

Character Matters

Leaders Must Have Character

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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Good afternoon to all of you. Good morning to those of you out in paradise [Hawaii]—at least as good as this earth will get I guess.

"When little men cast long shadows," said Walter Savage Landor, who was an English author back in the late 1700s, early 1800s, "it is a sign that the sun is setting."

Think about that for a minute. When I saw this quotation, I immediately saw President William Jefferson Clinton as a sign of the end of the age. The sun is setting on America because we have a man of very little character in the White House, in the the world's highest office, the world's most powerful position. The return of Christ *must* be soon if such a scoundrel is our president—our "Ahab," if you will; our "Manasseh," and he has had two terms. We were not smart enough after the first term to kick him out.

He so fully and completely fulfills the list of evil and perilous character traits in II Timothy 3:2-5 that we can know of a certainty that the "last days" are upon us. When you have a chance, go look at those "perilous days are coming, men will be like this," it says there. When you have a chance go check those things out and just see if you can put Bill Clinton's name on every one of them. It is amazing.

Another quote I found is: "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power." This quotation brought to mind the current public debate over whether "character" in leadership matters. Holding a position of leadership by definition means *holding power*, and only people of good character can handle power properly. Character does matter, especially in our leaders. That is where it matters the most.

Now God is the ultimate source for the true answer to this debate, "whether character matters in leadership," and we can determine His answers by asking just a few questions I think whose answers are obvious to those of us in the church.

Question: What has He called us to become?

Answer: He has called us to become His sons and daughters, to fill the offices of kings and priests in His government—positions of leadership. We have been called to be leaders, holding positions of great authority in His Kingdom.

Question: How do we obtain these positions?

Answer: By growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ; or as it says in other places, "by putting on the new man," or, "by being transformed into the image of God."

In other words, by taking on the very *character* of God Himself, who rules everything. There is no more ultimate power than He.

Question: Will God allow anyone without His perfect character to rule in His Kingdom?

Well, the answer is obviously "No." He is the Judge of all, it says. So every ruler in His Kingdom will have His personal stamp of approval. No one is going to get under the rod when He is the Judge. No scoundrel will rule in the Kingdom of God. No one of even just *moderate* character is going to rule in the Kingdom of God. He is going to make sure that every ruler has perfect character, and He will not let them pass until they have it.

So, does character matter? You betcha! You had better believe that it does. It means **everything** to us, and it means everything to leadership, human or divine.

I do not think I need to go into any of the sordid details of this current scandal. You have to say the word "current" because there are always a few. There have been a few, but there are probably a few that we have not found out about. This current scandal has now been somewhat melded into the American involvement in the Iraqi crisis because there are many people who believe that President Clinton will use this present trouble with Iraq as a way to get the American mind off his sex life—a way he can get "an out" with the American people by shellacking Saddam Hussein and his people over there in Iraq.

Now do you trust an adulterer, a liar, and a draft dodger with the lives of America's young men and women? I do not. Does a man's personal life affect his public life? Of course it does. Can a man make poor decisions in private matters and be expected to make good ones in public matters? Can you split them apart? If a man has a track record of doing wicked things in his private life, do you not think some of that is going to bleed over into his public life? It must.

I think these are very fitting questions to ask, and evidently so do the pollsters, because those are the sorts of questions they have been asking the American public. What we found out is the American people believe it is possible for a leader to successfully

separate his private life from his public life. The poll numbers bear this out. They believe as long as he is doing a good job with the economy and he is continuing the social issues that they endorse politically, that half of the American people do not care what he does behind closed doors. "Give me mine. Go do whatever you want," is what they are saying. "You're an all right guy if you scratch my back. I don't care what you do. Just keep giving me what I want."

Do you know that Clinton's approval rating jumped to 68% after his State of the Union address? More than 70% approve of the way he is handling the economy. Nearly 75% say his presidency has been a success, not a failure. Seventy-five percent—three-quarters of the Americans polled—say that he has been a successful president. In one poll 54% said it was at least probably true that Clinton had an affair with Monica Lewinsky, but 60% also said that they approve of his performance as president.

