

How to Build Godly Character

The dictionary defines *character* as "moral excellence and firmness." The highest standard of character is set forth in Scripture and exemplified in Jesus Christ. All who are serious about following Christ are exhorted to attain moral excellence through a life of trusting God and resisting the evil influences that surround us and arise from within us.

But such character is not built overnight; it is developed through a *process* involving experience, hard work, and learning from past mistakes. The apostle Paul had this kind of character in mind when he admonished Timothy to "exercise yourself toward godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7, NKJV). Paul knew that Godly character comes only through resisting evil influences and impulses and focusing on the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Many of today's popular Evangelicals claim that all a person needs to do to be saved is "just believe." Some go so far as to say that if a person who has truly put His trust in Jesus reverts to his old sinful ways, he may lose some "rewards," but he will *never* lose his salvation. He will "go to heaven," they claim, *no matter what he does*.

But Scripture teaches that we will be finally saved only *if* we "continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Colossians 1:23, NKJV).

Building Godly character is not about "earning" salvation through works. We know that salvation is a free gift. However, we also know that a person can *lose* his salvation by what he does or does not do! That's where character building comes in. When we speak of "building Godly character," we are speaking of the process of growing ever closer to God and relying on Him to assist us in our efforts to resist and avoid those things that would cause us to stumble. We mean strengthening ourselves, with God's help, against the evil influences that would lead us back to a life of sin.

James urges us to "lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be *doers of the word*, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:21-22, NKJV).

That's the essence of building Godly character—and that's what this booklet is about.

Let's now consider the fundamental tenets of character development.

Honor God

The first tenet of righteous character is to honor God. At first blush this is obvious to Christians. Christians should naturally honor God. The real problem is that we may know

God exists, but we often do not honor Him as we should. Do we really put the First Commandment *first* in our lives?

Hebrews 12:28-29 states, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with *reverence and godly fear*: For our God is a consuming fire." Do we have the fear of God that we should have? Do we fear His condemnation on us? More importantly, do we revere and honor God?

In 1 Samuel 2, Hannah gives praise and honor to God in a song: "My heart rejoices in the LORD...There is none holy as the LORD... neither is there any rock like our God...let not arrogance come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed...The LORD kills and makes alive...The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich...He raiseth up the poor out of the dust...He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silence in darkness...The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces...the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed" (verses 1-3, 6-10),

We have to realize that Jesus is training us for a position in His Kingdom. We need to hold Jesus and the Father in very high esteem. God has the ultimate power over us in all situations in our lives. This knowledge should lead everyone to honor God.

Paul, in his letter to Timothy, adds this: "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: *to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen*" (1 Timothy 6:16).

Moses was privileged to see Jesus Christ's backside. When Moses came down from the mountain, his face was so bright he had to cover it. The biblical account of this is found in Exodus 33:20-23: "And He said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall be no man see me, and live. And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shalt not be seen." The brilliance of Jesus Christ's presence reflected back on Moses! That is just one demonstration of the power of God. To think that a man's face would glow from just looking at the backside of Jesus Christ is awesome! Think of the power, the majesty, the brightness of Jesus Christ. We are told in the book of Revelation that when God brings His throne to earth there will be no need of the sun. The brightness of God will light up the universe.

How can we as fledgling Christians not bow our heads to the ground when we hear the name of Jesus Christ? Children are commanded to honor their parents. Jesus Christ is our Creator, Savior, Bridegroom, and, in one sense, our Parent. He certainly has honor due to Him. The Christian has to give a conscious effort in giving honor to God and recognizing Him for who He is.

Our honoring of God should be manifested in our worship services. There should be a reverence when we come to worship. Our minds should be on worshiping and giving honor to the One who has done so much for us. There should not even be a hint of strife

or contention. Our language should be of thanksgiving and praise to this Being who holds our eternal life in his very hands.

