

## PRINCIPLES THAT BUILD CHARACTER

Firm Foundation Chapter 10

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"Character" is used to refer to the notable attributes or features that make up an individual. Jesus was a man with outstanding character. Godly character can be developed in two ways. First, character can be developed by submitting oneself to the leading of the Holy Spirit and His Word in our interactions with relationships and life in general. Second, "Christian character is formed in the furnace of pressure, conflict, and trials," and properly responding while in them.

A "principle" is a rule or code of conduct, according to Webster's dictionary. The Bible contains many principles by which character can be developed. We are exhorted to hear and do these principles from the Bible in order to have good character and to be able to stand strong when problems come upon us (**Luke 6:47-48**).

If a person lusts in his heart, the Bible says he is guilty of adultery, or fornication (**Matt. 5:28**). Why? **James 1:13-15** says that when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin and then death. How many people who have committed adultery or fornication have first lusted for the other person? Only those people who have first had lust in their heart toward another person will commit a sexual sin with them. **Principle: If you don't lust in your heart, you won't commit a sexual sin.**

We are to be very careful about the words that we speak since we will be held accountable for them on the Day of Judgment. **By our words we will be justified or condemned (Matt. 12:36-37)**. Words are a by-product of what is actually in our heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (**Matt. 12:34-35**). If you put good thoughts into your heart by reading the Bible or by some other means, then good words will come out of our mouths'. On the other hand, if we put bad thoughts in our heart, then bad words will come out of our mouths'. **Principle: Only allow good thoughts into your heart so that only good words will come out of your mouth.**

When the Bible says to "turn the other cheek" if someone slaps us (**Matt. 5:39**), it means that we should not take revenge on one who **personally persecutes** us. When these Scriptures were written, a slap on the cheek represented the highest form of insult. It was not meant to physically harm the other person. Many misunderstand this verse and take it to mean that we should not defend ourselves if someone attacks or hits us. If a person persecutes you for righteousness sake (non-physically), then you should "rejoice and be glad, for the reward is kept for you in heaven" (**Matt. 5:10-12**). **Principle: Love your enemies and pray for them, especially when they insult you.**

During prayer, praise, or worship with God, we may sense that we are not being as effective as we ought to be. One reason could be that we have unforgiveness toward a brother/sister or he/she might have something against us which is causing our thoughts to be preoccupied. **Matt. 5:23-24** says that we ought to "go and make peace with our brother, and then offer our gift to God." **Principle: Enter God's presence free of offenses with others in order to enjoy Him.**

We must beware of practicing our righteousness before men **to be noticed by them (Matt. 6:1)**. Many people do good things out of the motive of having others notice and praise them for it (verbally or silently). It is not wrong to have others notice our good works as long as that is not what is motivating us to do the good works. **Principle: Not only do the actions need to be right, but the motives must be proper also.**

We must forgive others, otherwise God will not forgive us (**Matt. 6:14-15**). God has done so much for us already; Who are we to not forgive someone for a minor offense? **Principle: Forgive others.**

**Luke 6:29-30,34-35** explains what our attitude should be toward giving to others. We must give to him who asks and expect nothing in return. However, it is also true that we need to be good stewards of the gifts that God gives to us so we must not give our possessions to irresponsible people. We must be led by the Spirit as to when to give. **Principle: Have a giving, generous attitude, and do not be greedy.**

Jesus said, "**He who is faithful in a very little is faithful in very much**" (**Luke 16:10**). On the other hand, if a person is unfaithful in small matters, he will probably be unfaithful in a larger matter. **Principle: Be faithful in small matters, and you will be ready for larger responsibilities.**

God desires for us to be humble, rather than exalting ourselves. **The greatest people in God's kingdom are servants** (**Matt. 20:26-27**). Servants are not just people who do practical things for people, but he is a person who uses the gifts and talents that he has for the benefit of another (**1 Pet. 4:10**). A Bible Teacher can be a servant by "serving" the Word to people. During Jesus' ministry, many people thought they were great by the number of people who served them. **Principle: Serve with what you have and you will be great in God's kingdom.**

**The greatest sign of love is to lay our lives' down for our friends** (**John 15:13**). To lay our life down means to go out of our way in helping them with their needs. On the other hand, we need to be good stewards of our time and accomplish the goals God has set for us as individuals. **Principle: Have a giving attitude toward others in all matters of life.**

In conclusion, we need to be led by the Holy Spirit and His Word in order for character to be developed in our lives'. We need to understand the principles in the Bible and see that they are to be followed **as the Spirit leads** and not as a law would dictate. For each principle there may be exceptions. This is why many illustrations in the Bible that describe principles are not followed as laws, but by the leading of the Spirit according to the situation. However, **principles in the Bible need to be rooted and grounded in our hearts so that character can be formed.**

## THE FORMING OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER (hand-out)

Many people backslide and don't continue to follow the Lord because they don't understand that Christian character is formed in the furnace of pressure, conflict, and trial. A lot of times, when the pressures come on, people say, "I thought the Christian life was supposed to be the abundant life!"