These were several different polls, so you can see that the numbers are fairly consistent. Mr. Armstrong used to say that when there is 51% of people doing evil, that is when the bottom is going to drop out. Where are we now? Sixty percent? Seventy percent? Seventy-four percent? That is scary. This double-mindedness of the American people is scary too.

Please turn to James 1. I like the book of James. It is one of my favorites. There are all kinds of pithy little sayings in here, but if you keep them in mind they will help you keep a straight track. This is one of them. James is talking about asking God for things that we need, but I just wanted to pull this out of context because he is talking about a man who has one opinion, and then he vacillates and goes to the other. He is doubting. He is a wave tossed on the sea. He does not know really what he wants. To cap this off, to kind of summarize it, he says:

James 1:8 [This kind of man] is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

You could also say, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." That would be a fair translation.

And now we have an entire country that is double-minded in all its ways. What does this say about the future stability of the United States of America? I do not think it says very good things. It does not bode well for our future.

Here is a 1987 quote from a man named Jim Kane, who is editor of the *Florida Voter*

Magazine. "Just a few years ago we used to think that the issue of leadership and character were intertwined. When Gary Hart ran for president character meant something. People used it as a yardstick as to the type of president he would be, and he quickly dropped out of the presidential race." As soon as Donna Rice appeared, he was gone. "But Clinton has clearly changed the rule."

I thought that was a strange way of putting it. He has not changed any rules. The rule is still there. We are just ignoring it. We do not care anymore. Kane attributes this to a combination of presidential charm. I think it would be better put "his charisma used to deceive," not presidential charm. Another here: "domestic tranquillity." I have here in my margin—"We're all fat and happy."

So now we have "presidential charm," which is really "charisma used to deceive," and "domestic tranquillity," meaning that "We're all fat and happy," and a new definition of what it takes to be a good president, which has resulted primarily because we have a more liberal popular culture where sexual peccadilloes are accepted, and that is just the difference between 1987 and 1998. How far down had we slid before 1987?

Listen to this. This is just amazing. Arthur Applebaum, who teaches "Public Ethics,"—not at any Podunk junior college, but at Harvard's *John F. Kennedy School of Government*, one of our leading universities in America—says, "The current polls show the American people don't care who the president sleeps with, and if that's true, that's quite sensible." He is *teaching* our best and our brightest. "The connection between moral character and leadership is quite tenuous, but witness-tampering and obstruction of justice are very important."

You see, legalities are more important than morality, and this man teaches ethics! We have been flushed down the toilet already. We are not swimming in the bad stuff, we have already been flushed. In a way, what this man is saying is that it is okay to break the seventh commandment, but it is not okay to break the ninth—and only in some circumstances.

I thought that was incredible. "It's quite sensible" to not care if your president sleeps with every intern that comes in, or even just one of them, but "witness-tampering" and "obstruction of justice,"—Oh! That is terrible! We ought to send them to the guillotine for that.

Joel Bells, the publisher of *World Magazine*, says Clinton is "the quintessential embodiment of all those very same values taught in our classrooms, in the media, and even from our pulpit. The essence of that world view is that no values are supernaturally

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stated or imposed. They're made up as you go along. Such is now the way of doing politics, governing the world's strongest nation, doing business, marrying, starting and then maintaining a family, divorcing, entertaining, creating art and music, playing sports, worshipping, and everything else we do in life."

Listen to his conclusion. "Almost certainly the American people themselves are no longer to be trusted." (By the way, *World Magazine* is a pretty good weekly news source. They have very good editorials, if nothing else.)

That is a sad indictment of our entire society, but it is one I think we have suspected, if not known for quite a long time. It shows how far this nation has gotten away from its biblical roots. When our leaders were reading the Bible and when they knew what was in there, when they tried to follow it, they also knew that leadership and character went together hand in hand. There is no way to avoid it in the Bible. It never says anything contrary to that.

Character and leadership are inseparable, but once we reject God's Word, there is no telling what sort of ideas we are going to come up with about leadership, about character, about anything.

So let us start looking into the biblical record on this. We will start in Exodus chapter 18. Moses was having a problem here because he had to spend all day judging the people. His father-in-law Jethro saw this and he said, "Moses, these people are too many for you. You're spending all your day doing this and getting nothing else done, so I'm going to give you some advice about how to select people to help." So what we are doing here is selecting leaders for Israel.

