



"Beware of little expenses. A small leak will sink a great ship."
—Benjamin Franklin

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The Nanny Church (Part Three)

As shown previously, the problem of Nannyism arises when the governments of men take on increasing responsibility and control, and the people relinquish their responsibilities to allow someone else to take care of them. This can take place in the sense of either a despot establishing order or a therapeutic state indulging the people by providing what the people can and should provide for themselves. A Nanny government—whether in [the world](#) or in the church—arises from a failure on both parts to recognize and uphold individual responsibility.

The greatest victim of Nannyism is character—and this is critical because, once regenerated by [God](#), we become partners with Him in growing into His character image. When Nannyism intrudes, our spiritual progress is hindered because character growth stalls.

Character is born out of struggle—out of pitting ourselves against events and circumstances or against our own nature. Without something to struggle against, we will never develop discipline or self-control, nor hone our wisdom or foresight. Our prioritization skills languish and become muddled because they are unneeded. Perseverance atrophies from lack of use. We become self-indulgent if we never have to set aside what we want to do for

the sake of what we *must* do. These conditions are destructive enough on the human plane, but in a Christian, who is training for eternity, they are far more serious.

Nannyism allows us to skirt consequences. It allows us to shift the burden of responsibility to someone else. If a government mutes the consequences of our actions and decisions or tampers too much with natural circumstances—witness the current federal bailout of mismanaged institutions—it essentially rewards unrighteousness of various stripes (foolishness, greed, imprudence, impatience, etc.), allows nothing to be learned (setting the stage for the same thing to happen again), and fosters a tragically unrealistic understanding of life. What might it do to our view of *eternal* life?

Character does not just happen. God develops it over time by leading us through a multitude of courageous, right decisions—or at least teaching us through the poor decisions we make. Character is built in activity—whether physical or mental—rather than idleness. Notice the apostle Paul's rebuff of the languishing Hebrews:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, *you need someone to teach you* again the first principles of the [oracles of God](#) ; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for *he is a babe*. But solid food belongs to those who are of *full age*, that is, those who *by reason of use* have their senses *exercised* to discern both good and evil. ([Hebrews 5:12-14](#); emphasis ours)

The Hebrews were drifting along in complacency, gradually leaving their first love. One aspect of their spiritual condition was immaturity—spiritually, they needed to have their hands held, while Paul says that by this time they should have been spiritually mature enough to help others! He identifies the mature Christian as one who uses—exercises—his faculties in discerning good and evil, not allowing his mind or character to atrophy. The mature Christian makes active use of the gifts given to him, staying in shape spiritually. The immature Christian, pictured here, is complacent and still requires that others above him do the things for him that, Paul judges, should by now be a personal responsibility.

Paul similarly rebukes the church in Corinth, though the circumstances are somewhat different:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in [Christ](#) [immature; lacking in developed character]. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? ([I Corinthians 3:1-4](#))

The Corinthians identified with spiritual leaders (wrongly-identified benefactors; see [Luke 22:24-26](#)) more than with God, and this carnality was creating division. The apostles clearly recognized that God had apportioned the Christian sphere among specific domains, and so church members within the domains *should* look to the leader God had provided for them ([II Corinthians 10:12-16](#)). The problem, however, was that the Corinthians were staring solely at the human governments that God had put into place—and He *did* put them into place—rather than looking to the One above them all.

This, too, is a type of Nannyism: a mental delegation of responsibilities to human government what only belongs to God. The fact is, we are all impressed by the strong horse. We all want to be on the winning team. We all rally around a leader who appears to be going places and accomplishing great things, because we subconsciously anticipate that he can also take care of us and carry us along with his positive momentum. The Corinthians were focusing on human leadership because of what they felt the leaders could do for them. If instead they had been focusing on God, they would have accepted the leadership He had provided for the domain in which they found themselves, and kept on working on growing, overcoming, and developing spiritual character.

Obviously, Paul did not contribute to their condition—he was trying to disabuse them of it by pointing out that it was causing the Body to fracture—but from his other writings it is plain that other, false ministers were promoting Nannyism by seeking a following rather than pointing people to

God. We can see a similar effect today when church leaders stir up fear over the coming Tribulation, but then offer assurances of safety and God's favor (Nannyism) simply because one is a member of the "right" church— regardless of whether one ever develops character, makes strides in overcoming his human nature, produces the [fruit of the Spirit](#), or grows into the image of the Father and the Son. As stated, when we have nothing to struggle against, and the consequences are chronically muted (if only in our minds), we become complacent and our spiritual health atrophies.

If one's father is king, governor, town mayor, or the school principal, the temptation exists to behave as if the normal rules of life do not apply. Likewise, if one's spiritual leader has become the "strong horse" or one's church has become "the winning team," there is the same tendency to forget oneself and behave as if there will never really be any consequences. This may seem agreeable in the short term, but if it is not arrested and reversed, it will do incalculable damage to one's character.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Character Matters](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh, reflecting on President Clinton's lack of moral character (and the foolish double-mindedness of the people who twice put him in office), reflects that in God's kingdom only those who have God's approval, those who have developed iron-clad character will be qualified to rule. Americans unfortunately have separated legality and competence from morality and character. There is a direct correlation between the character of the leader and the morality of the people (having a deadly ripple effect to the entire population). In selection of leaders, whether king or elder, God has emphasized that character has to be at the core. A leader has to practice what he preaches. We have been called to a process of character building, qualifying to rule in God's Kingdom.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[What Do You Do in the Dark?](#)

by Mike Ford (1955-2021)

Character has been defined as "what you do in the dark." It is what you are when no one else can see you. Mike Ford uses the story of Joseph in Potiphar's house to extract some lessons about character.

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