

1 Corinthians #6
Christian Character
1 Corinthians 3:9

Someone has rightly said, "Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."

According to that statement, our character has something to do with our destiny. Since our destiny is of such great importance, shouldn't we be concerned about our character?

Christian character is formed through a lifelong process that begins at the new birth experience, and is defined as moral firmness, self control, integrity, truthfulness, honesty, commitment, purity, thoughtfulness, thankfulness, generosity, love, sharing, helpfulness, responsibility, respect, fairness, diligence, desire for excellence, perseverance, self discipline, determination, etc.

As one reads Paul's letter to the church at Corinth it becomes very clear that the flaw in their Christian character is that of carnality. And with that flaw they church had become dead, divided, and a disgrace to the cause of Christ.

In the portion of scripture that we are going to deal with tonight, we will see just how Paul with this major flaw in their Christian character. They had written to him asking certain questions about church government, but not exposing their real need, which is typical, so often, of people who seek counsel. In the first few chapters of this letter Paul is making them face the reality of the sin in their lives so that he might point them forward to spiritual maturity and the development of true Christian character.

So, how did Paul deal with the flaw in the character of the Christians at the church in Corinth? I guess it would have been easy for him to preach the wrath of God, the judgment of God, and heap condemnation on them for the way they were living, but he didn't. He dealt with them with grace and patience. He took the time to show them who they are in the sight of God, pointing out to them the purpose for which Jesus died, rose again, and ascended into heaven: that they might become a people worthy of His name.

Look at the wording he uses in verses 9, 16 & 23 as he reminds these Christian who they really are in Christ Jesus, "Ye are God's husbandry; ye are God's building"; "Ye are the temple of God"; "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." **Paul reminds them that they were God's possession, so why should they live on such a low level?** The problem, so often, in the life of a Christian that

hinders him from achieving his true character, to outgrow "babyhood" and move into the spiritual maturity, can be summed up in one word "carnality."

Carnality in the Christian life is when we allow our flesh, our self, to become the dominate factor in our walk with Christ. And one of the marks of carnality in the Corinthian church was their worship of leadership, personified in Paul and Apollos: "I am of Paul," and "I am of Apollos." **It was a church divided by loyalty to people.** Speaking of himself and of Apollos, and of the others who were subjects of hero worship in this church, Paul says, "We are (but) laborers together with God." In other words, "We are only God's messengers; we are not different from any of you, we are simply doing what God has called us to do."

He goes on to say in verses 6-7, "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." **In the field of souls, there must be plowing and sowing and watering before there is a harvest.** Paul and Apollos had planted the seed and watered it, but they could not make it grow; only God could do that.

Therefore, Paul says to the Corinthian church, "You are God's cultivated field." **All he has done is to plant the Word and water it, but the life-giving principle is not from the one who plants, nor from the one who waters, but in the seed.** It will grow according to the way in which it is sown and the way in which you receive it.

The seed may be received carelessly and heedlessly. It may be choked by the pressure of worldly cares, or ambition, or riches. It may be received on dry, hard ground, where it cannot take root, and quickly disappears. Or it can come into a heart that is wide open for all that is of God in Jesus Christ: the seed is fallen into good ground and brings forth much fruit.

This truth is shown for us in the parable of the sower as recorded in Matthew 13:3-8. A man went out to sow the seed, which was the Word of God, and some fell by the wayside and the fowls came quickly and devoured it. Other seed fell on a stony ground where there was not much soil, so that it sprang up quickly and was scorched. **Other seed fell among thorns and thistles, and although it grew for a little while, it soon became choked out.** And still other seed fell on good ground and brought forth fruit.

Twenty-five per cent of the seed in the parable brought forth fruit; the rest was wasted. I wonder if that is not a fair average! There are some in whose lives the seed has been planted, but it has not been understood; the principle of life in Jesus Christ seems vague and unreal; the Word is snatched away and forgotten. There are others who have received it gladly, with much emotion and tears; the Word has sprung up quickly, but because there is no root, the plant has

been scorched, and they are not growing, for they have not grasped the principle of it.

Others have listened amid the pressure of many cares and responsibilities. How hard it has been to sort it all out, to shake free from the things that pull in many directions. The Word has been received with a hungry heart, but the deceitfulness of this world's goods has choked it. **However, there are some who have received the Word with open hearts; they have been like a plant watered by the rain, growing under the sun and bringing forth much fruit.**

Whatever our state, we are God's field, and He is looking for the harvest. One day the great Farmer is coming to take the harvest of our lives. Everything depends upon how we have received the seed - not upon the preacher, nor any man who has planted or watered. You see, it doesn't matter who preaches it, it is each person's response that counts.