Our honor of God should manifest itself in marriage and child rearing, on the job, with our families, and with each of our brethren in Christ. We have to think about God in all we do.

Our daily lives in the workplace and in our association with this world will lead us away from God unless we choose to give Him first place. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are not of the Father, but of this world (1 John 2:16). Profanity, pleasure seeking, and a hedonistic lifestyle are not of God! When our minds are continually on pleasure and things of this world, we are not of the Father!

The daily thought process needed for properly honoring God has to start early in the morning as we ask God to help us honor Him in all we do and say. Our morning prayers must be attuned to honoring God. Our evening prayers should be occasions to ask for forgiveness and to praise God for all that He allows us to have. Would any man want to criticize his future wife? Would any woman want to talk mean spiritedly about her future husband? Of course not! We should feel the same way about God and the use of His name.

It takes thought, and we have to reinforce our thoughts daily to absolutely honor God in the way that He expects from us. Remember, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29)! We owe Him everything! We should honor God with all our substance—with our tithes and offerings. "It is God who gives us the power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). So, if we want to have Godly character, we have to honor God in every facet of our lives.

Diligently Seek God

In Hebrews 11:6 we read, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." In this passage we have two important concepts: faith, and a reward to those who seek God. To have Godly character, we must first *believe in God*. (Later on we will reiterate this in another tenet of character.)

Anyone who does not earnestly believe that God can solve problems is lacking in faith. That is why each of the outlined tenets is critical to building character. How many really take Jesus at His word in Matthew 6:33? He says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." It takes faith to make this passage a truism. Most of us in America depend on our education, labor skill, moneymaking ability, and our own resources. For a Christian to trust in God as Jesus has suggested may be foreign to us. It may be, as we say, "A giant leap of faith!"

Most people are actually afraid to trust in God, because we cannot see Him or talk to Him. There has to be a genesis of trust in our lives. Maybe we started our spiritual journey with a modicum of faith, but time eroded our faith or we got caught up in "worldly" activities that never allowed us to go on to deeper faith.

Faith is built just like constructing a building—one brick, one wall, one nail at a time. The trust, the faith, comes one tenet of belief at a time. When blessings come from tithing, for example, it builds trust. When a healing takes place, more trust is built. Just like a building, we keep growing by building character every day of our lives. We have to learn that it is God who provides for us under all circumstances. When we actually see God working in our lives, our faith grows and increases.

One way to begin to trust God and develop faith is to tithe faithfully. Recognize what Deuteronomy 8:17-19 really means.

"And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish."

This means that the believer must realize that God "allows" us to get our wealth. We certainly get the education and go to work everyday, but it is God who gives us the power to do what we do. We have to make a conscious effort to remember God and His intervention on our behalf. We only see this physical world and the books we read, the buildings we work in, and the money derived from our labor. God is, in a sense, in the background. We have the duty to bring Him to the forefront and give Him the acknowledgement He deserves.

When we forget God, our faith diminishes. When we stay away from Sabbath services, our faith subsides. "Faith comes by hearing!" said the apostle Paul (Romans 10:17). Faith is not built in a vacuum. We need activity to develop faith. Abraham is the father of the faithful because he was willing to travel three days and sacrifice his son because God asked him to do it.

When unemployment comes our way, then it's time to *believe* what Jesus says in Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the Kingdom of God...and all these things shall be added unto you." God will show us how He can care for us as He does the entire natural world. When we are out of work or terribly sick, we call on God. Why not practice "seeking" Him *before* tragedy occurs? Attend church services; remember who gives us our wealth; recognize God's power to deliver us out of adversity; give thanks for all we have in our lives.

Remember that God rewards those who diligently seek Him. God really wants us to find Him, discover who He is, and learn what His plan is all about. This can be called the

"eureka phenomenon." Ben Franklin may have shouted "Eureka!" at his discovery of electricity with his kite-and-key experiment; the experience of discovering God and His plan for us evokes a similar response. There is no greater satisfaction than to diligently search for something and then find it. God wants us to experience just that feeling of contentment in finding Him and trusting Him to be there for us whenever we need help or encouragement.

