

Excellence In Character (Part Two)

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If a person thinks of something often enough, he will come to the point where he cannot stop thinking about it. His thoughts become locked in and focused to the point that he will not be easily distracted from them, and his behavior will begin to reflect those thoughts. It is therefore essential for our character growth to discipline our thoughts, setting them on admirable, commendable things—those *excellent* things of God—that define a distinctive standard of character for living a praiseworthy life of moral excellence and obedience to Him.

A common word used to describe moral excellence is “virtue.” *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* defines *virtue* as “general moral goodness; right action and thinking; uprightness; rectitude; morality.” According to *Webster’s Dictionary of Word Origins*, the Romans derived the noun *virtus* from their word *vir*, “to denote the sum of the excellent qualities of men, including physical strength, valorous conduct, and moral rectitude.”

The Bible expends a great deal of space to define and emphasize God’s standards of virtue against which all Christians should measure their lives. God even defines His saints as “the excellent ones, in whom is all My delight” (Psalm 16:3). Herein, we continue our study on excellence in character.

1. How does the Bible define and portray virtue? Ruth 3:11; Proverbs 12:4; 31:10; II Peter 1:5; Philippians 4:8; Mark 5:30.

Comment: In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *chayil* can be translated as “virtuous,” and it is used to refer to strength, force, power, valor, and worthiness (Ruth 3:11; Proverbs 31:10). The New Testament renders two Greek words into English as “virtue.” The first, *arete*, means “excellence or valor” (II Peter 1:5; Philippians 4:8). The second, *dunamis*, refers to the remarkable and miraculous power of God (Mark 5:30; Luke 6:19).

Whether denoting a mighty force or power (II Samuel 22:33; II Chronicles 26:13), an admirable or praiseworthy character trait (Ruth 3:11; Proverbs 31:10; II Peter 1:5), or the immeasurable capacity of God’s grace, goodness, and might (II Corinthians 12:9; Hebrews 11:11), these words indicate a gold standard of excellence, something all Christians should aspire to and revere.

2. What specific virtues does the Bible list? Galatians 5:22-23; I Timothy 6:11.

Comment: The Bible has several lists of virtues. Perhaps the most noted and quoted is found in Galatians 5:22-23 as the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Within these excellent character traits, we discover the virtuous mind and nature of our Creator. We glorify Him when we, as members of the Body of Christ, display these virtues, and our efforts remind the world of the infinite power and beauty of His moral character. Moreover, our virtuous acts serve to separate us from a morally unhealthy and impure world.

The apostle Paul also encourages Timothy to pursue another special list of virtuous traits in I Timothy 6:11. Some of this list overlaps with the fruit of the Spirit while adding the virtues of righteousness and godliness.

3. Is discipline a virtue that God wants us to develop? Philippians 4:8-9; Colossians 3:2; II Corinthians 10:5.

Comment: In Philippians 4:8, Paul encourages the reader to discipline his mind with virtuous thoughts:

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

As Paul builds toward his uplifting conclusion in the epistle to the church in Philippi, he urges the members to focus their thoughts on truth, nobleness, justice, purity, loveliness—all of which further define the absolute moral excellence of God. The apostle emphasizes the benefits of a mind disciplined with noble thoughts, enabling a person to concentrate on God's very nature, empowering the good fruit of Christian virtue to be produced (Philippians 4:13). By doing so, Paul declares, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

In our next issue, we will conclude our study of excellence in character by focusing on the relationship between virtue and good works.