



"It's true that charisma can make a person stand out for a moment, but character sets a person apart for a lifetime."  
—John C. Maxwell

**31-Aug-12**

## **Leaders With Character**

"When little men cast long shadows," said Walter Savage Landor, an English author of the turn of the nineteenth century, "it is a sign that the sun is setting." Mr. Landor was not speaking of short-statured men, although perhaps he had the diminutive Napoleon in mind. No, he was referring to ignoble men, those with unworthy ideals and ambitions. Such men are self-aggrandizing, interested only in their own promotion.

Considering our political landscape, such men seem to be the rule rather than the exception. The current resident of the White House, reputed to be brilliant and motivational, seems to have few ideas, and those he does have are inimical to the traditions and principles of the nation he is supposed to be leading. Despite the President's popularity with nearly half the country, his record of unkept promises, division, and soaring debt marks him as one of the "little men" that Mr. Landor had in mind. And he certainly casts a long shadow, as Americans will be paying for the failure of his ideas for generations to come.

A better-known quotation on leadership and character comes from America's sixteenth President, Abraham Lincoln: "Nearly all men can stand adversity,

but if you want to test a man's character, give him power." This quotation—from a man who was tested as perhaps no other American chief executive has—makes it clear that character in leadership matters. Holding a position of leadership by definition implies holding power, and only people of good character can handle power properly. One could go so far as to say that character in leadership is where character matters the most.

Today, however, moral character in leadership is not considered a first priority. The current political campaign reveals what the candidates' public relations experts deem to be important: centrist policies, good looks, felicity in public speaking, a lack of skeletons in the closet, an ability to attract contributions, a willingness to compromise, and a clean track record on the issues. Thanks to previous administrations, the public is now willing to forgive indiscretion and obfuscation in its leader as long as he gives them what they want.

[God](#) is the ultimate source for the true answer to whether character matters in leadership, and we can determine His answer by asking just a few questions. The answers should be obvious to those whom He has called out of [this world](#).

First, we can ask, "What has He called us to become?" The answer is, of course, that He has called us to become His sons and daughters, to fill the offices of kings and priests in His government ([Revelation 5:10](#)). These are positions of leadership. Therefore, we can rightly say that His children have been called to be leaders, to hold positions of great authority in His Kingdom. From this, we could also extrapolate that, ultimately, the salvation process is about leadership.

Second, we need to ask, "How do we obtain these positions?" The Bible answers in [II Peter 3:18](#), by "grow[ing] in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior [Jesus Christ](#)." In other places, Scripture says that we must "put on the new man" ([Ephesians 4:24](#); [Colossians 3:10](#)) or "be transformed into the image of Christ" ([Romans 12:2](#); [II Corinthians 3:18](#)). In other words, we prepare for these positions of leadership by taking on the very character of God Himself, who rules everything. He is the highest Power in the universe, the greatest Leader of all.

Thus, we should ask, "Will God allow anyone without His perfect character to rule in His Kingdom?" We realize that the answer to this is obviously, "No." This truth is often stated in the negative: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the [kingdom of God](#)?" ([I Corinthians 6:9](#)), and then the apostle Paul lists a number of kinds of sinners he means by the term "the unrighteous." In Galatians 5, he writes of those who practice "the [works of the flesh](#)" ([Galatians 5:19-21](#)), which he lists, concluding with the statement "that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Even in the Book's final chapter, Jesus tells us plainly, speaking of New Jerusalem, "But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever practices a lie," ([Revelation 22:15](#)), clearly meaning that those with such low character will not be there at all!

Thus, we can conclude that every ruler in His Kingdom will have His personal stamp of approval on his or her character. Christ is the Judge of all. No one will be able to slip under His rod when He evaluates His sheep. No scoundrel will rule in the Kingdom of God. Not even someone of just moderate character will bear rule in His Kingdom. He will make sure that every *citizen* of New Jerusalem has perfect character!

Does character matter? Yes, indeed! Character means everything to us as His called-out ones, and it means everything to leadership, human or divine.

Does a person's personal life affect his public life? Of course, it does; they really cannot be separated or compartmentalized. Do we expect an individual who makes poor decisions in private matters to make good ones in public matters? If a "leader" has a record of doing wicked things in his private life, is it not logical to think that some of his immorality will bleed over into his public life? It must. As Jesus tells us in [Mark 7:20-23](#):

What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, [covetousness](#), wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.

A person carries what is inside of him wherever he goes, and those internal traits will affect whatever he does. If the characteristics that are within him

are good and benevolent, he will behave with [kindness](#) and generosity in every situation. Yet, if his heart is black with hate and self-seeking, he will act meanly and selfishly toward everyone. He may be able to cloak his evil nature from others for a short time, but Jesus tells us that his secret sins will be shouted from the rooftops if he continues in them (see [Luke 12:3](#)).

With the close of the Republican National Convention, and the Democratic National Convention to take place next week, America is entering the homestretch of the political campaign season. Whether the media or the public realize it or not, this election is about character, the moral character of those who will lead this nation forward. The nation desperately needs leaders with sterling character. November's elections will reveal if the American people will choose moral leadership or "little men."

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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by Martin G. Collins

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by Mike Ford

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