize Christ in *us*.

And *that* part of our movie is awesome! Just like when Josh convinced his best friend *Billy* it was *him* in *Tom Hanks' body*, **it's unbelievably encouraging when someone recognizes Christ in your body**. And I'll never forget one of the first times I felt it – cuz I had been a Christian for a *few* years and *really* working on keeping my *attitude* consistent. And *one* day, I was checking out at *Safeway* when the checker *stopped* and said, **“Hey, is there any chance you could drive a customer up to O'Reily's to buy a car battery? His car won't start and I know you're a nice guy, so I thought I'd ask.”** You know I'm a nice guy?! ... *It's WORKING!* Whatever *she* saw in our *brief* encounters was *consistent* enough to recognize the *kindness* of *Christ* – *not me* – cuz I'm *not* historically *nice* at *Safeway*. But I was so *excited* to be *recognized* as *nice* that I probably *scared* the guy as I kept *smiling*, making *small talk*, and *opening his doors*. I think I even offered to *pay* for his battery...

But the point is this: **when Jesus is what makes you, you – you get to live a life of love**. And only *that* life is full of *meaning*, *understanding*, and *fruit*. So, if that's *your* goal, go *out* and check *in* to see what *others* see in *you*. And if it *isn't* consistently Christ, watch your *words*, *wisdom*, and *works* to make sure what people see is who you want to *be*. And to *paraphrase* Paul, **“For heaven's sake, keep it simple stupid!”**

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.