

Temperament, Character, and Spiritual Gifts

Part 12 Dr. Lamar Allen

1. **The Value of Good Character:** A good place to begin thinking about the value of good character is Galatians 6:7, *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”*
 - Also 2 Corinthians 9:6, *“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”*
 - Likewise Proverbs 22:8, *“Those who plant injustice will harvest disaster.”* Hosea 10:13, *“You have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil.”*
 - The law of sowing and reaping is grounded in God’s justice.
2. **God’s Grace:** Sowing bad things usually means reaping bad things, but God is merciful and gracious. We do not always reap what we sow.
 - Romans 9:15, *“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”*
 - Because of God’s grace, mercy, and compassion, redeemed former sinners can have a home in heaven despite their sin.
 - *“You reap what you sow”* is valid both positively and negatively.
 - Galatians 6:8, *“Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”*
 - The traditional secular view is *“Sow a thought, reap an action! Sow an action, reap a habit! Sow a habit, reap a character! Sow a character, reap a destiny!”* Sowing evil reaps an evil destiny.
 - God’s common grace enables a fallen person to some extent to sow good thoughts, habits, and character. However, common grace is not saving grace. God gives saving grace to those whom He chooses.
 - God’s saving grace intervenes for those He is redeeming to make it possible for them to sow in their thought life good things that will be reaped in their words and good actions that will determine their character.
 - Every Christian’s character will ultimately be like that of Christ.
 - Every Christian’s destiny is life eternal in the presence of God.
3. **Aristotle:** *“Character is that which reveals moral purpose, exposing the class of things a man chooses or avoids.”*
 - The basis for Christian character is God’s moral character as revealed in Scripture. Christian character should reveal obedience to God.
4. **Ethics, Values, Virtues, and Vices:** Moral signifies being concerned with the principles of right and wrong. Values are goals. Goals may be good or bad. Virtues are good moral goals lived out. Vices are bad moral goals lived out.
 - Ethics refers to moral principles governing behavior. A person’s ethic consists of the moral principles governing their thoughts, speech, behavior, and activities.

- A Christian's ethic is to be based on the moral positions acceptable to God which are disclosed in Scripture.
 - In general a vice is the opposite of some virtue. Example: Honesty is a moral virtue. Dishonesty is a vice. Compassion is a moral virtue. Lack of compassion is a vice. Generosity is a virtue. Miserliness is a vice.
 - The same word can name either a value or a virtue.
 - For example: Honesty as a value means people should be honest.
 - Honesty as a virtue means a person is honest.
 - Everyone can consider honesty to be a reasonable "value," but not all will achieve the "virtue" of honesty.
5. **Goal of Christian Ethics:** The goal of Christian ethics is to live to the glory of God. What does that mean? It means things like:
- (1.) Personal character and actions are Christ-like. *"Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son"* (Rm. 8:29).
 - (2.) Abundant "fruit" is produced which is beneficial to the people of God and others. *"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples"* (Jn. 15:8).
 - (3.) Obedient behavior flowing from a committed personal relationship with God. *"But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed"* (Rm. 6:17).
 - Christians are called to have character, results, and behavior that glorify God.
6. **Character That Glorifies God:** Everyone would choose to be happy, satisfied, comfortable, and perhaps wealthy and powerful.
- But God is more concerned with character and growth in holiness (becoming the kind of person He desires).
 - Christians are to obediently strive to add new moral virtues in their daily life and at the same time eliminate moral vices.
 - Earlier we considered lists of moral virtues. A life of virtue will not happen and cannot be sustained without constant effort. In fact, without the indwelling Holy Spirit, it appears to be impossible.
 - Christians are accountable to God for their character. Temperament is given and does not seem to change, but character is not inborn, it must be developed and does change.
 - Mortal life is preparation for eternal life to come.
 - Jesus says our preparation for eternal life should include laying up treasures in heaven. That requires godly character.
 - Our calling, as the redeemed of God, is to become Christlike.
 - Ultimately, when Christians stand before Christ in heaven, they will be glorified and made like Christ.

- Our mortal life is to be lived in reverence and respect for God in accordance with His moral law as revealed in Scripture.
 - We are willingly to give up selfish agendas or plans to live a life dedicated to pleasure and convenience.
 - Possessions will not go with us into eternal life, but holiness and Christ-likeness will.
 - God's love for us is shown in regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. These steps are vital to developing Christlike character in preparation for life eternal.
 - Christian character involves sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed Himself on our behalf, and then our own sacrifices. Christians are not to be simply "good" people., They are to be servant-minded!
 - Jesus said in Luke 17:10, ***"So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"***
 - The world in which we live emphasizes power, wealth, popularity, fame, and possessions. God's concern is with the kind of person we are becoming. "More like Jesus" is to be our watchword.
 - Paul provides a word picture of two men of godly but different character. The men are Timothy and Epaphroditus
7. **Philippians 2:19-30**: ***"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²²But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also." ²⁵I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me"***
- Paul praises both Timothy and Epaphroditus as men of great value. Verses 19-14 are about Timothy, verses 25-30 about Epaphroditus.
 - In verse 22 the ESV has Paul praising Timothy's "proven worth." The NKJV says "proven character." Both are correct, but the NKJV captures the reason Timothy has proven his worth to Paul.
 - Timothy's character enables his worth. Verse 29 encourages the Philippian church to receive Epaphroditus in the Lord with all joy.