Exodus 18:13-16 And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?" And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws."

This was before the Ten Commandments, before the Old Covenant was given, and he is already teaching them God's laws and His statutes—just for those of you who do not believe that the law was before Sinai.

Exodus 18:17-21 So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you. [He says, This is godly advice.] Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men [He talks about their abilities. But listen to the caveats here. Not only able men, but] such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens."

So he should not select any old person, anybody to be a leader to judge the people of Israel. And not only *able* men, but those who *feared God* first of all—those who were men of truth, and hated covetousness. He is describing men of character. Those are the sorts of men who should be judges over Israel—men of honor and integrity who could make sensible and right decisions for the good of the community, or for the good of the tribe, or for the good of the whole nation, depending on what level they were set to judge.

Let us look at an opposite situation in I Kings 12. This is the time of the breakup of Israel under Rehoboam, and Jeroboam had an opportunity to start all over as far as the government was concerned, and especially unfortunately, as far as the religion was concerned. Listen to what Jeroboam did.

I Kings 12:20 Now it came to pass when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had come back [from Egypt], they sent for him and called him to the congregation, and made him king over all Israel. There was none who followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.

I Kings 12:25-27 Then Jeroboam built Shechem [his capitol] in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Penuel [across from the Jordan]. And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah."

He was scared for his skin here, because there was still the religion of Israel that was holding the people together, so he had to think of some way in order to separate them so they wouldn't go back to David's house.

I Kings 12:28-30 Therefore the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. ["Oh! That's such a long journey. Why don't just worship these calves here?"] Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. [Well once you start a religion you have got to have people to man your religion.] Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan.

It is kind of funny. It is ironic. He set one up in Dan, and that was a way, long way, away from most of Israel. So the reason he gave was "You don't want to go way down to Jerusalem. It's a long journey." And then he goes and puts one way far in Dan. That is just kind of an aside there. I always thought that was kind of ironic.

I Kings 12:31 He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.

They were not qualified for the job of priest. I think the King James has it best. They translate this "that he made priests from the **lowest** of the people." That is a much better translation. The word means *termination, the end, the extremity*. It means *the outskirts, the ones that were on the fringe of society*. So it probably should be translated as "lowest." He took any old guy to fill the job of priest, because he needed those positions filled quickly so that the people would not go back to Jerusalem. Character did not matter one bit. If they were an able body and wanted the job, he put them in there.

Now at the very least, if that is not correct, what it means is that he filled those positions politically rather than through merit or qualifications in any way. If any thing, they were political appointments of sons and brothers and uncles of his chief supporters. Whether they were religious or pious, or teachers or whatever, it did not matter. The Catholic Church did this all through its history, especially in the Middle Ages when second, third, and fourth sons often went into the priesthood because they knew they would not inherit the manor, the castle, the land. So they did the next best thing and went into the

priesthood.

The same thing was happening here in ancient Israel. It was this system that led Israel into further sin and rebellion against God. It was this system that led Israel into the society that God condemns in Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, and many other books of the Old Testament. It was this system that led Israel into becoming a nation that God sent to war, captivity, and exile for their apostasy and lawlessness, because their moral teachers, their leaders, were unqualified for the job. They were the lowest of the people. They had no character to match what they were teaching.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy 17. God gives a section here of rules that He wanted the kings that were to come to follow. "Principles Governing Kings" my New King James says here.

Deuteronomy 17:14-15 "When you come to the land which the LOORD your God is giving you, and possess it, and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LOORD your God chooses."

God reserved for Himself the right to have first dibs here and choose the one He wanted.

Deuteronomy 17:15-16 "One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may **not** set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother, but he shall not multiply horses for himself [This means he is not to become a military chieftain. That is not supposed to be the chief aim of his reign.], nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses [What He is saying here is that you are not to make military alliances with foreign nations.], for the LOORD has said to you, "You shall not return that way again." [That is what I just pulled you out of.], neither shall he multiply wives for himself."

