

## Temperament, Character, and Spiritual Gifts

### Lesson 12 Dr. Lamar Allen

1. **Aristotle:** *“Character is that which reveals moral purpose, exposing the class of things a man chooses or avoids.”* Moral means concerned with the principles of right and wrong. God’s moral character as revealed in Scripture is the ultimate basis for Christian character.

Character is determined by ethics. Ethics is determined by values. Good character and ethics depend on formation of right values. In forming good values, a trustworthy guide is essential. Trust arises from confidence in the truthfulness of that which is trusted. Truth is thus an indispensable force underlying ethics and character. Without truth there is no trust.

The true Word of God, as contained in the Bible, is the basis for Christian character. Based on the principles found in Scripture, I discover what I should choose to think about, speak about, and what actions I should pursue. Likewise, I discover what I should avoid. Values are formed as a person lives. Values develop either through conscious control or just happen.

2. **Ethics, Values, Virtues, and Vices:** A person’s ethics consists of moral principles which govern thoughts, speech, behavior, and conduct of activities. Moral principles, whether good or bad, establish “values.” The Christian’s vital issue is “what values are acceptable to God?”

The underlying meaning of “value” is a goal (that which is desired to be true but may not be achieved). Living out moral values is accomplished through positive attributes called “virtues” or negative attributes called “vices.” “Virtues” are the living out of good values. “Vices” are the living out of bad values. In general a vice is the opposite of some virtue. For example: Honesty is a moral virtue, dishonesty is a vice. Compassion is a moral virtue, lack of compassion is a vice. Generosity is a virtue, stinginess is a vice.

The same word can name both a value and a virtue. For example: **Honesty** as a value means people **should be honest**. Honesty as a virtue means a person **is honest**. Everyone can and might consider honesty to be a valid “value” but not all will possess the “virtue” of honesty.

3. **Goal and Source of Christian Ethics:** The goal of Christian ethics is to live to the glory of God. What does life lived to God’s glory look like? Three things stand out:

- Personal character and actions that are Christ-like. *“Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son”* (Rm. 8:29).
- Abundant “fruit” which is beneficial to the people of God and others. *“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples”* (Jn. 15:8).
- Routine obedient behavior flowing from a committed personal relationship with God. *“But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed”* (Rm. 6:17). In summary, Christians are called to have character, results, and behavior that glorify God.

4. **Character That Glorifies God:** God is more concerned with the kind of character we have and our growth in holiness (becoming the kind of person He wants us to be) than He is with our feeling happy, or comfortable, satisfied, wealthy, or powerful.

Values and ethics together with the consistency with which we adhere to them determine our moral character. We should strive to obediently add moral virtues and eliminate moral vices. Earlier we considered lists of moral virtues. From such lists, It is easy to see that a life of virtue is not easy to attain or sustain. It looks impossible without the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Christians are accountable to God for their character. Mortal life is preparation for the eternal life to come whether or not we recognize it as such. Jesus says our preparation for eternal life should include laying up treasures in heaven. That requires godly character.

Our calling, as the redeemed of God, is to become Christlike. Ultimately, when Christians stand before Christ in heaven, they will be glorified and made like Christ. In mortal life we are to live in reverence and respect for God in accordance with His moral law. We are to willingly give up selfish agendas, or plans to live a life of pleasure and convenience. Possessions will not go with us into eternal life, but holiness and Christ-likeness will. God's love for us is shown in regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. All these steps are vital to developing Christlike character to prepare us for eternity.

True Christian character involves sacrifice. Christians are not to be simply "good" people., They are to be servant-minded! Jesus put it very plainly. Luke 17:10: ***"So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"*** The world in which we live emphasizes things like power, wealth, popularity, fame, and possessions. God's concern is with the kind of person we are becoming. "More like Jesus" is to be our watchword.

5. **Two Examples of People with Godly Character:** There are many examples of godly character in the Bible. Two important examples are found in Philippians 2:19-30: ***"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. <sup>20</sup> For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. <sup>21</sup> For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. <sup>23</sup> I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, <sup>24</sup> and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.***

***<sup>25</sup> I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, <sup>26</sup> for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. <sup>27</sup> Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. <sup>28</sup> I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. <sup>29</sup> So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, <sup>30</sup> for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me"***

In this passage Paul praises Timothy and Epaphroditus as men of great value to him. Verses 19-24 are about Timothy. Verses 25-30 are about Epaphroditus. In verse 22 the ESV has Paul praising Timothy's "proven worth." The NKJV says "proven character." Both are correct, but the NKJV captures the reason Timothy has proven his worth to Paul. It is Timothy's character that enables his worth. Likewise, verse 29 encourages the Philippian church to receive

Epaphroditus in the Lord with all joy. Paul says the church should honor such men who are willing to die to further the work of Christ. Clearly both are men of godly character.

Paul says Timothy is unusual among men in that he will be genuinely concerned for the Philippians welfare (do we have genuine concern for others?). Paul's observation is many, if not most people, are more interested in their own interests than those of Christ, but that is not Timothy's character. High praise indeed for Timothy's compassion and commitment to Christ.

