

GH Called to Lead: Character

March 2021

1.3

(This is a plate of many small bites. Don't be overwhelmed, but after the first page, find an image or narrative to read and reflect on—one per day or 2 or 3 per week.)

Main point: Character is gospel fruit.

The Reality: A Lack of Gospel character can undo even the strongest apparent work for Jesus. Matthew 7.15-23 speaks first to the integrated nature of faith and fruit—healthy faith produces good fruit (7.17-18)--,but second to the possibility of doing Christian ministry *in Jesus name* (prophesy, cast our demons, do mighty works) and yet have Jesus say, “I never knew you.” (7.22-23). That’s a scary reality that should drive us back to the core gospel realities (CTL: February) that if they are true mean that Jesus does *know* us and we *know* him.

Do you know leaders who had seemingly thriving ministries or organizations but who then had a character crisis? I can think of two right away. A megachurch that was basically dissolved to nothing in a month or so due to a proud, aggressive leadership style. Another preacher, whose sermons I thought were some of the best in the country, was stripped of his ordination for issues related to anger. Neither of these happened over night, but when they broke, it was sudden.

***It is too possible, too easy for a lack of character to undermine what God would do in us and through us.

What is Character? Gospel Character is a new life of convictions, values, and actions that flow out of new life with Jesus.¹ In the context of Leading, it is character, along the way and in the end, that produces more of the results that God desires than our personal giftedness.

What Does Character Enable? Character is critical to leading yourself and others because sooner or later there will be opposition. This can come from inside yourself (pastors referenced above), from the church, and/or from outside the church. It is only the Holy Spirit working in you His character that will enable you to endure to the end, pursue what is best in God’s eyes, and take the harder but right path.

Character is essential not just because of the possibility of going astray but the reality that we will face temptations, disillusionment, and opposition—from the world, the flesh and the devil. We will likely find ourselves one day questioning if it is acceptable to compromise, wanting to quit, and facing opposition attacking our thoughts, abilities, and emotions. But Christ-formed gospel character is how we continue on the path to which God has called us—in holiness, in

¹ There are attempts in education, etc. to replicate these (e.g. “character-based education”) but the means are utter different since there is no spiritual transformation at work to produce them. Such attempts seem to use either pride or fear to accomplish such character creation. The gospel is so different; the gospel uses God’s grace at work in our new Christ-created natures that are set on a lifetime journey to be renewed into the image of Christ. (Col 3.10, Rom. 12.2, Rom. 8.29, 2 Cor. 3.18)

doing the right things, and in endurance. Conviction as to what is right (in God's eyes), dependence on God's personal love, hope in His strength are core aspects of this character.

A. The Scriptural Language and Images for Gospel Character:

1. Character is bore by God's work in Us for the Whole of our Lives: it is Fruit of New Life in Christ
 - a. The Divine work of the Gospel is to lead to godliness, and godliness is more than just actions but it is new and transformed *capacities, convictions, and capabilities* that show themselves in actions.
 - b. 2 Peter 1.3-11. 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, ⁴by 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. ⁵For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 - i. Note how the passage starts (v.3-4: "has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness," "promises," "partakers of the divine nature," "escaped corruption") and ends (v.10: "calling and election") with God's divine work. That is the source that produces the change and pursuit of character in the middle. But in the middle we are to "make every effort." God worked in us, so that we can work. His work is the big, essential work, but it has also enable the work he desires that we do. Then v.11, notice the looking forward to our future eternal state.
2. Gospel Character is spoken about with different metaphors [Remember "small bites;" pick one that intrigues you and read and reflect as to you as the Spirit to help you. Then tomorrow or the next day, pick another "small bite."]
 - a. Old vs New:
 - i. We are New in the Gospel and our lives should reflect that.
 - ii. 1 Peter 1.13-21. Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴As obedient children, **do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance**, ¹⁵but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." ¹⁷And if you call on him as

Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were **ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers**, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

b. New Birth

- i. 1 Peter 1:22. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been **born again**, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;
- ii. Born again, new birth: John 3:16, etc.

c. Seek things above (Heaven), not on earth

- i. Col 3:1–10. If then you have been raised with Christ, **seek the things that are above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²**Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.** ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and **have put on the new self**, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

d. Character as Living in the Light and not the Darkness

- i. Is 2:5. O house of Jacob, come, let us **walk in the light of the Lord.**
- ii. Jn 12:35–36. So Jesus said to them, "The **light** is among you for a little while longer. **Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you.** The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."

e. Character as Pleasing the Lord

- i. Col 1:9–14. And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, **fully pleasing to him**: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the

inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

- ii. 1 Th 4:1–8. Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and **to please God**, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.
- iii. Eph 5:8–11. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is **pleasing to the Lord**. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

f. Character: as Inheritance or Entrance to the Kingdom of God

i. Positively:

- 1. ¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:10-11

ii. Negatively: will not inherit the Kingdom of God

1. Spiritual new birth

- a. **John 3:5** ⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
- b. **1 Cor 15:50**: ⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

