

Temperament, Character, and Spiritual Gifts

Part 10 Dr. Lamar Allen

1. **Review:** Good Character is not inborn but must be developed. The quality of a person's character impacts their life and that of every person they encounter. Thought, speech, emotions, and actions must be trained and disciplined to achieve good character.
2. **Bad Character:** When you are out in the world, look around. From any point of view, bad character is present at all levels of society. The truth of man's depravity is proven by every day's headlines.
 - Men and women of all varieties do shocking things, so astounding you can only say "what on earth were they thinking."
 - People in powerful positions and of great wealth are no exception.
 - Bad character by any definition, is not rare.
3. **Good Character Takes Time and Focus:** Crises reveal character, but character revealed in crisis was formed in the past through the thought, decisions, and actions of every day.
 - The little anonymous poem many of us know makes that point. *"Sow a thought, reap an action! Sow an action, reap a habit! Sow a habit, reap a character! Sow a character, reap a destiny!"*
 - All Christians are destined to ultimately be Christ-like in character. Their character is transformed through sanctification, a process made possible by the Holy Spirit.
4. **Christian Character Building:** To acquire Christ-like moral character requires "putting off" bad character traits and behavior and "putting on" good character traits and "righteous behavior" (Eph 4:20-24). We are to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work to transform us into a likeness of Christ (having thoughts, attitudes, speech, and actions that are like His).
5. **Ephesians 4:21-24 (NIV):** *"when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*
6. **Galatians 5:22-23:** *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."*
7. **How Do We "Put Off" and "Put On"?** Scripture clearly names the kind of things we are to add and eliminate from our lives.
 - The difficult question is, how do you do that?
 - How can thoughts and actions be controlled so that we develop new patterns of thought, attitude, and behavior? From personal experience, it isn't easy. Just when we think we have succeeded, something happens, and the bad behavior pops out again.
8. **The Righteousness Gap:** The persistence of bad behavior highlights the gap that exists between what we know we ought to be and what we are – I call it "the righteousness gap."
 - How can we close our righteousness gap? How can we break bad habits of thought and behavior and develop new righteous habits?

- The top-level answer is by cooperating with the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit as He transforms our inner being into a likeness of Christ.
 - We are to “walk in step” with the Holy Spirit and neither “grieve” or “quench” Him.
9. **One Approach:** Many years ago, I read Larry Christenson’s 1974 book “**The Renewed Mind**” (Bethany Fellowship, Inc). He makes three powerful observations.
- (1.) In their inner being, each believer experiences an ongoing conflict between their desire to “live by the Spirit” and the internal urgings of their “sinful nature.”
 - (2.) Scripture says some things necessary to become “like Christ” can only be done by God. Other things God enables believers to do, and they must do them.
 - (3.) If we confuse the two, we get into trouble. Trying to do what only God can do is a losing prospect. Failing to do what God enables us to do is a serious problem.
10. **Philippians 2:12-13** says believers are to “*work out*” their salvation for it is God who “*works in*” them “*to will and to act according to His good purpose.*”
- “Work out” concerns what believers are to do. “Works in” concerns what God must do. How are we to understand these terms?
 - Paul gives further insight in Galatians 5:16, “*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*” By the “flesh” he means our “sin nature.”
 - Martin Luther says believers should follow the Spirit as our guide and resist the flesh, for that is **all we are able to do**.
 - He means we cannot be rid of sinful desires, but the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit enables us to resist (not gratify) those desires.
 - 1 Corinthians 10:13: “*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*”
11. **Summary:** Differentiating between things we can and must do and things only God can do, is an important insight. Knowing what is expected of us is important, but so is knowing what we cannot do and is not expected.
- To acquire Christ-like moral character requires “putting off” bad character traits and behavior and “putting on” good character traits and “righteous behavior” (Eph 4:20-24).
 - We are to cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s work to transform us into a likeness of Christ (having thoughts, attitudes, speech, and actions that are like His).
 - an obvious thing only God can do is regenerate, bring forth “new spiritual life.” Another is changing our heart which is the essence of our inner being.
 - Trying to do in our own power what only God can do is a great error, but so is failing to do what we are enabled to do and should do.
 - As the Holy Spirit “works in” us transforming us into a moral likeness of Christ, we are to “work out” that which we have been enabled to do. God will do the things we can’t do.
 - We are enabled to “not gratify” the desires of our sin nature, but we cannot eliminate the desires themselves.

12. **Understanding The Division of Labor:** We need to know more about what God intends us to do and what only He can do.
- Psalm 51, Colossians 3, and other passages help in developing that understanding.
13. **Psalm 51:6-12:** *“Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. ⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. ⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”*
14. **Understanding the Division of Labor- What God Only Can Do:** Psalm 51 is David’s plea to God for restoration after his sin with Bathsheba and the killing of her husband. In these verses, it is God who acts and David who is acted upon.
- God teaches David wisdom in his inner being. Only God can create within David a clean heart and renew within him a right spirit.
 - It is God’s renewed affirmation of salvation that brings David joy. God teaches, renews, and cleanses of sin, washing David so that he is morally as white as snow.
 - All changes taking place deep within the center of David’s or our being is God’s work. He changes our essence. As the Holy Spirit “works in” us to transform us into a likeness of Christ, we are to “work out” that which we are enabled to do.
 - To do our part and avoid trying to do God’s part, we need to know how God intends the labor of transformation to be divided.
15. **Colossians 3:12-14:** *“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”*
16. **What Believers Can and Must Do:** While changing our inmost being is God’s work. The outward visible work of “clothe yourself,” “put on,” and “put off” is work for the believer.
17. **Summary:** In the transformation of a believer into a moral likeness of Christ, God works the necessary change in the inmost being, but He enables and requires the believer to put on the outward form of Christ-likeness.
- The believer is to “put on” the qualities of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and over all other virtues, put on love binding them together in perfect unity.
 - “Putting on” Christ-like qualities means outward behavior as though you genuinely have that moral quality in your inner being.
 - Developing the genuine inner quality requires a change in essence. That is God’s work.
 - Outward behavior consistent with having the desired moral qualities is our work and is enabled by the Holy Spirit.

