

Character (2)

Lesson 2

VERSES TO READ:

2 Timothy 2:2

And the things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER

Whereas our words represent our person, our character is our very person. A person's usefulness, the things which can be entrusted to him, the responsibilities he can bear, and the things he is able to accomplish altogether depend on his character. A carpenter determines the use of a piece of wood based on its quality. Laziness ruins one's usefulness. Accordingly, character has very much to do with the Lord's service. Consider those persons in the Bible whom God used. They were used by God because they possessed a character that was fit for His use. The destiny of our usefulness to the Lord hinges on our character. Whether we are useful before God depends upon the suitability of our human character.

THE CONSTITUTION OF CHARACTER

Our character is constituted of our inborn nature plus our acquired habits. Whereas disposition is inborn, character is cultivated. A

person's character is thirty percent nature and seventy percent habit. For this reason, a young person must pay full attention to character building. In a young person, more inborn nature than acquired habit is manifested. As he grows older, he displays less of his nature and more of his habits. Consequently, acquired habits are more important than inborn nature. In considering the matter of character, we must give heed to our daily life, which is able to mold our character. The suitability of our character to God determines our usefulness to God.

THE NECESSITY OF CHARACTER BUILDING FOR THE LORD'S SERVICE

In the Lord's service there is the need not only of the knowledge of the Lord but also of a character that upholds the Lord. The Bible requires that the elders be grave. Is this a matter of character or of life? It is too clear that this is a matter of character and not of life. One person may be clearly saved but still frivolous. Another may oppose the Lord Jesus yet be serious in his character. If these two people were to stand up and speak to a crowd, which one would gain the confidence of the people? It would be the opposer. Why? Because he is sober. We can immediately realize from this illustration that our usefulness in the Lord's hand is based on our character and that it takes our character to minister life.

Admittedly, we are short in life, but I feel strongly that there is a severe, even desperate,

lack in our character. Young brothers, in the dormitory... To build up your character, you must keep the rules governing which bed you should sleep in, where you should hang your clothes, and where you should store your suitcase. You must abide by the rules of the school. You may think that these are small matters, but if you are not exercised in these things in your daily life, you will be absolutely useless to God. Believe me, this kind of person can never do a work.

Brothers, in serving the Lord character is no less important than life. Without a proper character, you have no way to do a work. Life is your material and character is your technique. A carpenter cannot make anything without wood; but this does not mean that he can make something as long as there is wood. The saw may be useful in the hand of another but not in yours. The ax is useful to others, but in your hand it only ruins the wood. You do not have a particular character simply because you have never practiced. The character within you enables you to be disciplined in your service to the Lord.

THE DIFFERENCE AND RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHARACTER AND LIFE

Let me further illustrate the difference between character and life. Consider a sister who loves to gossip, talks a great deal, and is always unhappy with others. Such a condition indicates a shortage in life, not in character.

Another sister rarely speaks or becomes angry, because both her tongue and her flesh have received the dealing of the cross. However, she is sloppy in her living and inconveniences those around her. When others murmur, she is not angry and does not blame them. This sister may be excellent in life, but she lacks one thing—a proper character. This example shows the difference between the aspect of life and the aspect of character.

Nevertheless, we must realize that life and character are not independent of each other. Life can influence our character, and on many occasions it can even replace our character. But character cannot affect life or substitute for life. Often the spirituality of a spiritual person becomes his character and replaces his character. This was the case with the Lord Jesus. The character of the Lord Jesus was almost an expression of His life. We may say that the aspects of the Lord's character, as recorded in Mark, were the expression of His life. In other words, much of His life was also His character.

However, we cannot say that character is life, for even an unbeliever has his character. For example, the sobriety of a certain person is part of his character, not his life. The spirituality of a spiritual person, which issues from his abiding in the Lord, can make him sober. The character of a Christian should not merely be character. We should not only display outward sobriety, thoroughness, and consideration for others, with no life inwardly. We must have

both life and character. In fact, we should go one step further: our life and our character should be blended as one. Although character does not equal life, life can become a great part of our character. I am polite because I live in Christ; I am also sober because I live in Christ. I can be careful because Christ is my carefulness, and I can be regulated because Christ is my regulation. Life and character have become one in me.

In the beginning the person who loves the Lord often seeks after life. Gradually he realizes that it is his character which limits his dispensing of the Lord to others. Then he changes the way he conducts himself; that is, he begins to develop his character. At first this kind of character building is mostly man-made. As he grows in the Lord and the life in him becomes strengthened, his character is slowly brought into life. Eventually, the life within him is mingled with his outward character. At this point his outward sobriety comes from his inward life. His outward politeness and orderliness are also issues of the life within him. His character is constituted predominantly with the inward element of life. This was true of our Lord when He was on the earth, and it must have been true of Paul. Today, our need before the Lord is to pay attention to the fact that in serving the Lord, without life we have nothing to minister to others. Likewise, if we only have life but lack the proper character, we have no way to minister. In the Lord's service there is the need for life as well as the proper character.

Therefore, we must thoroughly build up our character and our human conduct.

Group Discussion:

1. Many saints and young people think it is enough to have "life". They can do whatever they want because they have "life", in life". They think to have a proper character, to follow rules and regulations is not needed because we have "life". What is the difference/relationship between life and character in the matter of being useful to the Lord?
2. Can you give some examples that life and proper character are both needed to be useful to the Lord?