

The Christian Behaviour

The way we live each day makes a difference. When we treat others and ourselves with respect and compassion, we honor God as our Creator and recognize Jesus' sacrifice for us.

The Bible tells us that we are all sinful, that no one is perfect (Romans 3:23).

It also tells us that faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26). It tells us that the best way to demonstrate our commitment to God is to love others (John 13:35), and to offer a helping hand to those having a hard time in life (James 1:27, Isaiah 56:7).

Adventists believe the actions and words that sum up our behaviour can be the best witness there is to the love of Jesus Christ. By claiming Jesus as our saviour from sin, we put away the self-focused behaviour of the world and replace it with humble Christian behaviour that glorifies Him (Colossians 3:1-17).

But if we all make mistakes and struggle with sin, how can we make sure our behaviour consistently reflects the character of God?

Fortunately the Bible gives us timeless guidance on what kinds of intentions, behaviours and attitudes are beneficial to us, to others, and to God. To help us apply that guidance, Jesus' actions during His earthly ministry served as an example for living a Godly life.

Let's look at:

- What the Bible says about how we should behave (and why)
- How to become more Christlike in
- Our character
- Our thoughts
- Our appearance
- Our health and how we treat our bodies
- How we treat others

BELIEF 22: CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things that will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness. (Gen. 7:2; Exod. 20:15; Lev. 11:1-47; Ps. 106:3; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 10:5; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 2:4; 4:8; 1 Tim. 2:9, 10; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 John 2:6; 3 John 2.)

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT HOW WE SHOULD BEHAVE?

Since Christ has freed us from the eternal consequences of sin, we now live our lives in gratitude for this ultimate gift.

“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (Hebrews 10:26).

If we read through the whole Bible, certain behavioural themes stand out. By that we can determine which kinds of attitudes and actions are valued by God and show love to others. Some of these major themes are:

- Compassion/Kindness
- Generosity
- Humility
- Patience
- Joy
- Peace
- Faithfulness
- Merciful/Forgiving

The Bible also lists behaviours that are destructive to ourselves and others.

- Selfishness
- Hate/malice
- Sexual immorality
- Greed/idolatry
- Slander
- Prejudice

Knowing how to recognize these behaviours is the first step. Then we can dig a little deeper in Scripture to learn how to foster these kinds of habits in our lives, through the example of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21).

Yes, we will make mistakes. But what matters most is our pattern of behaviour. The philosopher William Durant said,

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

The same goes for our Christian behaviour. Every action we do each day doesn't earn or subtract points from a grand total. God knows our hearts and looks at our patterns. And if we prayerfully study the Bible and be intentional about our habits, the Holy Spirit can bless others through our daily behaviour.

It's just like Paul's advice in Romans 12:2, talking about the behaviour pattern of the world, and how ours is to be different:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (NKJV).

HOW TO BE CHRISTLIKE IN:

OUR CHARACTER

When Jesus was on earth 2,000 years ago, he could often be found caring for the sick and lonely, showing epic proportions of patience, performing miracles and sharing his love for his Father.

Sometimes we forget He came to show us *who* God is. He behaved in such a way to reveal God's character. He was the human embodiment of God's word.

The book of John chapter 1 tells us, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*" God's character is unchanging and Jesus displayed God's character through his interactions with the people around him.

The concept of being Christ-like means to reflect God's character.

It can be easy to forget that God loves *all* the people around us (even the most terrible people you can think of) just as much as He loves us. The same love, grace and forgiveness that he extends to all humans should also be given out by Christians (Ephesians 4:32) as an example of who God is.

If we were to act like Jesus did, in today's world, it could look like any of these examples:

- Caring for a sick person
- Baking biscuits for your new neighbour
- Having lunch with a homeless person
- Donating food and clothing to people in need
- Visiting people in prison
- Mowing your elderly neighbour's lawn for free
- Not spreading or participating in gossip
- Being kind to someone who has been unkind to you

WHAT WE CHOOSE TO OCCUPY OUR MINDS

But how do we learn to behave like Christ? When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he implored them to think about things that were "true...noble...just...pure...lovely...of good report...virtuous...and praiseworthy" (Philippians 4:8). He wanted them to meditate on those things knowing that the "God of peace" (Philippians 4:9) would be with them.

The same is true today.

When we fill our minds with good thoughts and God's Word, it directly affects our attitudes and behaviours.

Sadly, when we choose to observe things that go against those values, or fill our minds with thoughts that are dishonest, impure or violent, our attitudes and behaviour tend to follow that path instead.

It's not always easy to be kind to people who can be difficult or irritating. But being compassionate to the people around us helps us remember that our own behaviour is not always perfect and we need to show others the grace and compassion we hope to receive.

Sometimes, developing kind habits can take some effort. But we can do it by making certain behaviours a priority, such as:

- Call a loved one regularly and ask how they're doing
- Really listen when someone is talking with you
- Try to put yourselves in another's shoes (e.g. "If I was going through the same thing, what would I do or think?")
- Volunteer regularly at a soup kitchen, homeless shelter, nursing home, children's hospital, etc.