Paul is pleased with Timothy's "proven character." Timothy is a person of honor and integrity whom you can depend on in difficult times. He consistently lives up to what he says he will do. God is pleased with the Timothy's of this world.

Both Timothy and Epaphroditus worked with Paul and provided support Paul was pleased to have. Even the most gifted among us need help. God intends us to work with one another. We are stronger and more effective working as a team. Epaphroditus shows real courage and commitment in his willingness to risk his life to assist Paul working for Christ.

6. **Character Flaws:** Tim Keller uses a question to make an interesting point about character in his book **The Reason for God**. He asks if Christianity is the truth, why are so many non-Christians living seemingly more moral lives than many Christians? The moral failings of some Christian leaders are well-known. In-fighting and party spirit seem as common in church communities as in other voluntary organizations. Non-Christians ask, if Christianity is true, "Shouldn't Christians on the whole be much better people than everyone else?" Keller points out that this assumption is based on misunderstanding what Christianity teaches about itself. Two major points.

(1.) Christianity, through the doctrine of **common grace**, teaches that all people receive from God gifts that encourage moral acts of goodness and justice. Scripture says, ***"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change"*** (James 1:17). "This means that no matter who performs it, every act of goodness, wisdom, justice, and beauty is empowered by God. God gives out good gifts of wisdom, talent, beauty, and skill 'graciously' – that is, in a completely unmerited way." He distributes common grace gifts to all of humanity, independent of religious conviction, race, gender, or any other attribute. He gives these gifts to enrich, brighten and preserve human life.

(2.) The church is a healing place for imperfect sinners not a place of safety for perfect saints. ***"And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'"*** Every Christian's character is so damaged and flawed that through their own power and merit they are unable to establish a right relationship with God. The God-Man, Jesus Christ lived a perfect life under God's law, died to pay the penalty due under the law for sin, and was resurrected. In this way He made it possible for believing sinners to be restored to right relationship with God by faith through grace. This means the church as a whole will always be filled with recovering sinners, immature and broken people who must grow emotionally, morally, and spiritually to become "like Christ."

Many people who are drawn by the grace of God into the church will be broken and morally flawed to a greater extent than many people outside the church. As C.S. Lewis points out, unless you know the detailed history of people including their physical, psychological, and mental status, you cannot reasonably compare the moral character of a new Christian to that of a non-Christian. If the new Christian experienced more past trauma and brokenness than the non-Christian, you should not be surprised that the new Christian seems not to have as good moral character as the non-Christian. But, the moral development of the new Christian will be in the right direction. The new Christian is on a path to become like Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and assured of ultimate glorification (Rm. 8:28-30). Character flaws in Christians will be corrected.

7. **Conclusion:** Developing godly character is an essential factor in becoming Christlike. Many godly attributes are directly addressed in Scripture such as the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Other godly traits mentioned in Scripture include compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, forgiveness; focusing thoughts on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy; helping the poor, the weak, and the unfortunate; doing unto others as we would have others do to us; persevering in pursuit of righteousness, godliness, faith, and love; honor our word, having integrity, keeping promises even when it hurts; be temperate in all things, dignified, sensible, living honestly, speaking the truth, setting an example in speech, conduct, and purity; quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry; hospitable and generous, willing to share with others; live by it is more blessed to give than to receive. There are other good, useful attributes such as creativity, flexibility, alertness, focus, decisiveness, etc. which are not absolutely essential to godly character.

No Christian is perfect during their mortal life. All make mistakes, all sin, none are completely Christlike. Nonetheless Christians are being sanctified and will be glorified and like Christ ultimately.

Outward actions, which display evidence of godly character, arise in our innermost being. It is there in our “heart” that godly character does and must develop. Through our redeemed relationship with God, godly character develops as the benefits of that relationship are applied by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Christians are to cooperate with the Holy Spirit, striving to do things corresponding with His gracious work within us, and avoiding doing, thinking, or saying things that grieve or quench Him.

An individual Christian’s responsibilities include working to understand what godly character looks like, making decisions and taking actions consistent with their understanding of godly character. We are to consistently pray God will illuminate our understanding, enable our actions, and direct our path.

Christian responsibility for developing godly character includes making right moral decisions over and over again until right moral decisions become habitual. Actual character transformation to godliness comes only through the Holy Spirit’s transforming power. With His help we step-by-step put off the old nature and put on the new nature. The actions

necessary actions for “putting off” and “putting on” do not come naturally. They require deliberate focused decisions and persistence. Breaking bad habits and replacing them with good ones is never easy. The process of “building forms” helps to develop good habits including what we think about, what we say, and what we do.

Keep in mind the quote by President Regan in lesson 10. The character which controls our actions today is the result of uncountable choices made in the past. Becoming Christlike in character requires both getting rid of inappropriate character traits and adding good character traits. New Christians typically (and rightfully) focus on eliminating bad traits. But the bad must be replaced by the good, the traits of righteousness and holiness. In Romans, Paul tells us transformation from where we are to where we are going proceeds through the renewing of our mind. With the Holy Spirit’s help, taking off the sinful and putting on the godly moves us toward the goal of Christlike character. That goal will be fully reached when we are glorified.