God wants to reward us for all we do. David wanted to build a permanent tabernacle for God, and God was impressed with David's gesture of recognition to God. We as parents want our children to remember us on special occasions. Our mates really appreciate recognition when it comes unexpectedly. Sometimes we may find the mate asking, "Okay, what did you do wrong?" This is probably an indication that we do not express appreciation of mates, children, and other family members as much as we ought to. This is especially true with God. He wants recognition! He wants us to search for Him! He really enjoys our search, much like a child likes to find the "hider" in playing "hide and seek"!

God does not really hide from us, but He does want us to make the effort to find out how magnificent He really is. Discovery is a rewarding experience. God sees to it that we are really rewarded for finding Him. Unfortunately, we often delay the search for God until we are in dire need and have no place else to go. This is the often repeated story of the Israelites who sought God when they were enslaved and forgot Him when times were good.

When we have found Him we can call on Him every day of our lives. Should disaster befall us, we are already in touch with Him and the search will not be long at all. The constant contact with God may also prevent us from falling into a disastrous situation. So there is every reason to have faith and seek God.

Develop faith and diligently seek God so you can experience the heart-warming feeling of finding Him.

Produce Fruit and Be Profitable

Once we have found God and we sense a reward for our search, we now have to produce fruit. In John 15:2, we read, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." In verses 16-17 of the same chapter, Jesus states, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained [appointed] you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it to you."

Christians are appointed to produce fruit. That puts fruit bearing in a category of great responsibility. Those who do not produce fruit are purged and cast away. Do we

understand the implications of this? Jesus is plainly telling us that unless we produce fruit, we will not make it into His Kingdom. He wants the fruit bearer to keep producing more. It is analogous to the parable of the talents (Luke 19:11-27). The one who was given five talents went out and got five more. The only one who was "taken away" was the one who only had one talent and then hid it because of fear. He produced no fruit!

Jesus is also explaining that faithful fruit bearers can ask anything of the Father and He will answer. Does that mean the slothful and unproductive do not get answers? It would certainly seem so! Jesus puts a very high value on productivity. He said, "My Father works, and I work" (John 5:17). Jesus demands that we be productive! He expects a return on His investment in us. He created us, died for us, and now intercedes for us. The logical question is, "What are we doing for Jesus in return?"

Jesus is a pragmatist in that He gives us instructions, sets an example of performance, and expects us to follow His guidance. Some people think that once we are baptized, we just coast into the Kingdom. This is a damnable notion that Satan would like for every one of us to believe. The truth is, slothfulness in our spiritual development can be disastrous. It takes work to maintain 5: marriage; it takes work to be financially secure; and it takes work to grow spiritually.

Fruit producers such as those who have apple orchards, peach farms, orange groves, and pear trees have a lot of labor invested in their enterprise. They have to start with seedlings and care for them till they can be replanted. Then as the trees mature they have to be pruned! The fruit producer is constantly watering, pruning, harvesting, and caring for his crop. The manager or owner has been appointed to keep the grove at maximum efficiency. A return on the investment is expected! Any manager who would allow the trees to grow wild and grow unproductive sprouts (shoots) and let the harvest dwindle would be fired! This process is the purging Jesus Christ was referring to when He said He would "purge" us so we could produce more fruit. The fruit trees and our fruit are very similar in concept.

Our fruit production involves virtually every facet of our lives: our jobs or vocation, our child rearing capabilities, church attendance, holy day attendance, tithing and giving, our loving demeanor to our brothers in Christ, and our marriages. If we are slothful and unproductive, Jesus will eventually cast us aside. He may be forced to castigate us in order to create in us a desire to do our work. This is a hard way to learn a lesson. But we should not be surprised if God reprimands us for not doing what we were appointed to do. If we search diligently and honor God, we should be producing fruit, which is the very substance of Godly character.