18. **Building Forms of Righteousness:** Putting the two pieces together, building outward forms of righteousness is a necessary step toward Christ-likeness.
- (1.) God enables and requires the believer to put on the outward form of Christ-likeness.
 - (2.) God works the necessary inward change in the believer producing within their innermost being the reality simulated by the outward form.
19. **Building Forms:** Building structures of concrete is a good analogy. Rough temporary forms are built which define shape and volume and externally resemble the desired structure.
- A mixture of cement, gravel, sand, and water is poured into the forms. When cured and solidified, temporary forms are removed. A strong functional structure remains.
 - In becoming Christ-like external forms are necessary but temporary. The necessary forms are the outward forms of righteousness.
 - The forms for righteousness are rough and unfinished but recognizable as external signs of compassion, kindness, humility, and the other required qualities.
 - Only God can change the heart. He causes necessary internal heart changes to make the outward qualities genuine. God will fill forms we build with the real thing.
20. **Example:** At times, believers must deal with people who are unpleasant.
- We are not inclined to be patient and kind to such people. We may even be furious and angry, feeling a strong desire to “get even.”
 - But, desiring to be obedient and pleasing to God, we refuse to gratify our anger or desire to “get even.” Instead, we strive to be patient and kind.
 - To do this we act in ways consistent with patience and kindness against our “feelings” but in obedience to God trusting that He will give us true inward patience and kindness.
 - We cannot eliminate sinful desires, but we can refuse to gratify those desires.
 - It is a big mistake to try to do God’s job of internal change, which we cannot do while ignoring proper outward behavior which we can do.
 - As we refuse to gratify sinful desires, behaving outwardly as God would have us behave, God will change our innermost being so outward behavior and inward reality match.
21. **Example:** Christianson cites a true story of a woman who rushed into early marriage to get out of a bad home situation.
- She did not love the man she married and soon felt resentful and trapped in the marriage.
 - At some point she realized her husband was a good man who deserved something better than an unloving wife. So, she began to outwardly act as if she loved him, fixing his favorite meals and always acting loving toward him.
 - *Some years later, one of their teen-age children said “Mom, all the kids say we sure are lucky because you and Dad like each so much.”*
 - Hearing that, the woman realized she did truly love her husband. She had built the outward *form* of love. God produced genuine love.
22. **The Role of Faith in Building Forms:** It would be pointless to “put on” outward forms of a virtue without believing God will use our obedient actions to work the genuine virtue in us.
- We trust God to use our obedience to create the reality of a new attitude in our heart.

- We realize obediently putting on the outward conformity of a virtue will never be as beautiful, true, or strong as the real thing.
- It is not intended to be – it is simply our active expression of faith that God will use our obedience to form in us the genuine beautiful and true virtue.

23. **Galatians 5:16**: *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”* Our sin nature will always generate sinful desires. But, if we live by the Spirit, He will enable us to not allow sinful desires outward expression.

- When offended, our sin nature will stir up desires to lash out at the offender. The verse doesn’t say, don’t feel that way, or that’s a terrible way for a Christian to feel.
- You can’t stop feelings coming into your mind, but you can refuse to gratify the desires.
- Don’t speak those cutting words. Don’t fight. Don’t plan to get even with the offender.
- When we do the temporary work of building outward forms of Christlike attitudes, God will do the inward lasting transformation! When all is done, the temporary forms are gone and what remains is God’s genuine workmanship.
- Our transformation into Christ-likeness is truly a work of God’s grace. Yet, He graciously enables us to take part in that work.
- Our task is outward and temporary; God does inward lasting work!

24. **The Importance of Honesty**: Using “outward forms” may seem like hypocrisy. Is it hypocritical to be kind or act nice when our feelings are just the opposite? No!

- Hypocrites are people pretending to be what they are not. In building outward forms, we admit we are doing things against our natural inclination.
- We do so in obedience to God. We are honest before Him. We build outward forms of obedience even though we would prefer not to. We trust God to use those forms to work in us that which is pleasing to Him (Hebrews 13:21).
- Christ often required persons receiving a miracle to participate by doing some outward thing. The miracle of a sinner becoming morally like Christ requires that we participate by outwardly acting as He would act. Building forms is a way to make that happen.
- We are not to be enslaved to our “desires,” “feelings” or “wants” at any given moment. We walk by faith, not by desires or feelings.
- The point is that we cannot suppress our feelings, but we are able to control their outward expression. We leave the feelings themselves in God’s hands.
- Some outward forms of righteousness are very difficult to build – but we must not stop trying. Only God can make us truly righteous.
- As we obediently build outward forms of righteousness, we trust God will transform our inner being so that our thoughts, motivation, and actions become more like Christ’s.
- He is faithful to do just that. God will honor our efforts at becoming righteous by implanting in our hearts the real thing!
- **Philippians 1:6**: *“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”.*