You might think this means sex sins, but it does not. It means foreign political alliances, because that is how they did it back then. They would send a king a wife from another nation in order to cement an alliance between two nations. So God is telling him—"Look. You're not supposed to make **political** alliances **or** military alliances," which by the way George Washington said in the very beginning that *this* nation should not do. It was not long thereafter that we got rid of the *Washington* principle.

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Deuteronomy 17:17 "Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away."

These political alliances could also turn to religious alliances as well, because these foreign wives would bring in their foreign gods and turn the king's heart away to foreign gods, and this is exactly what happened with Solomon.

Deuteronomy 17:17 "Nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself."

He is not supposed to be a covetous man, one who is there only to get rich.

Deuteronomy 17:18-20 "Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel."

What kind of ruler does God want leading His people Israel? Well, what you have here is God's qualification of a man who has *sterling* character. He is to be well-versed in the law, as the law teaches us all these ways that we can have good character. It defines it.

God gave four reasons why he should be doing this. First, He says "so he will learn to fear God." The chief reason why God wanted the king of Israel to do these things, especially to read the law and to have it in his heart, was so that he, the king, would have a relationship with God like David did. *Learn to fear the Lord.*

Secondly, He says that he would be humble, meaning that he would have a right attitude, that he would not set himself up as better than the people, because he himself was subject to God who is the real King.

Thirdly, God told him that He wanted him to do this so that he would walk the straight and narrow, meaning that he would obey God, not only for his own good, but as an example to the people.

The fourth reason was in a way a selfish one for the king, and that was so that he would have an enduring throne, that it would last for generation after generation. But you know, this has another side affect—a good one, that if there is a dynasty that is made up of good-quality kings, it produces stability in the nation, and that is what God wanted for His people. He wanted them to be led by a family, a dynasty of kings that would show the people the right way to go, as His representative.

Now the implication is that if these are missing, his reign will be marred by scandal, intrigue, and sin, and eventually his dynasty will fall. What effect will that have on the people? If you read the books of Kings and Chronicles, you will see that some of the wicked kings destroyed Israel, and later destroyed Judah.

Let us look at one of these in II Chronicles 33. We a're going to look at probably *the* worst king of all. His name was Manasseh, son of Hezekiah. Of all people Manasseh had the longest reign of any king of Judah. He reigned 55 years, and the people of Judah had to endure Manasseh's reign. What is so interesting about this is that Manasseh repented, and maybe that is why God allowed the rest of his reign to go on. That is found in verses 10 through 17.

We are not going to read that part. I want you to see that by the time we get to verse 9 here, you will see a direct correlation between the character of the leader and the morality of the people.

II Chronicles 33:1-9 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. But he did evil in the sight of the LOORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LOORD had cast out before the children of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshipped all the host of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the LOORD, of which the LOORD had said, In Jerusalem shall My name be forever. [Can you imagine that? Right in the temple of God he put a pagan altar.] And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LOORD. [He built these not only in the sanctuary, but out in the courts he put all these idols.] Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft; and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LOORD, to provoke Him to anger. He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of

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Israel, I will put My name forever; and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers—only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses." [So he mentions it again just how much it stunk in God's eyes, that there was a pagan idol in His own house. Now look at verse 9.] So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.

There is a direct correlation for you. Manasseh **seduced** the entire nation of a couple million people to do evil. It was his own crooked, corrupt, perverted leadership that dragged the entire nation down. This word *seduced* means *made to go astray; made to wander; made to err; made to stagger and reel*. This nation of Judah in just a few years went from Hezekiah's great Passover where all the people came into Jerusalem and celebrated the return of God's way, to Manasseh's sacrificing his own sons in Gehenna, to Molech. How quickly a people can be corrupted when their leaders show them the way.

Let us go to Proverbs, chapter 16. Solomon weighs in on this. It is too bad he did not take his own advice.

Proverbs 16:12 It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established by righteousness.

Of course it is an abomination when *anyone* commits wickedness. That goes without saying. Why does God single out the king? Well, it is obvious, because the king's example reaches so many more people. It reaches so much farther than the common man's wickedness. Now when you and I sin, in the majority of times it may affect yourself and your family, and a few other people. But when a king sins, when the President sins, when a Prime Minister sins, possibly millions of people are affected by it. Millions of people become involved in the sin, either as an observer or as a participant.