Beware of Satanic and Worldly Influence

One way to fail in building Godly character is to allow Satan and this world to lure us from our duties. Paul addresses Satan's wily craftsmanship in Ephesians 6:12,16: "For we

wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places...[To counter this evil influence, take up] the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

Our task is to preclude the master deceiver from deterring us from our goal of developing Godly character. It is sometimes difficult for us to comprehend that Satan wants to destroy all of God's people. Satan is replete with cunning devices to cause us to stumble, get discouraged, stay away from Christian brethren and church services, work on the Sabbath, and cause division.

There is a poignant story in Acts about Satan's influence that we need to take to heart. In Acts 5:3, we read, "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" In this scenario, Ananias and his wife wanted the approbation of the church, the apostles, and fellow believers. They were willing to do anything to get approval and look good in the Christian community, Satan got it for them! He saw the larceny in their heart and worked on their minds to convince them that their plan was a good one. The tragic result was that two people lost their lives. Satan uses us, plays us, and lures us, and then he is off on another journey while we suffer the consequences of our actions. We will never build Godly character as long as we succumb to Satan's influence.

This lesson is a powerful one. Satan will take the ambition, desires, lusts, and seemingly good intentions of anyone and lead him or her astray. Ananias was probably a good man in many ways. He may very well have been a person we would have enjoyed having in our church. Ananias was not cognizant of Satan's awesome power! If Ananias had thought carefully, prayed to God, and meditated about the potential consequences, he probably would not have carried out his charade.

Satan can also lead ministers and church leaders astray through the ambitious desires they possess. Our hearts have to be pure, our intentions pristine, or we can easily find ourselves in a position like Ananias. Each of us must be able to walk away from any situation. We have to possess the ability to say "no" when it is appropriate. Ananias should have said "no" when he was tempted! His failure shows us that we need to be very sensitive to Satan's awesome power and influence.

So many people naively say, "I just told the ol' devil to go away!" They, like most people, do not realize the power and cunning of Satan. James says to "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Resisting is more than just saying something. Resisting takes an active, conscious effort toward avoiding what Satan is tempting us with. Ananias is an apt example of not resisting! All we have to do is keep our minds keenly aware that any thought fueled by lust, greed, jealousy, envy, pride, or strife gives Satan a chance at getting to us. When tempted by Satan, Jesus had the presence of mind to quote Scripture to him and not waver in His convictions. Reading and studying the Bible offsets wrong motivations and helps us acquire the mind of Christ.

We discussed Satanic influence; let us now discuss worldly influence. John, the apostle of love, has this to say: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-17).

Ananias and Sapphira were no doubt enamored by the "pride of life"; they wanted recognition—and it cost them their lives! We should be able to see the very close relationship between worldly desires and Satanic influence. Satan will do his cunning best to obfuscate our sense of rightness. It is our duty to preclude the evil influence of Satan and this world.

Whenever any of us has an insatiable desire to have wealth, recognition, or status, we need to be extraordinarily careful because of the potential consequences of becoming ensnared by our own lusts and Satan's influence. The Christian must remember that we only "see" this world; we do not "see" God because He is a Spirit. It is easy to forget God because we cannot see or hear Him. We see the actions of famous people who glamorize infidelity. The same is true of lust. David and Bathsheba are a stark reminder of the ensnaring propensity for the "lust of the eyes"! Our corporate leaders can be ensnared in greed and the "pride of life," and the lure of money has caused many to stumble. For these reasons, some are being convicted in our legal system for fraud.

If we are diligently seeking God, honoring God, and producing fruit, we will be more discerning about what is happening to our lives. We will become sensitive to what God wants versus what we want! Our decisions will become more Christ-centered rather than self-centered. This cautionary step may prevent disaster in our lives. We must develop wisdom, understanding, and the ability to follow a sure steady path.