C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, wrote "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less".

In other words, all humans have equal value in God's eyes. Being others-centric doesn't mean we have to treat ourselves badly or deprive ourselves of our own needs.

The way we treat ourselves is as important as the way we treat others. After all, self-loathing or beating ourselves up about not being good enough is actually a way the devil tricks us into being self-centred.

But even as we care for ourselves, keeping our minds and bodies healthy, it's important that we learn to put the needs of others before our own whims and wants.

To help us in these efforts, Paul explains the importance of putting on the armour of God. Being prepared every day with the Christ-like qualities of radiating truth, exhibiting righteousness, willingness to share the gospel, exercising faith, believing in our salvation, and digging into the Word of God—all the while praying in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:10-20).

In order to behave like Jesus, we need to practice the habits that make us *like* Jesus every day. Rather than focusing only on advancing ourselves, it's important to include others into our focus so we help one another along.

Honestly, we're not going to get it right on our first day as a Christian...or even our 5,000th day. Learning habits can take a lifetime. That's okay, because God is loving and patient. It's about genuine progress rather than achieving perfection.

What counts is that we strive every day to try again, just like an exercise program. If you don't do as well on some days, you try your best during your current day.

Thankfully, we're not alone in our spiritual journeys. The Holy Spirit is walking with us and will help us grow over time.

OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Did you know that God looks at the heart rather than what we look like on the outside? (1 Samuel 16:7). In that sense, it's easy to recognize where God places a person's value. It is our character, our choices, and our potential to be moulded in His image that is most important (Romans 12:1-2).

We don't need to worry about expensive clothing or jewellery in order to be loved and accepted by God. The latest Nike sneakers or iPhone shouldn't be the only things we have going for us—we should concentrate on qualities that can't become obsolete or get broken, or mask less-desirable qualities. Let's instead concentrate on the characteristics of gentleness, respect, modesty and sensibility.

Yes, modesty and sensibility sound boring. However, paying back any kind of debt—financial, social or mental—is much harder to deal with than avoiding those pitfalls in the first place.

These two character traits develop throughout the Christian life by exercising faith and stewardship. Being able to help someone in need is far more valuable than impressing people with the latest fashion.

HEALTH (EXERCISE, REST, DIET)

Christian habits also include healthful practices, like regular exercise, healthy diet and rest. Paul told the Corinthians that *“whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31)*.

You can actually be a witness to God through your health and fitness! Keeping our bodies and minds healthy and fit are acts of service to God and a visible testimony in this world.

Being intentional about what we eat is an important aspect of maintaining our health. Food can either actively encourage our cells to be healthy or it can lead toward disease in our bodies. It's up to us to give our bodies a fighting chance.

Choosing foods that are healthful is a way to honour God. Adding to that, creating a healthy balance of movement and rest are vital to good circulation and muscle strength, which directly affects heart and brain health.

Getting good sleep at the end of each day is highly important, as is resting at the end of the week on Sabbath. By looking after our own health, we can be useful to others and shine a positive light on God's character.

HOW WE TREAT OTHERS

“Walking in love” means caring for the interests of others as well as ourselves (Philippians 2:4). If the Holy Spirit is living within us, the natural outpouring of behaviours will be *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23)*.

By treating others with love and respect, it shows the world a glimpse of God's character. Behaving like Jesus did in the Bible is not just the responsibility of the church pastor or deaconess; it is the responsibility of every Christian to represent who Jesus is. After all, we may be the only witness some people have the chance to see.

Though it's important to remember that as followers of Jesus, we are not responsible for “converting” others to our beliefs. We are only responsible for sowing the seed by pointing others gently toward Jesus. The rest is up to the Holy Spirit to work on their hearts.

Our actions should attract people into the love of Christ as they experience Christ-like purity, love, and unity from His very own followers. Godly actions that put others interests ahead of our own can be criticized by people who might misinterpret unselfish acts as a weakness. Don't give up though—this world needs more kind people like you!

Some people think Christians should behave better than non-Christians. While that seems logical, the only way a Christian can “level up” to a higher standard of behaviour is by remaining close to Jesus and surrendering our lives to Him. We must remember that every human being is a sinner and only God's presence in our lives can make us anything more than what our fallen nature dictates.

Adventists believe it's not enough to just call ourselves Christians. The way we behave in all areas of our lives, both inside the church and out, should reflect the behaviour of Jesus. Everything we watch, read, eat, do, think and say should be for God's glory and not our own (1 Corinthians 10:31).

C.S. Lewis advised in his book, *Mere Christianity*,

“Do not waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbour; act as if you did? As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.”

The difference between a Christian who only says he loves his neighbour and the one who actually *does* is found in his daily actions. Christians can be found in any church around the world, but Christ-like behaviour can only be found where the Holy Spirit is present.

If we want to act in the same way Jesus did, the first step is to invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts, and accept God's grace and the salvation He offers freely.