

**Christianity and Truth:** Christianity claims to give a true account of facts – to say what the real universe is like. That claim is supported by a chain of historical and experiential evidence. Like other statements, the Christian account may be true or false. If confirmed to be true, then every honest person should want to believe the Christian account. If confirmed to be false, then no honest person should want to believe it. Does available evidence indicate Christianity to be true? My answer is yes!

**Scripture and Reality:** There is one reality statement in Scripture which particularly helps in understanding the behavior of people and what happens to them in life. This proposition about reality is given in the form of a command. It is an absolute command, applying to all people, in all places, for all time and eternity.

Conforming to this command is a necessary condition for living life that pleases God. Disobedience to the command results ultimately in the irretrievable loss of everything – security, health, rationality, happiness, civility, civilization. The command deals with ultimate good, the final basis for all things.

The command is found in Exodus 20:3, *“You shall have no other gods before me.”* This command is nonnegotiable in every aspect. It applies to all people. It is not altered by anything we or anyone else can do or think. There is no first principle but God. Nothing is before God! No one is before God! That is the essence of reality. Ignoring this reality is perilous.

Think of Eve’s temptation. God made her in His image. The tempter’s promise was the lie that she could become more like God by eating fruit forbidden by God. She disobeyed God and ate the fruit causing an incredible disaster! The disaster was a direct consequence of her choosing “becoming more like God,” as being more important than obedience to God. Her decision, and Adam’s agreement with it, placed “the possibility of becoming more like God” as of higher importance than obedience to God. That decision brought about a disaster which has negatively affected every human who ever lived, including Adam and Eve. The evil effects of that decision are visible today. With the best of intentions, placing anything or anyone before God is a trail to doom.

Gravity can be a nuisance. Can you choose to ignore gravity? Sure, but the difficulty is how do you get gravity to ignore you? Likewise, you can choose to ignore God and His commands, but how do you get God to ignore you?

**Idolatry:** Putting someone or something before or in place of God is idolatry. There are many forms of idolatry, both physical and mental. Worship of physical idols has been a widespread reality for humans in all ages. Idols of the mind are even more pervasive. In ancient Greece there were some physical idols, but statues of deities were relatively few compared to idols of the mind. In the Roman Empire, idol worship, emperor worship, and idols of the mind were all widespread.

In our own time idols of the mind are everywhere. Many people place ideologies before God. An ideology is a set of ideas organized as a “point of view.” Everyone is considered to have a right to their “point of view.” We constantly hear things like “You have no right to say I’m wrong.” What we don’t hear are questions about whether what is being claimed is true or false. God says test every spirit.

Ideas about what is true in life have become so diverse that it is common for people to be convinced absolute truth doesn’t exist. The point, they say, is, “Who is to say who is right?” Truth is claimed to be relative to circumstances. Truth for you may not be truth for me. My truth today may be different than my truth tomorrow. I’m convinced that kind of thinking is both false and does not amuse God.

Scripture says stark reality is that there must be no one or anything before God. That statement is absolute truth. Ignoring God, by placing something or someone before Him, is like ignoring gravity. You can ignore gravity, you can ignore God, but how do you get gravity or God to ignore you?

**Claims Religions Make:** Every religion claims that faithful embrace and practice of its tenets will be beneficial to living a good life. Every secular ideology makes the same claim.

In addition to the claim of being beneficial to life, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam claim to be factual truth. Comparing their assertions of truth reveals so many conflicting statements that only one of the three can be true, although all three may be false. Other religions seem to focus on the beneficial effects they bring to faithful adherents and make no claim to be factually true.

**Conflict Between Christian and Materialist Truth Claims:** Christianity makes statements about the universe different from those held by others. As an example, compare Materialist and Christian views on essential points. Christians believe people are eternal, created by God and designed to find their true and lasting happiness only by being united to God. They believe people have departed from the

one true path defined by God, and the only way back to the true path is through obedient faith in Christ.

Materialists believe people are accidental results of blind, random outworking of matter. They believe people evolved from a single living cell which somehow came about from non-living matter. Through millions of years that single cell replicated and mutated into today's humans. Materialists believe, that during those millions of years, there was a steady increase in capabilities of the developing creatures. They believe humans live some 70-80 years and then cease to exist. Happiness is attainable by good social services and political organizations. They believe all else (like abortion, euthanasia, lifestyle choices, education, etc.) is to be judged "good or bad" simply in so far as it helps or hinders continued evolutionary development and the kind of happiness produced by good social services and political organizations.