Have a Clear Vision of God's Plan

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." We who have the Spirit of God need to have a clear vision of what God has planned for us mortals. To really develop Godly character, we need the driving motivation to achieve our goals. All of the aforementioned tenets will become easier to achieve if we know what the end result is going to be for all of us. In Revelation 1:6, John, speaking of true Christians, says that Christ "hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father."

Paul said that he looked through a dark glass to understand God's intentions (1 Corinthians 13). Paul knew in part; he understood in part—and our knowledge and understanding is also "in part." Do any of us, for example, really know what it means to be a king? Do we comprehend the ability to appear and disappear as Jesus did after His resurrection? Do we grasp eternity and immortality? The plan that God has for us is really beyond our human understanding, but we need to try. Our minds need to be projecting us into that future world where we will spend eternity. We need to diligently

search and meditate about what it means to be a king and a priest. Even though we know we are not "going to heaven" when we die, do we really understand how breathtaking God's plan is for us? If we could get a glimpse of this Kingdom as Paul did on one occasion, it might spur us on to greater dedication.

Our earthly journey is transitory, yet we sometimes act like we are going to live forever in the flesh. Somehow we have to embrace the vision, grasp the understanding, and focus on the future so we never lose sight of why we are on this earth. Our minds have to grasp God's vision! Becoming immortal members of God's family and participating in the glorious Marriage Supper (Revelation 19:9) with all the saints is a vision to contemplate! Paul's prolific insight about the Kingdom is stated in 1 Corinthians 2:9: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

Many college graduates and professionals in past times have received sign-on bonuses from employers. What a sign-on bonus we are going to get! We will have for eternity many of the guarantees that we want in this life.

Guaranteed employment: We will be spirit beings who will be carrying out our duties forever! God's intention is for us to be employed forever. That is why we are being challenged, molded, and shaped for our future employment. Is it a good employer who will never fire you or lay you off because of "downsizing"? **Comprehensive medical coverage:** We as spirit beings will not suffer sickness, or have debilitating diseases or inherent weaknesses that are passed on to us from parents. So we will have a guarantee of permanent good health! **A compensation package that is perk-inclusive:** Our stature in the world will be awe-inspiring. People will want to bow to us because we will be kings, and the citizens of this world will recognize us for who we are. Jesus says that we will be inheritors of His Kingdom. This means that all the gold, diamonds, precious gems, and resources will be ours to enjoy. We will be multi-millionaires by virtue of our inheritance. We will be able to travel throughout the universe almost instantaneously, faster than light! Would that be a good compensation package? **Good retirement benefits:** We will be so energized and excited about our work and the joy we receive from the "God family" that retirement will not even be a subject of discussion. Who would want to get away from peace of mind, work satisfaction, good pay, excellent benefits, and unlimited travel opportunities?

Paul's vision and understanding of God's reward drove him to achieve what he did for the work of God. He said, in Romans 8, that virtually nothing could separate us from the love of God. Paul could say this because he was convicted, through his vision and insight, of God's intentions. We, too, have to be resolute about our reward.

One way to help us grasp this vision may be to imagine some lofty concept that we can relate to. One that comes to mind is the former television series *Hart to Hart*. This program depicted a very rich, happily married couple that had all the amenities of wealth. Jonathan Hart was a businessman who could travel to other countries and conduct business by flying in his Lear jet. He had a chauffeur, a beautiful loving spouse, a

successful business that had a world scope, honed in places around the world, money, and social connections for enjoyment. This man virtually had it all—just like we will have it all, but in a profoundly greater sense.

We will have angels as servants. We, as a collective body, will be married to Jesus Christ, a loving marital partner who will be attentive to our concerns. We will be world travelers and have social relations with multiple spirit and human beings.

What a wonderful life to contemplate! This vision will help propel us to greater service and dedication to Jesus Christ. Our lives will be copious with love, achievement, satisfaction, and pleasure arising from service to others for all eternity. What a wonderful vision!

