

"Glass, china, and reputation are easily cracked, and never mended well."

—Benjamin Franklin

02-Sep-16

Character and Reputation (Part Two)

In Part One, we saw that our character is who we are in God's estimation, since only He truly knows us. Our reputation, on the other hand, is what other people think of us—in other words, their assessment of our character and personality. Though we may make strenuous efforts to help them form a good opinion of us, we have only marginal control of their opinion. In this way, we have more control over another's reputation than our own.

Jesus faced this issue when His enemies called Him "a glutton and a winebibber" ([Matthew 11:19](#)). They also charged Him with being "a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Judging His outward appearance, they attributed to Him a false reputation. Out of jealousy, hypocrisy, and hatred, they attacked His reputation.

What people say about others matters. It matters to [God](#) and to those so tarnished. The Bible frequently admonishes us to avoid [gossip](#) and idle talk about one another ([I Timothy 5:13](#); [Proverbs 20:19](#)). We can never destroy another's standing before God, but we can easily injure his or her standing before other people. In this sense, we truly are our brother's keeper.

Most people want to assign a decent reputation to those they meet. From my perspective, others think more highly of me than I know to be true. I am not trying to deceive them; they just have not seen enough of me to know any better. This, however, is never the case with God. He sees us better than we see ourselves, and knows our hearts, yet He never stops working on our behalf, for which we should all be grateful.

Webster's Dictionary defines *character* as "a distinctive mark; a distinctive trait or quality; a person's pattern of behavior; a description of the qualities of a personality; and a moral strength." These are broad definitions, describing both good or bad character. To know which traits are good and which are bad, there must be a standard—one we know thoroughly.

Fortunately, that standard is revealed to us within our relationship with the Father and the Son. God's giving of the Holy Spirit converts our thinking, allowing us to see what we otherwise would not ([1 Corinthians 2:9-14](#)). His Word reveals truth to us, but just as important, we receive a desire to practice what we learn and to conform to His image. So we grow in His way of living.

In time, we look back at our past and wonder how we ever thought so highly of ourselves. Now we desire to please God and act acceptably before Him—something we never thought to do before. This proves that the love of God has taken root in our hearts. These changes in us are gifts from God, and if we follow through and cultivate these gifts, godly character begins to grow.

To instruct us, God placed many examples in His Word of men and women who knew God and strived to live according to His will in [faith](#), [hope](#), and love. For instance, [Moses](#) greatly desired to see God's glory. To put it another way, he wanted to see God's divine nature, to know firsthand the glorious character of the God he had come to worship. So God revealed this to Him by expounding on His names and attributes, for they are inseparable from His holy, righteous character. They describe His divine nature.

And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, [merciful](#) and gracious, [longsuffering](#), and abounding in [goodness](#) and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and [sin](#), by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the

children's children to the third and the fourth generation. ([Exodus 34:6-7](#))

Jesus' prayer echoes this sentiment when He said He had revealed the Father this way: "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of [the world](#)" ([John 17:6](#)). He did this mostly through His day-to-day example in how He lived His life. They saw, heard, and touched the true nature and character of God ([I John 1:1-3](#)). They took that incredible experience and passed it on to us in Scripture, which should inform how we live each day.

It should also set our approach and attitude when we come before Him in prayer or at services. We should never forget that in such cases we are more than figuratively on holy ground before Him. We are constantly in His presence; He lives in us by His Spirit. Nothing we possess comes close to His matchless holy character and glory, so we should always speak of Him reverently.

Jesus always spoke with the utmost respect and reverence to His Father in heaven, so how much more should the sons and daughters of this age do so in prayer to the living God? This approach will aid greatly in developing our own character in concert with our holy God.

[Proverbs 22:1](#) states, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold." Many in this world disagree with God on this point. They would happily trade their names, their reputations, their characters, for an easy life. But this is a darkened perspective propagated by a corrupt culture. We know that wealth can go no further than the grave ([I Timothy 6:7](#)), but a person's character and good name do not stop there. Wealth is physical in nature, but character is spiritual. Which is most important to us? Which is more important to God?

Whose character traits do we want to carry through the grave? Our neighbor's or God's? In answer, Jesus says in [Matthew 5:48](#), "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." In the same vein, Peter writes: "As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former

lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" ([I Peter 1:14-16](#)).

This has everything to do with God establishing His image in us, implanting within each of His children the riches of His holy character. As it is God who orders life, His purpose for us stands in the face of any and all adversity we may encounter. We must work to serve that purpose and avoid frustrating any of God's efforts. Servants like us have many responsibilities, first to learn and then to do, but the first duty we have is to listen to our God. From Him flows wisdom, grace, and all the virtues we need to succeed in transforming into the image of [Jesus Christ](#).

Of all that needs to be done in our preparation toward the [Kingdom of God](#), aligning ourselves with God's character is most important. By ourselves we do very little, but by faithfully following Christ, we will grow into His image. Though it can be difficult for us to change, when we find that we want to put off doing what we know we should do, we need to cling to God, and He will give us strength and motivation and lead us in the right direction.

If we follow His lead, on that day when He looks for His people and calls out to them, He will find us because we will be like Him ([I John 3:2](#)) and known by Him ([II Timothy 2:19](#)).

- James Beaubelle

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's in a Name Anyway?](#)

by David F. Maas

Names not only identify but they also arouse associations—sometimes good, sometimes bad. David Maas explains the biblically, a person's name held his reputation, a thing to be guarded and enhanced through godly living.

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