

Module 3: Growing as a Disciple

Cultivating Character to His Glory

To grow as a disciple, we have looked at the importance of growing in Spirit and in the Word so that we can lead a balanced spiritual life. Just as important is that we need to grow in character.

We read in *2 Peter 2: Confirming One's Calling and Election*: ³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And also ... Titus 1: ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. ¹⁶ They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

These Scriptures continue to be a reminder for us to bolster our understanding and to grasp His ways. Let us keep in mind that the Lord calls us to obedience, He calls us to keep His order, He calls us to worship Him as I Am and He calls us to seek Him daily to receive a fresh revelation of Him. If we seek Him, then He will go with us to prepare a favourable path. Of late,

How then do we reach such a place as a disciple in our walk on earth? Works is not the answer. True works should always be the outflow of our walk with God. How then? Simply through what extent we have allowed the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to change us to become more like Him. It is only when we love like Him, walk like Him and, like Jesus, have a true and living relationship with the Father that would cause our names to resound. It is when we do this that we will in our existence glorify Him. For this reason our eyes are not set on the temporary, but the eternity, yet it is in the temporary where we need to make a statement that will resound forever.

It is only our character that proves if we are truly children of God, not our works. No matter what works we do, if it is without the character of Jesus it could easily fool and deceive. Remember *1 Corinthians 13* which says: *2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.* Charity in this case speaks of love, which speaks of your character which must be like that of our Lord.

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Preaching to millions, evangelising, baptising or whatever form of work unto God can have the appearance of godliness yet it can also be without true power or anointing. Sons and daughters are truly known by their fruits.

1 Thessalonians 4: Living to Please God: 4 As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit. 9 Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, 11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Character is the key to making an eternal difference. For only through character, implying the way we behave, the way we react, our attitude and so forth serves as the key to what extent we have submitted and allowed God to change us.

In his epistles to Timothy, Paul alludes to the importance of character. Paul was writing these epistles late in his life, during his first and second imprisonment in Rome. Paul had thus by this time done a lot, seen a lot, experience many highs and lows, and now we like Timothy are in the privilege position of hearing from a man who reached a point of greater spiritual maturity.

And it is clear from the letters to Timothy that for Paul to walk in accordance to God's character, in His image, in His will in order to bear fruit of the Holy Spirit is of utter importance.

At the end 2011 the Lord placed it on my heart today we sit with a church without character. We have concentrated on doing things right according to our ways, and equipping people to minister, that we have neglected that just as important, if not more, is to build character and to grow in the image of the Lord. What good is it then if we can preach and teach until the heavens weep but we have no character and no integrity?

Character speaks of values, morals and ethics. It speaks of walking in the ways of God because we are being transformed in His image.

It seems today the Church wants the gifts and the ministry, but we are not willing to allow God to change us so that our character glorifies Him. To grant gifts and to awaken callings is

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easy for the Lord, but to build character speaks of a journey and it speaks of self-sacrifice, obedience, faithfulness and a deep submission.

Paul sees Timothy more like a son, and by all likelihood Timothy was a delegate to the apostle to keep the Church on track in Ephesus. So Paul was speaking to Timothy as spiritual father, a friend and a mentor. Paul therefore finds it important to keep urging his spiritual son to always seek goodness, godliness and to ultimately **grow** in the character of God.

Paul writes in *1 Timothy 4*: ¹² *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.* ¹³ *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.*

Paul often urges believers to follow his example and his conduct. He even mentions to Timothy when he writes in *2 Timothy 3*: ¹⁰ *You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance,* ¹¹ *persecutions, sufferings.* Again in his epistle to Timothy he urges the young believer to walk in God's character which is reflected in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity.

If we look at the Church today, are we truly setting an example of God's character and nature by our conduct, faith, speech, love and faith? Again, it is easy to appear godly and pious, but the condition of our character will manifest itself. Therefore Jesus spoke clearly on the fruits we carry, which is a referral to the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5.