Communicate With God

This would normally be called a "prayer" section, but communication connotes a deeper, more meaningful relationship. In Hebrews 1:1-2, the writer tells about Jesus: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds."

The One who became Jesus Christ spoke to Moses and others by voice. Moses pleaded with Him to exonerate the obstinate Israelites, and He acquiesced to Moses' impassioned plea (Exodus 32). Abraham "bargained" with God over the fate of the people of Sodom, finally getting Him to agree to hold off destroying the city if ten righteous people could be found there (Genesis 18). These two men talked directly to the Member of the Godhead who later became Jesus Christ, and got a response right on the spot. But we do not have the luxury of personal communication as they did, do we?

Yes, we do!

When we pray, we can take the Bible with us and quote from the Bible about God's promises to us. What about those who are sick? They can go to James and quote directly to God the promises in that book (see James 5:13-18). Their prayer of faith can reach God with intensity, because they are pleading with God just as Moses and Abraham did on behalf of their people. When we quote God's Word in our requests to Him, He will listen, and He will see that we are serious about our requests.

Another example is found in Matthew 6:33. We are told to seek God first and He will care for us. If in fact we are truly seeking God and striving for a close relationship with Him, we can quote this passage to Him. We are, in essence, communicating with God just as effectively as Moses and Abraham did in their time. This is demonstrated further in Hebrews 4:12-13,16: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the

joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do....Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." God wants us to go to Him and confidently proclaim our plea to Him, just as Moses and Abraham did when they implored God on behalf of their constituents.

There is another reason to communicate clearly with God. The thought comes to us through Luke 22:36: "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be able to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." When converts have a communicative relationship with God, they may qualify to escape-the troubles coming upon the world in the time of the end. It may seem self-serving, but if we go to God and develop genuine closeness with Him, there will be manifold blessings as a result. Our best bet is to take Jesus at His word, and we may very well escape tragedy! More important, we will be able to stand before Jesus when He returns.

Jesus says that His sheep hear His voice (John 10:27). How? By close contact, prayer, meditation, praise, thanksgiving, and biblically oriented communication. Daniel prayed three times a day and he was saved from the lion's den. Shadrach and his friends were saved from a fiery furnace. Communication with God is necessary and may save our lives in certain life-threatening situations.

We have all the reasons in the world to communicate with God. We will grow stronger spiritually. And when the evil day comes, we will be able to stand!

Solid, Steadfast Practitioners of Faith

People need to have reinforced training in every profession and skill that they may possess. Commercial pilots have to have constant check flights in simulators and in the air. Athletes rehearse specific plays over and over till they become automatic. Someone once quipped to Ben Hogan how lucky he was at golf. Ben's reply was, "The more I practice the luckier I get!" Christians, too, need to have practice in faith and in executing biblical principles.

Hebrews 5:12-14 states, "For when the time ye ought to be teachers, ye need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat. For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

Christians need to achieve the latter half of this dictum. The phrase "by reason of use" means they are adept at *practicing* biblical principles. It is a hurdle for Christians to realize that they actually have to *work* at overcoming. Traditional theology teaches us that

we only have to believe. But belief (faith) that produces nothing is worth little. James wrote that only the *doers* are justified (James 2:14-26). Our minds have to accept the principle of "reason of use"!

Working at conversion on a daily basis is another giant hurdle for some. The existing "Christian standard" for so many people is this: The family attends church sporadically, and attends special occasions such as Easter, Christmas, christenings, and marriages. Some may be regular attendees, but then it is for a short message, and the members use the rest of the day for their chosen entertainment.

But then, a paradigm shift begins to occur when God calls some of these traditional Christians. They are baptized and start attending Sabbath services. This is familiar to them at this point, because it mimics their mindset of "church"! The next step is a giant one because it is so different from their previous approach to "religion." They discover that they have to "work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). To the uninitiated, it may seem onerous to work diligently at seeking God, but that's precisely what we must do as we resist Satan's influence and the appetites of the flesh.