- Paul says the church should honor such men who are willing to die for the work of Christ. Each one is a man of godly character.
 - Paul says Timothy is unusual in that he will genuinely be concerned for the Philippians welfare (is our concern for others genuine?).
 - Paul observes that many, perhaps most, are more interested in their own interests than those of Christ but Timothy is not like that.
 - Paul gives great praise indeed for Timothy's compassion and commitment to Christ.
 - Paul is pleased with Timothy's "proven character," a man of honor and integrity whom you can depend on in difficult times.
 - Timothy consistently lives up to what he says he will do. God is pleased with the Timothy's of this world.
 - Timothy and Epaphroditus worked with Paul providing support that pleased him. Even the most gifted among us need help. We are stronger and more effective as a team.
 - Epaphroditus shows real courage and commitment, willingly risking his life to assist Paul in his work for Christ.
8. **When Character is Flawed:** In his book "**The Reason for God**," Tim Keller makes a good point about character by asking "if Christianity is the truth, why are so many non-Christians living seemingly more moral lives than many Christians?"
- The moral failings of some Christian leaders are well-known.
 - In-fighting and party spirit seem as common in church communities as in other voluntary organizations.
 - Non-Christians ask, if Christianity is true, "Shouldn't Christians be much better people than everyone else?"
 - Keller points out that this assumption is based on misunderstanding what Christianity teaches about itself. Two major points.
 - (1.) First, Christianity's doctrine of common grace teaches that all people receive God gifts encouraging moral acts of goodness and justice and restraining evil.
 - James 1:17: ***"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."***
 - No matter who performs it, every act of goodness, wisdom, justice, and beauty is empowered by God.
 - God gives out good gifts of wisdom, talent, beauty, and skill 'graciously' – that is, in a completely unmerited way.
 - He distributes His common grace gifts to all humanity, independent of religious conviction, race, gender, or any other attribute.
 - He gives these gifts to enrich, brighten and preserve human life.
 - (2.) The second point is that the church is a healing place for imperfect sinners not a place of safety for perfect saints. Christians are not perfect during mortal life. Each one is just a sinner saved by grace.

- Mark 2:17: *“And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’”*
 - Every Christian’s character is so damaged and flawed that, by their own power & merit, they cannot attain right relationship with God.
 - The God-Man, Jesus Christ lived a perfect life under God’s law, died to pay the penalty due under the law for sin, was resurrected.
 - In this way He made it possible for believing sinners to be restored to right relationship with God by faith through grace.
 - This means the church will always be filled with recovering sinners.
 - As recovering sinners, Christians are immature broken people who must grow spiritually, emotionally, and morally to become like Christ.
 - Some people, drawn into the church by God’s grace, are more broken and morally flawed than some people outside the church.
 - As C.S. Lewis points out, unless you know the detailed history of people including their physical, psychological, and mental status, you cannot reasonably compare the moral character of a new Christian to that of a non-Christian.
 - If a new Christian experienced worse past trauma and brokenness than a non-Christian, it is not surprising the new Christian doesn’t seem to have as good moral character as the non-Christian.
 - But the moral development of the new Christian will be in the right direction. The new Christian is on a path to become like Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and assured of ultimate glorification (Rm. 8:28-30). Character flaws in Christians will be corrected.
9. **Conclusion:** Developing godly character is essential to becoming Christlike. Many godly attributes are directly addressed in Scripture such as the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
- Other godly traits mentioned in include compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, forgiveness; focusing thoughts on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy.
 - Helping the poor, weak, and unfortunate; doing unto others as we would have others do to us; persevering in pursuit of righteousness, godliness, faith, and love; honor our word, have integrity, keeping promises even when it hurts; be temperate in all things.
 - Be dignified, sensible, live honestly, speak the truth, set an example in speech, conduct, and purity. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry; hospitable and generous, willing to share. It is more blessed to give than to receive.
 - Though not essential, further good attributes include creativity, flexibility, alertness, focus, decisiveness, etc.
 - No one in mortal life is completely Christlike. All make mistakes, all sin. Yet Christians are being sanctified and will ultimately be glorified to be like Christ.

- Outward actions displaying evidence of godly character originate in our innermost being. It is in our inner being, our spiritual “heart,” that godly character must develop.
- Godly character develops as the benefits of salvation are applied by the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- Christians are to cooperate with the transforming work of the Holy Spirit by striving to do things corresponding with His gracious work, avoiding doing, thinking, or saying things that grieve or quench Him.
- An individual Christian’s responsibilities include working to understand what godly character looks like, making decisions and taking actions consistent with their understanding of godly character.
- We are to consistently pray God will illuminate our understanding, enable our actions, and direct our path.
- Christian responsibility for developing godly character includes making right moral decisions repeatedly until right moral decisions become habitual.
- Actual character transformation to godliness comes only through the Holy Spirit’s transforming power.
- With His help we step-by-step put off the old nature and put on the new nature. The actions necessary for “putting off” and “putting on” do not come naturally.
- They require deliberate focused decisions and persistence. Breaking bad habits and replacing them with good ones is never easy. The process of “building forms” helps to develop good habits including what we think about, what we say, and what we do.
- Keep in mind that the character that controls our actions today is the result of uncountable past choices. Every moral choice is important.
- Becoming Christlike in character requires getting rid of inappropriate character traits and adding good character traits.
- New Christians typically (and rightfully) focus on eliminating bad traits. But the bad must be replaced by the good, the traits of righteousness and holiness.
- In Romans, Paul tells us that transformation from where we are to where we are going proceeds through the renewing of our mind.
- With the Holy Spirit’s help, taking off the sinful and putting on the godly moves us toward the goal of Christlike character.
- That goal will be fully reached only when we are glorified.