The whole world, at least a few billion people who keep their eyes on the TVs and their ears to the radios, have been affected by Bill Clinton's inability to control his sexual urges. Have you thought of it that way? All the world has become involved in this man's sin. How many children have been rudely awakened to sexual misconduct in all its perverted forms we hear coming out of the White House?

The link between character and leadership is not tenuous at all. It is strong and critical to society's well-being. They say that a business is the length and shadow of one man. What about a nation and the man who stands atop it? It is not long before the people observing this man's conduct begin to copy it, if they are not doing it already.

Let us go to II Samuel 11. I am not going to read the sordid tale of David and Bathsheba. We all know it. We know what they did. They committed adultery and then tried to cover it up with the murder of Uriah. David placed him on the front lines of the battle where he would surely be killed by the people of Ammon. Sometimes I think when we are dwelling on David's sin or repentance we forget to think about the people it affected. I am not talking about David or Bathsheba. I am talking about all those others who later became involved. Let us start in verse 27. I just want to pick up the last line here.

II Samuel 11:27 But the thing that David had done displeased the LOORD.

I think that that is a terrible translation. It says in the margin, "The thing that David had done was **evil** in the eyes of the LOORD." Call it a spade. It was an *awful* thing that he had done—adultery, then murder.

II Samuel 12:1-9 Then the LOORD [in response] sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, 'As the LOORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.' Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LOORD God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul." [I expected better than this, David.] I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! [I was going to give you anything you asked, David, and this is how

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you repay Me.] Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword. [Notice he names that first. That was the worst thing.] You have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon."

He names it twice. The adultery was just the way that it came out, that Uriah had to die, according to David.

II Samuel 12:10-15 "Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor [David's own son, as it turned out], and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun. [Jesus later paraphrased this, and said "Everything you say will be shouted from the housetops."] Then David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. [That is all he could probably croak out.] And Nathan said to David, The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. [He was still giving to him. He gave him forgiveness.] However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die." Then Nathan departed to his house.

Now this ropes in another person, an innocent child. He had done nothing to deserve that, but his death became the penalty for David and Bathsheba's sin. But it did not end there either. Nathan specifically prophesies Absalom's rebellion. Do you know how many people died in Absalom's rebellion? Twenty thousand men! You can find that in chapter 18, verse 7. Twenty thousand men died as a result of David's murder of Uriah and his adultery with Bathsheba.

What about Amnon and Tamar, a few chapters later? War, rebellion, and scandal in the house of David. He lost a son and a daughter because of his sin, because he was not a man of moral character when he did that, and he was the leader of all Israel and he was going to pay the price. I would not doubt that Adonijah's rebellion was also included in this, and he lost another son. See what an abomination it is for a king to commit wickedness? A throne is established by righteousness, not by wickedness.

Just for a minute let us just suppose, let us speculate that Clinton's hawkish plans

against Iraq are aroused to divert attention from his sex scandal. A modern David and Bathsheba, if you will. What if it is? I am not saying it is, but what if it is? How many people will it touch! How many American lives will be lost in a conflict with Iraq? How many Iraqi lives will be lost in conflict with America? How many widows and orphans will it make? How much damage and destruction of property will it cost? What about the blow to American prestige and integrity? How would you put a cost on that? What about the long-term consequences to the environment, to the economy of the nations involved?

What if Saddam Hussein decided, in a moment of insanity, to let loose a few of his biological and chemical weapons at the Israelies? How many of *them* would die? What if the Israelites retaliated, bringing other Arab nations into the conflict? What if all the dominoes fell and world war erupted? How many millions, or billions, would die as a result of one man trying to hide a sex sin? Now you might say, "You're taking this too far." Maybe I am, but it could happen. I have heard commentators on the radio say that one wrong move and we have World War Three! Russia's President Boris Yeltsin said exactly that as a warning to America. "You might be starting World War Three!" What if it was all started to cover his own sin? Do you see why it is an abomination for a leader to do evil?