Our senses must be developed to discern good and evil. In Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul writes, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the *inner man*, That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God."

Paul is showing us that our inner man can be strengthened by God's Spirit. We need God to protect us and deliver us from evil, but receiving God's help requires our participation. With God's help, we can triumph and gain the mastery and become like Jesus Christ.

Summary of Tenets

The Christian has to learn—just like anyone in any discipline has to learn, whether it is a trade, a profession, or a skill. Many people have put in years of work, but lack any real experience. Some have said it like this: "A Christian can have thirty years of experience or one year's experience thirty times over." The convert has to gain true experience from life's many choices. There has to be reflection or meditation in learning. Learning does not take place while we are performing an activity. It happens afterwards, when contemplation takes place. Ask yourself, "What did I learn about this experience? How could I have done it differently? Will I do the same thing in the future?" There has to be reflection in order to prepare us for future experiences. The book of Hebrews echos this principle by stating, "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those

who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). The candidate has to *learn from every experience!*

The convert also needs to reflect on the Bible in relation to his or her experience. We need to develop a greater frame of reference. Growing in grace and knowledge requires a constant comparison to the Bible in order to validate our learning. Compare yourself to Daniel, Paul, or Moses. What did they do that set them apart? We cannot duplicate someone else's life, but there are principles that can be derived from the lives of others. There is a learning reference in being a lawyer for example. There are case studies from trials and decisions that have been handed down in special circumstances. The legalist can then compare a case with a finalized decision and have that case as a frame of reference. This principle can be applied in any profession, especially for the Christian. We must therefore *add knowledge to our frame of reference!*

Learning is not done in a vacuum; it is done through trial and error. There will be setbacks in life. The struggling Christian must learn that to make mistakes or fail temporarily is not at all unusual. An apprentice mold maker has to learn how to operate a variety of machines and hold very close tolerances on the components he is machining. He is given simple tasks so as to develop confidence. Measuring, checking, and watching are a part of the process that a neophyte goes through. Mistakes will surely be made, because there are so many facets of learning to be aware of in the trade. Over time, the apprentice will develop skill in the basics, but may make mistakes in procedures. The novice becomes skilled by taking advantage of the mistakes that are made and adds them to his frame of reference. In other words, mistakes can be used as a learning experience and contribute to the growth process. The Christian needs to know that God understands "our frame" and is not out to get us, but is there to help us in the learning process. It is not shameful to make mistakes, but only a fool would ignore the lessons and warnings associated with temporary setbacks. *Accept failure as apart of growing!*

The Christian, like any other professional, must not be myopic when he juxtaposes himself with Jesus Christ. Christ wants His people to become perfect. His desire is for us to see ourselves as He sees us. As candidates for kingship, we have the obligation to compare ourselves to the perfect model, while realizing that we are never alone in our quest for Christ-like character. Help is only a prayer away! The final admonition for us is to do what we know to do! We must *look to Jesus as the perfect model of righteousness and source of help!*

Our heroes, whether they are movie stars or political, military, or biblical personalities, have all demonstrated a certain degree of inner strength. Daniel was a prince as an Israelite captive. Joseph rose to prominence even though he was imprisoned for thirteen years. Arnold Schwarzenegger became a world-famous bodybuilder and movie star, and has a desire for politics. Jessie Ventura was a famous wrestler and movie star, and went on to become a governor. These people and others like them have tenacity; they work hard at their craft; they develop a boldness that exudes confidence in others. We often envy and idolize our heroes. The primary difference between our heroes and us is that our heroes were willing to suffer long in their quest for success.

We can do the same thing, but the desire has to be there. Maybe our biblical heroes can entice us to become heroes in our own right. If we emulate their examples and apply the biblical principles set forth in this booklet, we will all become heroes in the eyes of Jesus Christ. He will recognize our accomplishments and reward us with crowns of glory!

All scripture quotations were taken from the King James Version except as noted.

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