



"The central issue about the Bible is whether we live it."
—John F. Alexander

01-Feb-02

Behavior Matters

I listen to the radio in the mornings as I prepare for and drive to work. Every day at 8:50 AM on Charlotte's WBT is "A Moment of [Hope](#)," an attempt by a prominent local preacher to inspire, encourage, and benefit the citizens of Charlotte. Most of these two-minute offerings drip with Protestant saccharin, requiring some effort to endure them. One morning this week, however, I could listen for only the first fifteen seconds before turning the radio off in disgust.

The preacher began (my paraphrase): "I've really noticed lately how external our society is. We care so much about how we look and how we dress. It matters too much how much our house costs and what model car we drive. That's really quite dismaying because how we look and how we behave have no eternal value..." (This is when I cut him off.)

I could hardly believe this outright lie! How we behave has no eternal value? It made me question the man's education, and then I remembered he graduated from a Protestant seminary. Everything fell into place. Core Protestant theology, especially the mainstream variety, decrees that [grace](#) by [faith](#) alone is the only thing of eternal value, and behavior—which Protestant theologians consider to be "works"—has no part to play in our eternal life.

It is likely that this Charlotte preacher would find a way to defend his statement while maintaining that [God](#) wants us to be good people. If pressed, he would probably fall back on the deceptive, Protestant line that all one has to do is believe in Jesus and he will be saved. What we do, as long as we are committed Christians, does not matter in

the end. Billy Graham spread and popularized this concept through his crusades—"Jus As I Am, Lord."

Such Protestants, known to the media culture as the "religious right," are the ones who led the charge during recent presidential elections, crying, "Character matters!" One might get the impression that behavior and character count when high office is on the line, but makes little difference when [eternal life](#) is at risk. Put another way, it appears men have tougher standards than God. Or, it is easier to "get into heaven" than it is to lead others here on earth.

This is an idea that just has not been thought through. If "heaven" were populated with immortal spirit beings with character and behavior like that seen in "Christians" on earth, what would "heaven" be like? Earth—butworse! The problems of earth would merely be transported to "heaven" with the added monumental and insurmountable factors of endless life and godlike powers in each being! And we thought we had problems. . . .

The last two chapters of Revelation do not paint such a picture. The time of the new heaven and the new earth is one in which "there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" ([Revelation 21:4](#)). The "former things" are the sins and their consequences that caused so much death, sorrow, crying, and pain on earth!

[Jesus Christ](#) suggests that behavior and character matter when He says in verse 7, "He who overcomes shall inherit all things." What does a Christian overcome but his own [sin](#), this present evil world, and the Archenemy, [Satan](#) the Devil!

Who will be there and who will not? These two chapters make it quite plain: "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city [of New Jerusalem]. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie" ([Revelation 22:14-15](#); cf. 21:8). It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to deny that those who live upright lives will enter God's Kingdom and those who live sinful lives will not. Righteous behavior and character certainly **do** matter to God!

We can go to no higher source to receive the answer to "Does our behavior have eternal value?" than to Jesus Christ Himself. A man came to Him and asked him this very question: "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" His answer is unambiguous: "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" ([Matthew 19:17](#)). The commandments are a code of behavior that builds godly character

in those who keep them, and God wants only those with godly character—characterlike His Son's—in His Kingdom.

Behavior matters. Character matters. The [Ten Commandments](#) matter. They will not "pay our way" into God's Kingdom, since God's [salvation](#) is a free gift and it is humanly impossible to purchase or earn it ([Romans 6:23](#); [Ephesians 2:8](#)). Nonetheless, when God judges us "according to [our] deeds" ([Romans 2:5-11](#); cf. [1 John 2:28-29](#)), the record of our behavior will make the difference between eternal life and eternal death.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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

[Perfection...Piece by Piece](#)

by Mike Ford

What is perfection? Does God require perfection of us? Mike Ford defines Biblical perfection and shows to what standard God holds us accountable.

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