Let us go to Acts 6. We have been in the Old Testament, now let us bring it into the New. The same principle God brought forward into the "Israel of God," into the very church of God.

Acts 6:1-2 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables."

We cannot do all this physical work, because more spiritual matters are necessary to be taken care of. We need to take care of them. Listen to what they came up with here.

Acts 6:3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."

"Men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." They wanted men of great character who could provide this physical service of serving these widows. It was a position of leadership, and they needed to have men in there of good character. This

was not a popularity contest. It was not because Stephen and Nicanor, Philip and all the rest were good looking men, and they were good to the cameras. It was because they were full of wisdom, and they were full of the Holy Spirit, and they were men of good reputation and could handle the work.

Let us go to I Timothy 3. Paul put this in the scriptures as some instruction to Timothy.

I Timothy 3:1-13 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop [or an elder, an overseer], he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, soberminded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice [meaning not one just newly converted], lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony [a good reputation] among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be proved [tested]; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise their wives [It is not just the men who are going to fill these positions, but their wives also.] must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

That is some pretty high marks the deacons and elders must attain, and dare say, most of us do not. We would like to. There are several of these that touch upon the situation with President Clinton and Mrs. Clinton. He would be automatically disqualified from any position in the church no matter how able he was to do these jobs. In fact, ability takes backseat to character everytime. I do not care how good you are at setting up the chairs, or whatever a deacon must do. If you are not of good character, you are unqualified for the job. I do not care how good a speaker you may be, or be able to write articles or whatever—as an elder, if your character is not of a sterling quality, you are unqualified for the job. Why?

Because of the quality of the material that he must handle before God and before the

people. He is a teacher of morality, and thus he must himself be moral; else he is a hypocrite. Is that not what Jesus castigated the Pharisees for—placing heavy burdens on the people, and then getting out of them through loopholes for themselves? What would you think of a car mechanic who would not work on his own car because he would be afraid that he would break something?

What would you think of an accountant who went elsewhere to have his taxes done? Would you use him? What would you think about a banker who stashed all his money in the bank down the street? A minister must practice what he *preaches*, or he condemns himself as a hypocrite. He is a teacher of morality. He himself must be moral.

Let us go to Titus. This is repeated.

Titus 1:5-9 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you. If a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination, for a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

And I dare say not only those who contradict, but even those who believe. He must be able to show that he is not only preaching these things, but doing them as well.

Let us go back to Romans chapter 2. This is the section of scripture that "Practice what you preach" should be the title.

Romans 2:17-24 Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, and instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles

because of you," as it is written.

Just a few verses later Paul tells these Roman brethren that *they* are the spiritual Jews. *We* are the spiritual Jews. You, who have been taught the law, do you break it? Do you tell your children, "Don't lie," and then you lie? You are blaspheming God's name among the people of this world. **Character matters**, even to those of us who are not leaders, because we will be leaders. That is what we are being trained for. That is our goal, and if we are not doing this, we are failing in our calling.

Philippians 2:19-22 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.

Now all I wanted there was the fact that in the *New King James Version* it used the word *character*. It might be somewhat ironic to think of it, but up to now we have not used one with the word *character* in it. The reason is, the *King James Version* never uses the word once, and the *New King James* uses it only three times in two verses, and that is really ironic because that is what the entire Bible is about. The entire plan of God is about developing godly character. Yet in our English versions the word hardly appears. Maybe that is why the world's Christian churches pay so little attention to it. They cannot see the forest for the trees.

The Greek of the New Testament does however have a word that expresses the idea of character. It is the word *dokime*, and its root meaning conveys the idea of testing or proving something, especially used in the smelting of metals. You finally come to a point where you want to test something, whether it is solid gold, or test a piece of iron work to make sure that it will not crack and break apart, and that is the original idea of this testing and proving something to make sure it is authentic and genuine, that it is a quality piece.

In a figurative context, *dokime* means *proven*, *tested*, or *proved*, or either the word *attested*, something that has gone through a process of testing and has come out the other end with a "Grade A" label. So here in Philippians 2 it means *proven worth*. They know Timothy's *proven* worth, his *attested* quality, or his *demonstrated* character. He has been through the fire and has come out solid gold.