It's God's desire to bring many sons into the image of Jesus, manifesting His glory. God is not so much concerned about your happiness, and He's not always asking you, "Are you happy today?" Many parents ask, "Are you happy? Did you have a nice time? Did you have fun?" If you're asked that every day of your life, you begin to think that is the purpose, that is the goal; I've got to have fun. If I can't say yes then this day wasn't any good. Somehow I missed whatever I was supposed to be finding. A lot of us have that idea of life. God is not so concerned about our happiness as He is about "Is the character of Jesus being formed in your life today?" Happiness, prosperity, the good life and having your needs met, is not the goal of the Gospel. But we think they are so many times, they are only added blessings of the Gospel.

When life is over, when you stand before the throne of God and give an account for your life, whether you had wealth, poverty, success or failure, happiness or sorrow, a hard life or an easy one, will amount to nothing. When you stand before God, the most important thing you can take with you is the inward working of Holiness (II Cor. 7:1, I Pet. 1:15-16), because without it, no man shall see God. When you stand before God, He won't ask you if you enjoyed your life or if you had a good time, but "Did you do My will? And did you finish the work that I gave you to do?" He will ask you to give a stewardship, and account of everything that He's placed in your charge, and He's not going to ask you if you had fun doing it.

So where do you get your life from? Life is not so much made up of sorrows or blessings that come to us, rather it is made up of what we get from them. For example, if a man has been tried by poverty and a lack of things he needed, how did the poverty affect him? If the trial left him nobler, truer and a better person, if that lack caused him to reach out to God and realize that man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of God's mouth, then poverty has become riches to him. If that poverty causes him to reach up to God and realize that his life didn't consist in the abundance of possessions that he had, but the delight and joy of His heart was to know God and to love Him, then that poverty has brought him to a place of abundance. All the money in the world could not afford the land flowing with milk and honey, that poverty gave him. His failure brought him true success. But if wealth comes to you and makes you arrogant, proud, vain, unloving, uncompassionate, unkind and if it has made you the watchdog of the money bag, then riches has become poverty to you. Your riches has made you a failure and has robbed you of your soul.

Solomon, observing this truth said, "Folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places. I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land." This is not preaching the gospel of poverty because God **wants** us to be prosperous, to do His work, we need money.

God took the Israelites through the wilderness of testing, causing them to suffer lack, be hungry, be thirsty, that lack of all things. He did this to see what was in their hearts and to cause them to know that when He brought them to the land of milk and honey, it was **God** who had blessed them. He tried them to bless them in the end. This purpose for Israel was to cause them to know that God was their source and to love God more than the blessings of God (Deut. 8:2-18). But what the Israelites did was to murmur, complain and look to the things and the abundance of possessions as their life, so they never learned their lesson and died in the wilderness.

So when trials come into our life, we have to see that God is trying to form Christian character

in our lives (II Cor. 4:17-18). As we remember this, whenever we get into a pressure situation, as we overcome each time, we'll rise up higher. The pressures last year don't phase us today because we've worked through them. The only source of strength when under pressure is not to look around to see how you can get rid of it, but to look up for strength from God to overcome it. Then you'll rise up higher in your spirit and He'll enlarge you to do more things. As you're faithful in a few things, God will make you ruler over many. As you're a good steward, you'll receive not less, but more things to do and God will give you the ability to do it.

Webster's 1828 dictionary defines character as the mark made by cutting or enlarging stone, metal, or other material. It is a mark or figure made by stamping or impression. To impress means to make a mark on anything by **pressure**.

So character by its very definition, includes a lot of pressure. Pressure has to be placed on there to make the mark that God's trying to make.

So Christian character is molded in the furnace of affliction. The most precious stone in the world is made through pressure. A diamond is made out of a piece of coal placed under tremendous pressure for years and years and years until finally it becomes a diamond. All the impurities are pressed out of it. The same is true with us when we come to the Lord and He begins to squeeze us and apply pressure and all the impurities start to rise to the top. The Bible says, "The Lord who you seek will suddenly come to His temple and He'll be like a refiner's fire." John says there's one who will baptize in the Holy Spirit and with fire. God will thoroughly purge His floor. He'll burn up the shaft with unquenchable fire, and the more you go through that purifying work of God, the more you'll show forth the light of his glory, the more you'll be like a diamond reflecting the light of the Son and less like that lump of coal.

**Christian character is formed in the furnace of pressure, conflict, and trials.** Unfortunately, many Christians don't understand this principal and try to escape. These are the people who lived by faith, Hebrews 11:32-35. So we see, faith is not without conflict or trial. Out of their weakness, they became mighty with God's power. The challenges that faced them, **forced** them to reach up to God and to receive His power and strength. So we always have that choice when we get into pressure situations. We can panic and get upset with other people around us or we can reach up to God and ask for His strength and the faith to fulfill those responsibilities.

The reason for God's testing of man is to see what's in his heart. That's why there are periods of heavy testing before God gives a man responsibility. By the way men **react** through trials, God determines faithfulness. It is required of a steward that he be found faithful. Trials come to us as a prophet, to prepare us for God's greater blessing. Defeat prepares for the victory. It's the dark clouds that bring the rain.