



"Sow an act, and you reap a habit. Sow a habit, and you reap a character. Sow a character, and you reap a destiny."

—Charles Reade

26-Aug-16

Character and Reputation (Part One)

We all know that obedience to God's moral laws, His statutes, and His judgments brings us great benefits. We also know that, by knowing and then living within the framework of what [God](#) has revealed to us, we each receive a rich reward in developing godly character. When we make the choice to follow God, He begins forming each of us into His and His Son's image. [Psalm 19:7](#) states this principle clearly: "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul."

What we find in our choices of how we follow God—when we turn aside from evil and when we cleave to God in the days of trouble and suffering—is that our lives and our characters become enriched far beyond what we could ever do on our own. It is a tremendous blessing to follow God's ways.

Our God has called each of us personally, and He is teaching us day by day how to build our lives on the rock and not the shifting sands of the culture that surrounds us. Because of our calling, a great responsibility has been placed upon us. He has given us His name and brought us into His Family,

so it is incumbent on all of us to walk worthy of that name and position ([Ephesians 4:1](#)). We do this best when we are obedient and strive to reflect His character and His way of life in our daily activities, speech, and thinking.

He is the true and everlasting God, a Lord of perfect grace and righteousness. He is the Most High and Almighty Eternal, and nothing and no one comes close to Him in beauty, power, and [holiness](#). He is our Father, our Provider, and our Teacher. All of His names, titles, and traits revealed in Scripture reflect directly on who He is and teach us of His holy character. They disclose to us His divine nature, and by them we learn, not only to know Him ([John 17:3](#)), but also how to [love](#) Him ([Matthew 22:37](#)). They inspire us to desire to be like Him.

None of us is born full of these godly attributes—in fact, we come along with hardly any of them. With few exceptions, godly character must be acquired by us over a lifetime of instruction and often painful experiences. But God is always there as we stumble along the path to His Kingdom. The transformation from the old man to the new is a work God does mostly with us, not to us ([Philippians 2:12-13](#)).

Though it is true that God will set up conditions and trials for us to be tested and grow in, it is equally true that we have a part to play in them. Because we make choices, we can either choose to follow His lead or not. If we choose to follow Him, our efforts then can become a part of the creative efforts God does for us. When we move beyond a mere intellectual consent to His efforts and begin to practice what we know to be true (and this knowing is a gift), we become more like Him.

This is what we should do. Yet, how often have we ignored or put off doing the things we know we should have done? Most of the time, we know what is required of us, yet by distractions or laziness or any number of excuses, we ignore God, at least for a while. Like Jonah, we run away from what we have been commanded to do, putting off until tomorrow what we truly should have done today.

This has happened to each of us, and it is, frankly, a character flaw. God knows we will delay from time to time, as our old nature desperately resists change. Changing a heart from stone to flesh is no small task ([Ezekiel 11:19](#);

[36:26](#)). When the stony heart is still in control, we easily return to sinful haunts and old habits—bad ones, that is—which are like the flu: very contagious and easily caught. In [I Corinthians 15:33](#), the apostle Paul shows us how significant our choices are in our character development: "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'" To get us moving, he writes in verse 34: "Awake to righteousness, and do not [sin](#)." Of course, we know sin is directly opposed to the creation of godly character in us and in fact, destroys it.

But good habits that lead to virtuous behavior can also be contagious. Paul instructs us in Hebrews 10 to participate with each other in Christian growth. Verse 25 in particular tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves but to exhort one another. As he says in the previous verse, "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" ([Hebrews 10:24](#)).

God has given each of us a good deal of control over our conduct. We have a responsibility to choose right actions that lead, not only to the building of godly character and a name for ourselves that glorifies His good name, but also to a name that reflects well on others in the church. It must be this way, as we are of one Body. What I do and you do matters very much.

When we consider a person to have a good name, are we not suggesting that they have good character and a good reputation? We often use "character" and "reputation" somewhat interchangeably, tying both words together, but they are not the same. One way to think of it is that our character, be it good or bad, is who we are in God's estimation. It is a devastatingly true picture of us, for He truly knows us. Yet, it is a quality in our own keeping, and it is up to each of us to maintain it and to work with God to transform it to be more Christ-like.

Of course, the difficulty in this lies in the necessity for us to change, and human nature hates change, especially the kind of change that God has in mind. But change we must! Look at it this way: Were we not all spiritually dead when God called us? Yet now we have been made truly alive! Refusing to change would be tantamount to spiritual suicide, throwing away what God has so graciously bestowed on us. Bending our will toward God, then, is

essential in His creative process and our future. Not to bend His way, to be stiff-necked like the Israelites, will never work out well for us, just as it did not work out for them.

It is true that some changes God asks of us can seem insurmountable. We see in ourselves bad behavior—large matters such as gluttony, judgmentalism, lust, or dishonesty in our dealings with others—and we try to cast off these unwanted traits, working at being more temperate, evenhanded in judgment, chaste, and honest. This is right and good, of course, but very difficult.

However, many of the changes we will make will occur because of minor, everyday decisions. Day by day we begin to learn a little better the virtue of [patience](#) or of charity. We more easily come to forgive [offenses](#) against us. We learn to stay silent and control our tongues and our anger. In our daily practice of Christianity, in the little things, we grow to reflect God's image.

These more minute changes grow slowly over time into the fabric of our character, and in this sense, it is what we mean when we talk about the process of conversion or the perfecting of the saints. This is not all of what conversion is, but it is a major part of it.

In Part Two, we will look at reputation and how character and reputation work together in the church.

- James Beaubelle

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by Martin G. Collins

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