Another mark of carnality in the church was their lack of growth. In verses 1-3 Paul calls them "babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with solid food...For ye are yet carnal." He reminds them, however, that even in that protracted spiritual infancy, they were still "God's building." And in verse 10 he reminds them that all he had done was to lay a foundation, but every man was responsible "how he built on it."

In verse 11 we see the kind of foundation that Paul had established, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." **So Paul says the foundation that the Christian is to build his life on is the foundation of Jesus Christ.** And then in verses 12-15 he gives us the final analyses of building as a Christian filled with spiritual character or a Christian filled with carnality, "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall test every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

As we said earlier our Christian character is formed through a lifelong process. When a person gives their life to Christ, the Holy Spirit begins a process of developing His character traits within the soul of the individual. Christian character is not an instantaneous development, but a consistent lifelong process of choices and decisions.

I would remind you that day-by-day you are in the process of building your Christian character. You don't really have any choice in the matter. You are either building it up or you are in the process of tearing it down.

Therefore, Paul reminds us that when we received Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, He became the eternal foundation of our life, He is the rock upon which we stand, and upon that solid rock we are building our lives. But what kind of materials are we using?

The materials that you are using, is a reflection of your Christian character.

You see, the problem with Christian character is that it is not the same as Christian reputation. *Christian reputation* is what other people think of me, but *Christian character* is what God thinks of me. *Christian reputation* is what other people see when they look at my life, but *Christian character* is what God sees when He looks at my life. **Christian reputation is what people see on the outside, but Christian character is what God sees on the inside.** And I promise you, they are not always the same!

Having said that, Paul goes on to say that one day every man's work is going to be put through the fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ. And John tells us in Revelation 1:14 that the Lord, who shall judge us in that day, is the One whose eyes are as a "flame of fire." The building which we are putting up, the building of our character, is going to pass under His scrutiny, and if any man's work shall abide in that day then, says the record, he shall receive a reward. **But if the eyes of our Lord, which are as a flame of fire, shall find any wood, hay, and stubble, it shall be burned.** That man shall suffer loss, although he himself shall be saved, but as by fire. Take heed how you build.

In verses 16-17 Paul approaches the subject of their carnality from yet another angle, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." This is a very interesting statement that Paul is making here and needs to be understood in light of what he is teaching.

Two different Greek words are translated in our New Testament by the English word "temple." One means the building itself, the other means the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies where the glory of God dwells - that is the word here. We are God's sanctuary, the place of His holy and awesome presence.

Paul goes on to say, "If any man defile the temple...him shall God destroy." But the word "destroy" does not mean to annihilate, it means to spoil or mar: "If any man spoils (corrupts) the temple (the place of God's glory), him will God

corrupt or defile." You too are God's sanctuary; your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. You are simply the structure in which He lives; you are the dwelling place of the Shekinah glory. God wants to reveal Himself there, controlling and guiding your life, shining through it with His radiance and power.

But Paul says that if we defile the sanctuary of God, then it is not very long before our whole life becomes corrupt, worldly, and indifferent to the things of God. That is, if we give way to flesh attitudes and philosophies of the world, we therefore, open the door for Satan to bring in his means of destruction: mental, physical, and spiritual).

But Paul is very careful to make sure that this kind of destruction does not just affect us as individuals, but the Body of Christ as a whole. The evidences of carnality in the Corinthian church were jealousy, envy, strife, and division. And because of their individual carnality, the testimony of the holy place (the life of the Christian), which should have been filled with the glory of the indwelling Christ, was being crippled and marred. And the greater result of their carnality was that the Body of had become corrupt and worldly and was in danger of losing their testimony for Christ in a world of lostness.

In verses 21-23, Paul has one more thing to say about Christian character, and this is the most precious of all, "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and you are Christ's and Christ is God's."

I love to go up into the mountains, or just to ride down the road and see the country side, and because it is my Father's, it is mine. I may never own legal title to an inch of it, but it is all mine in the Lord Jesus.

Therefore, Paul is simply saying that although you might be living in carnality, just remember: "you are Christ's; and Christ is God's." So remember who you are in Christ Jesus and adjust your character, because you standing at the Judgment Seat of Christ depends on how you are building your life on the eternal foundation of Jesus Christ.