Christians and Materialists clearly can't both be right. The one which is wrong will act in ways that fail to match reality. With the best of intentions, following the wrong path will lead to destruction.

Though there are fundamental disagreements, Christians and Materialists actually agree on many things. Both approve good sanitation, excellent hospitals, and a healthy diet. But sooner or later, their beliefs will produce conflicts even in practical proposals and desired actions.

Each will desire different kinds of education with the aim of producing different results. Proposals which seem to "increase the happiness of the majority" will likely seem right to Materialists. But if Christians determine the proposals to be unjust or otherwise forbidden by the truth of Christian principles, they may well have to say no to such proposals.

The Materialist views nature, civilizations, nations, and organizations to be more important than individuals. Individuals live a brief few years and the materialist believes they then cease to exist. The other things endure much longer. Christians view individuals as most important in part because they will live eternally. All other things are temporal. Human individuals will endure. In comparison other things will quickly disappear.

Christians and Materialists differ significantly in their judgment of what is true. To live a life consistent with perceived truths, Christians and Materialists, while having many things in common, will desire significantly different results in key areas of life. Even when they agree on a desired result, there will often be a difference in

judgment about acceptable methods of pursuing the desired end result. Which is correct? How can we know? At mortal death, if the Christian is right, the soul of both the Christian and the non-Christian lives on. They will know whether or not God is real. If the materialist is right, nothing remains that is capable of knowing.

A.W. Tozer: *“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”*

### **Personality, Temperament, and Character**

**Christian View of Persons:** Christians believe there is a personal God, eternally existing as three Persons in one Being. Before anything was created, God existed and there was real love and real communication between the persons of the Trinity. God created everything else that exists. Humans were created in the image of God. Personality is thus intrinsic in their creation. God is personal and people are personal. Real love and truthful communication between people and between people and God was intended from the beginning.

Each person’s behavior is distinct from that of all other persons. Every person has a moral character which determines “what” they do. Every person has a temperament which determines “how” they do things.

**Personality:** Personality refers to enduring mental and behavioral traits. It is the totality of distinctive attributes of mind and behavior which make you – “you.” There are personality attributes associated with thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition. Though different attributes are distinguishable, personality is an integrated whole. Its various functions continuously interact.

Attributes of personality fall naturally into two broad categories. The first category is “temperament” which is moral neutral. The second category is “character” which is moral. It is useful to consider the two categories separately, but reality is, that to some extent, they do interact. Character and temperament together determine personality. Personality has both moral and morally neutral attributes.

**Temperament:** Temperament is defined by attributes which influence the *manner* in which people pursue goals. Temperament is morally neutral. It determines the preference for either “inward thinking and activity” (introversion) or for “outward expression of thoughts in activity,” (extraversion) the way information is acquired, and the way decisions are made.

Temperament is determined primarily by DNA. Preferences make themselves manifest over a period of years. Rapid increase in number of preferences happens in the first few years, and slowly after that. Temperament is relatively constant throughout adult life.

Temperament influences *how* a person thinks, speaks, and acts. Temperament functions much like a tool. Like a tool, it cannot of itself be good or evil. A person's character determines the purposes (good or bad) which are implemented through temperament preferences.

Temperament preferences are relatively sturdy. However, through sufficient training it is possible to override temperament preferences with adaptive behavior. Because adaptive behavior requires greater attention and energy than the underlying preferred behavior, adaptive behavior is typically used only when necessity demands. Intense training, as in military or similar training, can override temperament preferences with trained adaptive behavior. The greatest motivator for using adaptive behavior is probably love - love for a person, a nation, or a cause.

**Character**: In general, character is “**the essential essence which makes anyone or anything what it is.**” It is meaningfully to talk about the character of a person, of a relationship, of a country, of a neighborhood, of a school, of a company, of a book, of a wine, of a river, etc.

For people, character is the moral component of their personality. Unlike temperament, character is not inborn. It is acquired. It is the interactive total of purposeful traits, attributes, and abilities at any point in life. Throughout life, character traits can be added, changed, or lost. Character is grounded in the set of *moral principles* which determine the goals a person sets, and whether thoughts, words, and actions are morally good or bad.

Every Christian's *character* is being transformed into a likeness of Christ, but *temperament* remains essentially the same throughout life. As a person matures, they do gain in ability to use less-preferred temperament functions and attitudes. Likewise, as we mature in Christ, our character as expressed in thoughts, words, and deeds becomes more Christ-like.