Paul, during his second term of imprisonment, writes the following: *2 Timothy 3*: ²² *Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.* ²³ *Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.* ²⁴ *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.* ²⁵ *Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,* ²⁶ *and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

Again, Paul is placing strong emphasis on character, on godly conduct, on how to move in faith and love. How the Church needs to once again pay close attention to its character, because without it we become power hungry without a proper foundation.

Paul after all sounds warning to the lack of character at the end of days, and this warning is specifically directed at believers in the Church who are sowing discord and preaching deceit. *2 Timothy 3*: *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.* ² *People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,* ³ *without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good,* ⁴ *treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—* ⁵ *having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people. None better of this is the illustration of the temptation of Jesus in the desert.*

Paul also wrote his epistles to the churches in Ephesus and Colossae during his imprisonment in Rome. In Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 he makes strong argument on how to live as a believer, which alludes to one's character. His prayer to the church in Ephesus was as follows: *Ephesians 3*: ¹⁴ ***For this reason I kneel before the Father,*** ¹⁵ ***from***

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whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge —that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Paul's desire has always been for the believers to walk in the fullness of the Lord, and in the fullness of the Spirit, so that all believers are grounded in faith, love, and hope. And once we are grounded and rooted in the Lord, living by the Spirit and Truth, our character will be shaped and formed to reflect and glorify the Lord.

In his epistles to Timothy and to Titus, Paul also warns about false teachers, erroneous doctrines and false teachings. Considering Paul's last ditch attempt to preach on character and living a godly life, it remains clear that Paul was concerned that those who walk not in the character of the Lord are most likely not grounded in love and faith and thus will be susceptible to spiritual corruption.

What is also interesting is that when Paul writes to Timothy about the qualification of overseers/elders, along with deacon, he is not placing emphasis on what they can do but the kind of people they should be in character. *1 Timothy 3: 3 Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full^{al} respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. ⁸ In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.*

With Paul it was an urgent matter that the Church needed to be led by those of character and integrity, because they are the ones submitted to the Lord, manifesting the fruits of the Spirit and would thus be walking in God's Truth and Ways.

Again, this is why Jesus spoke about fruits. The only true sign of someone's willingness to submit and to be led by the Lord is by the evidence of his character, which is reflected in his conduct, speech, love and faith. Those without character have clearly not submitted in totality to the Lord, and will thus remain susceptible to the lures and temptations and deceptions of the world and the devil.

Indeed, the Scripture teaches a lot about our conduct:

1 John 2: ¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the

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world. ¹⁷ *The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.*

Ephesians 5: Amplified Bible (AMP): 5 Therefore be imitators of God [copy Him and follow His example], as well-beloved children [imitate their father]. 2 And walk in love, [esteeming and delighting in one another] as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a slain offering and sacrifice to God [for you, so that it became] a sweet fragrance. 3 But immorality (sexual vice) and all impurity [of lustful, rich, wasteful living] or greediness must not even be named among you, as is fitting and proper among saints (God's consecrated people). 4 Let there be no filthiness (obscenity, indecency) nor foolish and sinful (silly and corrupt) talk, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting or becoming; but instead voice your thankfulness [to God]. 5 For be sure of this: that no person practicing sexual vice or impurity in thought or in life, or one who is covetous [who has lustful desire for the property of others and is greedy for gain]—for he [in effect] is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one delude and deceive you with empty excuses and groundless arguments [for these sins], for through these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of rebellion and disobedience. 7 So do not associate or be sharers with them. 8 For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of Light [lead the lives of those native-born to the Light]. 9 For the fruit (the effect, the product) of the Light or the Spirit [consists] in every form of kindly goodness, uprightness of heart, and trueness of life. 10 And try to learn [in your experience] what is pleasing to the Lord [let your lives be constant proofs of what is most acceptable to Him]. 11 Take no part in and have no fellowship with the fruitless deeds and enterprises of darkness, but instead [let your lives be so in contrast as to] expose and reprove and convict them. 12 For it is a shame even to speak of or mention the things that [such people] practice in secret.