2. Washed of old character

- a. 1 Cor 6:9-10: ⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

- b. Gal 5.21: ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

B. Character seen in Biblical Characters

- a. Life of Joseph, Gen. 37-50
 - i. Character believes God is present even in terrible circumstances. 37.28, 39.1
 - ii. Character believes God can use me no matter my status or position. 39.2-6
 - iii. Character enables us to flee temptation rather than compromise. 39.6b-10
 - iv. Character enables me to serve even when I'm treated unjustly and my position is going down. 39.21-23
 - v. Character gives us endurance in the midst of disappointments. 40.23
 - vi. Character has great confidence in God and great humility that God has a role for me. 41.16-32
 - vii. Character looks to see events from God's big purpose and plan. 45.7-8
 - viii. Character knows what we must leave with God (judgement) and what we are to do (forgiveness and generosity). 50.19-21
- b. Zacchaeus, Lk 19.1-10
 - i. As a tax collector before following Jesus: financially corrupt and greedy
 - ii. After becoming a follower of Jesus: concerned for generous (give away money to the poor) and justice (return fourfold to those defrauded)
- c. Ezra and Nehemiah
 - i. Ezra: from our Series in Ezra, how have you seen his character on display?
 - ii. Nehemiah
 - 1. Hearing of how God's people are suffering in Jerusalem brings him to tears, fasting, and prayer: 1.4.
 - 2. Courage: 2.2-6
 - 3. Wise evaluation and then presenting vision: 2.12-18
 - 4. Wise protection of People: 4.9, 13-14, 17-18
 - 5. Stops oppression of the poor: 5.1-13
 - 6. In a complex situation of opposition, comprehensive wisdom and God's grace saves him: 6.12.
 - 7. Enduring opposition: 2.10, 2.19, 4.1-3, 4.7, 6.1f, 6.10, 13.4, 13.28-31
 - 8. Financial integrity and generosity: Neh. 5.14-19
 - 9. Turns to Prayer often: Neh 1.4-10, 2.4, 4.4-5 (imprecatory), 4.9 (response to opposition), 6.9, 14, 13.14, 9.2, 9.6-38, 13.14, 22, 13.29, 13.31b
 - 10. Leads the people to joyful worship to celebrate and dedicate the wall: 12.27ff
 - 11. Organizes the biblical details for worship: 10.28-39, 12.44-47
 - iii. Paul

1. 2 Cor 4.8-10, 16-18; 5.6-10; 6.3-13

C. Key elements of Character for today

- a. Bible's biggest character focus: money and sexual. The rejection of greed and sexual practice outside of heterosexual marriage.
- b. Courage and lack of cowardliness. Though it will look differently in different contexts, in an age of anxiety, we need courage.
- c. In the context of vocational work
 - i. Eph 6:5–9. Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. ⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

D. The Character qualifications for Elder and Deacon come from what All Christians are to Pursue

a. 1 Tim 3.1-13

- i. **3** The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.
- ii. ⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.
- iii. Titus 1.5-9. This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— ⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers⁵ and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

- iv. Titus 2.1-10. [Not elders but for all Christians]. But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. ² Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. ³ Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴ and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. ⁶ Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. ⁷ Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, ⁸ and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. ⁹ Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

How do we grow in Character?

1. Reflect and get a better grasp on the newness of life in Christ.
 - a. We tend to just think of life continuing on the same from day to day but when we come to Christ, it is an inflection point. Everything after is on new trajectory. We should remember that and cultivate the new direction of life with Jesus. Meditate on the verses above about newness in the Christian life.
 - b. Reflect on the other images above:
 - i. eyes towards heaven or towards earth
 - ii. live in light or darkness
 - iii. seek to please the Lord
2. What are my idols? What are the core areas that I struggle the most to realize the gospel character shown in the verses above?
 - a. Sermons on idol areas (approval, control, comfort, power):
<http://www.gracehillnc.org/adoption.html>
3. Meditate on the fruit of the Holy Spirit. What are the particular areas where gospel fruit is unbalanced in my life? What is lacking? Which elements are strong but which are weak in the Fruit of Holy Spirit. It is not "fruits" but "fruit." So I am only as strong as my weakest element in the list. Read over the whole passage (Gal. 6.16-26): Prayer, confession, requests for God to put to death what is fleshly in us and make alive the fruit of His Holy Spirit.
 - a. Gal 5.22-23: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control;
4. #1 and #2 above assume that you are already reading, studying, meditating on Scripture (January CTL) and that you are orienting yourself towards Christ and His grace in all of your life (February CTL).

Resources:

1. Harry Reeder, *3D Leadership*, whole book but chapter 3 speaks to character
2. Henry Cloud, *Integrity: character in business*
3. Gospel Eldership, by Robert Thune,
 - a. The whole book is helpful but, in this context, Chapter 3 about the primacy of Character and chapter 4 about the Triangle of Leadership (Character, Competence, Compatibility) are especially helpful.
4. Ross' Sermon on 1 Tim 3 and 1 Peter 5 from 2013: on the Calling and Qualifications for Leadership, including as an Elder. On CTL section on website.
5. Narrative Books:
 - a. *Unbroken*
 - b. *Wounded Tiger*