**Christian Character**: Christian character is consistent with Christ's character. With maturity in Christ, Christian character grows increasingly righteous and holy. Fellowship with God is crucial in character development. Fallenness and enmity to

God cannot produce Christian character. Regeneration, belief through saving faith, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are predecessors to Christian character.

**Common Grace and Saving Grace:** Non-believers are often kind, benevolent, trustworthy, and exhibit good behavior in other ways. They may be friends whom you trust. It is God's gift of common grace which enables this to be true.

Through His common grace, God gives good gifts to the saved and the unsaved alike, including things like physical and mental health, the ability to invent useful things, and even the ability for virtuous living. God restrains people who want to be bad from being as bad as their fallen nature without restraint would allow them to be. If God were to remove His restraints, "give them over" to their fallen nature, the results, as Paul dramatically shows in Romans 1, would be dreadful.

Christian character is a gift of God's "saving grace." He bestows saving grace on whom He wills. No one can truthfully claim that in their own power they are "good" in a Christian sense. Christian character comes only with God's intervention, changing fallen nature into redeemed nature.

**The Role of The "Heart":** For every person, fallen or redeemed, character arises in the "innermost reality" from which thoughts, speech, decision, behavior, and relationships flow. Scripture refers to this innermost reality as "heart." The function of "heart" is a vital one. Scripture insists only a renewed heart can enable one to think, speak, and act consistent with God's character.

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV): *"Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it."* Matthew 12:34-35: Jesus said, *"You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup> The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil."*

Human character is determined by the state and content of the "heart." For character consistent with God's character, fallen hearts must be regenerated and made spiritually new. Scripture identifies the "heart" as our "mission control center" which dictates the "what" toward which temperament-controlled activities are directed.

Character establishes the activities to be pursued. It controls whether behavior is morally good or bad. Activities determined by character are implemented using temperament preferences. A person's true thoughts, words, and deeds reflect their character, that is, what a person genuinely is in their inner being. A nation's constitution states its values, reflecting its fundamental character.

Since character is observable only through the outward signs of speech and actions, it is possible to be deceived about a person's character. People can, and sometimes do, deliberately act and speak to deceive.

When the going is tough, good character will pay whatever price is necessary to act consistent with its undergirding principles. Think of Daniel. His behavior was consistent obedience to God no matter what threats or actual mistreatment he received. Being cast into the lions' den revealed but didn't change his character.

**Quotes about Character:** (1.) Horace Mann: *“Character is what God and the angels know about us; reputation is what men and women think of us.”*

(2.) Aristotle (more than 2300 years ago): *“Character is that which reveals moral purpose, exposing the class of things a man chooses or avoids.”*

(3.) Heraclitus (even earlier than Aristotle): *“Character is destiny.”*

(4.) A famous Greek saying: *“The key to good character is to be able to know yourself, control yourself, and give of yourself.”*

(5.) Theodore Roosevelt: *“Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations alike.”*

**Distinguishing Between Temperament and Character:** Here is an example to illustrate the distinction between character and temperament: Good character demands we help people in need. But the way we go about helping is grounded not in character but in temperament. One person may be inclined to do only things in which they can be involved on a direct hands-on basis. Another person may be most inclined to do things in which they can stay in the background unnoticed. These two people may have equally good character, do equally good things for the needy, but their different temperaments cause them to approach acts of mercy in such different ways that each may think the other is wrong.

**Bad Character is Present in All Levels of Society:** The truth of the depravity of man is proven by headlines every day. Men and women of all varieties do things that stagger the imagination, so astounding that you can only say “what on earth were they thinking?” People in powerful positions and of great wealth are no exception. Bad character is not rare.

**Implications of Character:** Our character affects everyone and everything we come in contact with. Good character is not inborn but must be developed. Thought, speech, emotions, and actions must be trained and disciplined. Understanding “right and wrong” is vital. Everyone has a God-given conscience which causes them to feel

good when doing what they know is right and to feel bad when they do what they know to be wrong. We are to constantly feed our conscience with the truth of God's Word. Conscience is most effective when we strive for a moral nature compatible with God's moral nature.

**Little Things Matter:** Step-by-step little things lead to greater consequences. A slight but constant drift from the "straight and narrow" is all that is needed to ultimately yield utter wickedness. Good character is the work of a lifetime requiring constant attention. All Christians are destined to be Christ-like in character. For believers, the Holy Spirit makes that transformation possible. Believer's constant cooperation is required. Walk in step with the Spirit!

**What's Next?** More discussion on Christian character.