

Temperament, Character, and Spiritual Gifts

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1. **Introduction:** Principles of good conduct have been sought, studied, and practiced for thousands of years. Aristotle listed 12 virtues he considered necessary for good conduct. God's common grace makes it possible for all people to practice such virtues. Christians are certainly expected to practice them. Such virtues are necessary for Christian character but insufficient.

What factor essential to Christian character is missing from secular "good character?" Secular "good character" knows nothing of God's requirement to be "holy as He is holy." Non-Christians of "good character" can and do follow the principles of good conduct. They may seek to do "good," may be benevolent to those in need, kind, polite, etc. However, as fallen people lacking God's gift of regeneration and a new spiritual "heart," they fail to recognize and honor God as their creator and sustainer, fail to seek to obey Him, and are not members of God's eternal family (Christ's mystic body).

2. **General Comments:** Scripture says the spiritual "heart" (with its contents) is the source of the moral nature of thoughts, speech, decisions, and actions. A fallen moral nature cannot of itself turn to God. A radical change to a righteous nature is necessary to enable acquiring Christian character. Fallen, unregenerate persons may have "good" character in Aristotle's sense but not in the Christian sense. Unregenerate people may do things beneficial for others, be obedient to secular law, etc. But "good decisions" do not make character Christian. Only "righteous decisions." Righteous means decisions consistent with God's character motivated by a desire to be obedient to God. God's gift of common grace enables unregenerate people to make decisions to do "good." Unregenerate motivations to do "good" may be for altruistic reasons or for personal advantage.

One truth about all people is that everyone yearns for "purpose" in life. All desire life to be meaningful and significant. Does such a universal purpose exist for human life? Practicing Aristotle's 12 virtues is a purposeful move in the right direction but – insufficient. Only Scripture's answer truly satisfies man's need.

God created people for a specific purpose. What is that purpose? The answer to WSC Q1 gives a summary answer: "*What is the chief end of man?*" "Chief end" means "overarching purpose." Answer: "*Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.*" What does that mean? How can a person glorify God and enjoy Him forever? Man was Created in the image of God, but man's creation image was distorted by the fall into sin. Important privileges were associated with the original created nature of man. Adam and Eve were holy and could live in God's presence and directly communicate with Him. But their holiness was lost in the Fall. Scripture tells us that only the "holy" can see God, so it is something we all need. God's

intervention is the only way the fallen can regain the lost creation perfection and its privileges. God intervenes in the lives of those whom He chooses.

God's intervention enables fallen people to become new creatures with the ability (through the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit) to **glorify God by becoming like Christ in character**, thereby regaining their image of God, and making it possible to be with and enjoy God forever. Heb. 1:3a: ***“He (Christ) is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.”*** Christ is the perfect image of God. Everyone “in Christ” is destined to be like Him. Paul says all who are justified will be glorified (become like Christ, the perfect image of God).

Glorifying God and enjoying Him forever, is the “overarching purpose” for which God designed all human life. The only “fix” for the negative consequences of the “Fall” is for God to intervene. God's redeeming grace can and does enable people to become holy, enabling them to live in His presence. How are the redeemed to “glorify God and enjoy Him forever?”

3. **The Bible, Our Infallible Rule for Faith and Life**: WSC Q 2 is directed at this issue: ***“What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?”*** Answer: ***“The Word of God, which is contained in the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.”*** The whole Bible is to be our information source showing us how to live life as God intends for us to live.

Since we cannot grasp the whole Bible at once, we need an organizing principle. WSC Q 3 points the way. ***“What do the Scriptures principally teach?”*** That is, what are the dominant themes of Scripture? Answer: ***“The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.”*** We are to approach the Bible seeking to understand what we are to believe concerning God and what duty He requires of us.

4. **The Glory of God**: The word glory, in general, means things like splendor, honor, power, intensity, wealth, profoundness, and dignity of position. God's glory includes all these ideas and more. Two categories must be considered: (1.) God's intrinsic glory, the glory He has within Himself. (2.) God's extrinsic or ascribed glory.

God's intrinsic glory is the totality of who He is, including His preeminence in all things, sovereign power, self-existence, truth, grace, wisdom, love, and awesome brightness. Nothing can be added to or subtracted from God's intrinsic glory. It is permanent, complete, infinite, and inseparable from His being. God's intrinsic glory is manifested in many ways. The most complete manifestation is through our Lord Jesus Christ. Heb 1:3 says Christ is, ***“the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of his nature.”*** He came filled with truth and grace. His earthly life showed us facets of God's glory – holiness in His sinless life, mercy and justice in His atoning death, and sovereign power in His resurrection.