Character determines how much we have allowed for the Spirit to be God in our lives. In the desert God understood free will cannot be compromised and man's loyalty and obedience will not be brought through a display of power and brutal force. Man's obedience unto God has been brought by the shed blood of Jesus who chose to die on the cross as the Suffering Messiah so that we could be set free in righteousness.

The Lord wants strong character and strong faith. Jesus showed us how. He did miracles, but many times He wanted no one to know about it. He may have healed the sick, but Jesus' greatest purpose was the healing of the spirit and the soul. He reached out to the lost, the sick and the sinners because they had a different disease, namely rejection and that they were unloved and unwanted. Jesus restored love and acceptance unto them because of His character that was formed on his three-year journey. Jesus raised Lazarus unto the glory of God and displayed true power over death. Oh yes, the Lord still heals today divinely, but God seeks above all else the true healing of spirit and soul. Our greatest miracle is salvation. Love is God's greatest weapon on earth.

A man is truly tested by his character. We want those quick answers and we want God to show up in fire and fury, but God wants sons and daughters who have sought Him earnestly, who held unto Him in truth and faith during all seasons, who have chosen both the crown and

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the cross, who have chosen character above wonderful works, who have chosen to resist the temptations of the devil and rather obeyed the Lord.

Jesus chose twelve disciples of character. He chose not the rich, the powerful, the politicians or the even the religious. He chose mere men who were poor in Spirit, hungry for truth and righteousness.

It amazes me the backdrop to Jesus giving His Sermon on the Mount. Here was Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, having beaten the devil at his own game, having survived the desert for 40 days, to truly begin His ministry among the people. The people on the other hand were expecting a Messiah who would tell them to be strong and defeat the Romans. They expected encouragement and a sound Winston Churchill order to be brave, to be powerful, to be strong, never to give up and to keep on fighting. Jesus was faced with such a crowd at the beginning of His ministry. How easy it would have been for Jesus to stand on the Mount in a display of glory. He could have sealed the allegiance there and then. What Jesus told them must have astounded them.

He gave them a sermon exactly the opposite of what they wanted to hear! He told them to love their enemy; He told them to feel blessed when persecuted, to love, to be holy, to be meek, kind, gentle, pure of heart and poor in Spirit. Jesus risked losing a whole lot of supporters because He didn't put on a performance, didn't seek their approval on what he said or did, didn't seek to appease the religious authorities and neither was He there to destroy any earthly Kingdom. He stood on the Mount to advance the eternal Kingdom and laid the principals of His constitution that focuses on character and choosing both the crown and the cross.

Jesus took on the religious authorities, not Rome. He took that which corrupts character and obedience unto the Father unto the cross. His focus was not for glory on earth or fame or wealth. He was focused on the Father's will. What do we seek? Do we advance the Kingdom or do we advance ourselves in the failing kingdoms of this world? We need to abstain from evil, but not abstain from doing good. We must love and be charitable; to the extent we love our enemies. We must be pure, humble and true unto Lord. We must cast aside sadness; doubt and anger, for these speak not of faith. We must be true oaks of righteousness. We must seek modesty, simplicity, charity, faith and truth. Let us fear the Lord and also fear the work of evil, for it destroys the character of the virtuous.

As a stone that is tossed up into the sky will never reach heaven, so is a man without a virtuous character, for he will not touch the heavens. A virtuous character opens the door to the throne room, invited, to speak to the Master.

Let us be those who stand for truth yet we draw the sinners in so that they may the Father and His redemption by the Blood. Jesus was a friend of sinners, yet uncompromising in His virtue and holiness. The Church today repels the sinners and struggles in a mire of sin and ungodliness.

Where is the character? So, let us then be pure of heart, let us be meek, peacemakers, righteous and poor in Spirit, for then the lost, sick and the sinners will be attracted to us. Let us walk thus in true divine character, for the rewards are great in eternity, where our names will be spoken and what we do will indeed have an everlasting impact.