

“CHARACTER”

Romans 5:1-5

Reader's Digest has a feature "My Most Unforgettable Character." If you think a few moments, you can probably think of one or more persons that you would put into that category.

Since I retired, I have been trying to learn to write short stories. One of the most important skills to learn is how to create and describe characters that are so real the reader can see what they look like, hear what their voice sounds like, and develop opinions about the characters. The characters in a story have to be distinguishable one from another. They can't all seem to be cut out with the same cookie cutter. The great writer of short stories, Isaac Bashevis Singer said in an interview in the *New York Times Magazine* (November 26, 1978) "It seems the analysis of character is the highest human entertainment. And literature does it, unlike gossip, without mentioning real names."

How is our character related to characters in a short story or those people about whom we say either they are our most unforgettable character or others whom we may say "She/he is a real character!"

William James wrote to his wife, "I have often thought that the best way to define a man's character would be to seek out the particular mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks and says, 'This is the real me!'"

From ancient Egypt comes this advice from a king to his son, "Instill the love of you into all the world, for a good character is what is remembered." *The Teaching for Merikare, paragraph 24, circa 2100BC*

1.) And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:3-5 NKJV)

William James spoke of defining a man's character, Isaac Singer spoke of the analysis of character, and the Egyptian king urged his son to have a good character. Character, in and of itself, has no quality of good or bad. It is what we put into it. All checkbooks look the same. One may contain \$10,000, the other one may be overdrawn. The word which is used for character in the verse above is used elsewhere in the New Testament for the character of Satan and the character of God.

"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, *[or character]*for he is a liar and the father of it. (John 8:44 NKJV)

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, (Hebrews 6:17 RSV)

“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. The words which precede these verses are the reason that tribulation produces in us a character that hopes in the glory of God. Tribulation could just as easily produce bitterness, hatred, violence, despair, even suicide.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2 NKJV)

It is because we have been made righteous through faith in Jesus, and now have peace with God, that we can access God's help at His throne of grace, and we then rejoice in hope of the glory of God. When tribulation comes, as it inevitably will, we rejoice in tribulations, knowing that they are making us stronger and more like Christ.

2.) Building Character

When we speak of building character, what do we mean and how do we do it? Every ideology tries to mold the character of its followers by beginning with the youth. The Nazis had their Hitler youth; the Communists had their Young Pioneers; Freemasonry has DeMolay.

Christian parents are to raise their children so that their characters are built on the design in Scriptures for godly men and women.

Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6 NKJV)

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

(Deuteronomy 6:5-7 NKJV)

Moses sets a pattern of believing parents, who themselves love God with all their heart, soul, and strength displaying the godly character they seek to form in their children by teaching them God's Word and speaking of its teachings throughout the day. When children are rebellious; their parents are frustrated when correction does not work.

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4 NKJV)

What if only one of the parents is a Christian? This was the case with Timothy. His mother, grandmother were Christians; his father pagan.

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15 NKJV) For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. (1 Corinthians 4:17 NKJV)

Not all children of Christians are brought up in this way. Too often the character of our children is molded by television and other children.

3.) Rebuilding Character As Adults

William James wrote about "the particular mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive." That describes the feelings of a person who has been "born again." Old things have passed away, all things are become new. One of the things that become new is our attitude to God's laws. Before we were saved, they were onerous restrictions. They restrained us from a lot of sins, but we resented them. After we become Christians, they become a guide to how we can please God whom now we love. We don't want to please the world anymore.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Romans 12:2 NKJV)

However, the habits we have formed, the attitudes we accepted, the sinful desires we satisfied for so long do not give up without a struggle.

To build a Christ-like character is strenuous work. As Paul confessed:

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:22-25 NKJV)

The building of character is a lifelong career for the Christian. We have tribulations and persecutions from outside ourselves and the old man struggling to pull us back to the ways of sinful self indulgence and rebellion against God. That struggle is helped by the Holy Spirit. It makes our character strong and our soul holy as God is holy.