God's ascribed or extrinsic glory includes His moral creatures properly acknowledging His intrinsic glory. We only know of two categories of moral creatures. Spiritual creatures we call angels and physical-spiritual creatures we call humans.

5. **Glorifying God:** We glorify God by properly acknowledging who He is, what He has done, is doing, and will do. How can we properly acknowledge God's intrinsic glory, thereby ascribing glory extrinsically to Him? One obvious and important way to acknowledge God's intrinsic glory is to praise and worship Him, but there is much more.

In John 17:4, Jesus says to the Father, ***"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do."*** By analogy we recognize that obedience in doing the duty God requires of us glorifies God. Paul adds to this in 1Cor 10:31 saying, ***"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*** It seems whatever we do, all the ordinary things of life, can be done to God's glory! Disobedient things bring God no glory.

We learn from Scripture to glorify God by believing Him, confessing and repenting sin, gaining wisdom, practicing and defending His truth, being fruitful, walking cheerfully, loving and praising Him, loving and ministering to His people, reaching out to the as yet un-regenerated, and progressing in becoming like Christ. In general, we glorify God by doing His will and reflecting His attributes and holiness. We fail to bring glory to God when we disobey Him, by doing those things we should not do and not doing things we should do.

The most important way we glorify God is to obediently follow His leading as He makes us like Christ. We are to believe God and live as He intends us to live. In this, we glorify Him (honor His intrinsic glory) and reflect some of His glory in our life.

6. **Christian Character:** What is Christian Character and how is it acquired? **Christian character is being Christlike in thought, word, and deed.** How do we develop Christlike character? The first step is regeneration (God does this). Regenerated, converted, declared legally righteous by God (justification), and having the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are ready for our fallen character to be transformed into a character like Christ through obedience.
7. **Implications of Being "Born Again with a New Nature":** When we are "born again from above," God gives a new moral nature. What does that mean? When God gave us physical life through our parents, He caused a single cell to be formed containing a physical DNA pattern which determines every step of growth from the single cell to a mature adult. All required information to develop to maturity is in that cell. The process of growth is directed by DNA and requires things like nutrition, exercise, and time. By analogy, I think a similar thing happens when God gives new spiritual life in regeneration. As the physical and mental characteristics of the mature adult are latent in physical DNA, so are the characteristics of a

mature Christian latent in the spiritual DNA bestowed by God at spiritual rebirth. The spiritual DNA given at rebirth contains the pattern for the complete spiritual transformation from “babe in Christ” to “mature believer.”

In 2 Pt. 1:3-7 Peter conveys this idea: *“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.”*

Notice that God “has granted” all needed for life and godliness. Step-by-step we are to make manifest (add) the elements of Christian character that are latent in the spiritual DNA we receive in regeneration. Knowledge of He who called us (Christ) provides the nutrition and spiritual exercise for the process of growth from “babe” to “mature believer.”

8. **Our Sin Nature Remains but Our Ability to Control It is Increased:** As a “new creature,” our “new nature” is inclined toward God and righteousness, but the “sin nature,” inherited from Adam and Eve through our parents, remains. Our sin nature is inclined away from God and toward unrighteousness. Our new nature does not cause sinful desires to cease. However, the Bible teaches that our new nature brings new power to refuse to gratify sinful desires. We cannot eliminate the sin nature’s evil desires, but we can recognize them for what they are and choose not to gratify them – to not act out the evil desires (temptations). **1 Cor. 10:13:** *“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”* As we are sanctified, our sin nature gradually is suppressed to be completely eliminated at glorification.

Redemption is prerequisite to developing Christian Character. God supplies everything necessary. At times, evil desires encourage doing things God has forbidden. Other times, evil desires discourage doing things God tells us to do. In either case, our duty is to refuse to make manifest the wrong behavior indicated by the unrighteous desires. Don’t do what God forbids. Be obedient to God’s rules. God, Himself, will change our innermost being to make our character ultimately like Christ. We are to cooperate by walking in step with the Spirit and not acting in a manner that will grieve or quench Him. God’s grace enables developing Christian character. God’s command demands it.