Let us look at its opposite in Romans 1, because sometimes when we look at the word's opposite, we have a better idea of what the original word means.

Romans 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.

The word that I am look at here is *debased*. It is *ahdokime*, or *a-dokime*; *ahdokimos*, actually. The "a" at the beginning of it makes it a negative. So what is "un-dokimos" or what is negative *dokimos* is this word *debased*. It could also be translated *reprobate*, or *degenerate*, or *depraved*. So *dokimos* means *proven quality*, or *tested character*, and its antonym is *depravity*, or *baseness*. We have been called out of the depravity it says here, out of this state of rejection into a process of testing and trial designed to prove the worth of our character.

I Corinthians 3:11-15 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Paul goes on to say whoever defiles the temple of God's Holy Spirit, which we are, will be destroyed.

What I wanted from this is that some people take this passage to mean that any old character will do, and God will save us. But that is not what it means at all. All six of these materials represent good character, not bad character. All six of them represent good character. They are all efforts of building on the foundation of Jesus Christ, but some do better than others, do they not? Some people have more talent. Some people have more ability. Some people get the bit in their teeth and they take off and they do what God wants them to do, and so God will save even those who build with straw. Maybe that is the best they could do.

In the parable of the talents Christ condemns the third man because he did **nothing** with his gift. He told him—"Look. Had you just put it in the bank and had gotten some

interest, I wouldn't have been upset. But you did nothing, and you're going to where there is going to be weeping and gnashing of teeth." So God wants us to put effort into this process of building character, to sincerely try to build on that foundation, to build the best house, the best structure that we can.

Two simultaneous ideas are running through these types of character—gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble. One thing is their value. The other is their endurance. Gold, silver, and precious stones are very valuable and they are fairly enduring. Fire will melt silver and gold, but precious stones like a diamond just seem to be all the more beautiful under pressure and great heat. They endure it and they just sparkle like anything. God wants us all to be like diamonds, but he knows that most of us will be somewhere in between that and nothing. So He takes that into account.

But verses 16 and 17 say those who do defile their character, who return to the debased and reprobate mind, He will destroy them, because that not only fails to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ, it rejects and spits on Christ's work for them. He brought them to the point through His death and calling where they can build character, and when you stop doing that and go the other way and reject it, you are telling Him—"I don't care that Christ died for me. I don't care that He gave me the opportunity to be one of His brethren." Character matters. It is the whole ballgame.

I want to go to another scripture here in I Corinthians 11. Passover season is approaching.

I Corinthians 11:17-19 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must be factions among you, that those who are approved [dokime] may be recognized among you.

We might say, "For those who are of proven character may be made manifest among you, may be revealed among you." This verse is very apropos to our church today, is it not? "When you come together, there are divisions, and I believe it," he says. But this is for a purpose, to find out who has got character and who does not.

So why are there so many divisions and splits among the churches today? I think the answer is obvious. God is scrutinizing and separating those who have "proven character" from those who do not. God is separating the wheat from the tares. Just the other day in the office we speculated God is now in the process of separating the sheep

Character Matters by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

from the goats. So He is not only getting rid of Satan's plants in the church, but He is also getting rid those of His own who have rebelled, who have failed to grow in righteous character.

This is "crunch time" brethren. Final exam time. God wants to know whom He is going to protect, and whom He will cast back into the fire; whom He will put in His pocket, and whom He will burn in the fire. So our mission is found in I Peter 1.

I Peter 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead [This was the foundation that was laid for us. He's called us to this by His mercy, and this is what we are called to.] to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled.

This sounds like I Corinthians 3, does not it, talking about those who have defiled the temple of the Holy Spirit? What our inheritance is, is undefiled.

I Peter 1:4-7 To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness [dokimos—the proven character] of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

This is our mission. We have been called to fill the spiritual process of character building so that we can qualify to inherit the undefiled reward waiting for us in the resurrection. Our trials and tests are now a part of that process, and what they are doing is proving and improving our character—the quality of our faith—so that it may be found honorable, praiseworthy, and glorious when Christ returns to give us our reward.

Now I hope we can see that character matters.