

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

BY BROTHER TOOLE, WITH EDITOR'S COMMENTS

The subject that we have been studying somewhat during the week has been that of Character Development. This is one feature of the Plan of God. Your part and my part in the eternal Plan of God depends upon our Character Development. God's Plan is going to be carried out. He will have a class selected from this earth who will worship and serve Him on the spirit plane of existence. He will ultimately have this earth inhabited with human beings who also will live in harmony with His holy Law. But whether we are to be of the Heavenly number, who will eternally love and praise Him and eternally enjoy His favor and blessing, or whether any one of us is to be of the earthly number, who also will eternally love and praise Him and eternally enjoy His favor and blessing, *depends upon Individual Character Development*. So after getting acquainted with the various features of the Plan of God in a general way, our minds seem naturally to fix upon *that one thing* upon which the enjoyment of God's eternal blessings depends.

The great questions that confront us then are: What is the standard of character that we must develop in order to have the assurance of enjoying the Plan of God in its consummation throughout the endless ages of eternity? Is it possible to develop such a character; and how is it developed?

Let us notice the standard that God has set. Romans 8:29 says: "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate [determine or decide] to be conformed to the image of His Son." This shows the standard; God has decided that this class, whom He did foreknow to be joint-heirs with Christ, should be character images of Christ.

That same thought is given to us in Ephesians 4:11-16, when it speaks of the Lord's providing of evangelists, teachers, pastors, etc., for the perfecting of the Church, for the edifying [instruction] of the Body of Christ. For how long? Until they come to the unity of the faith, unto a perfect Man. What is *the perfect* Man? "Unto the *measure* of the *stature* of the *fulness of Christ*." You see from this last clause that the full measure of Christ's character is the standard.

Again, take Ephesians 5:25-27. It says: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and *cleanse* it with the [R5901 : page 155] washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, *not having spot*, or *wrinkle*, or *any such thing*; but that it should be *holy* and *without blemish*." Now you can see that if the Church would be presented in His presence without blemish, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, she would be Christlike; wouldn't she?

What does it mean to be presented without fault or without blemish? It means that every imperfection of character is to be overcome. Every unholy quality of disposition is to be cleansed away. He washes us from our past sins by His blood; but it takes the Word and constant obedience to the Word to sanctify us.

For example, take pride. Pride is an unholy quality of character. It is the disposition of *self*-exaltation in heart or in act. Of a king it is written, "His heart was lifted up unto destruction." Humility is expressed in the exhortation: "Let each esteem others better [more important] than themselves"; and, "Not unto *us*, *not* unto us, but to Thy Name give glory." Now to be presented *without fault and without blemish* would mean that this disposition of pride would be so completely eradicated that no temptation, however strong, would ever in the heart in the least degree arouse self-importance or self-exaltation. This passage says that Christ can and has undertaken to

save His people as completely as that. Now if He can purify us so completely from pride, could He not as completely cleanse us from any other blemish of character? Yes, we are to be presented without fault and without blemish – perfect characters.

Further, since Christ makes the Church holy by making the individuals holy, this passage would read: Christ loved *me* and gave Himself for *me* that He might cleanse *me* by the Word, that He might present *me* unto Himself a *glorious character* without spot or wrinkle, but that *I* should be holy and without blemish. Here again holiness, or Christlikeness, is set as the standard.

Additionally, this passage also shows the possibility of reaching that standard. It says, Christ so loved the Church, *not* that He may do an impossible thing; for if it were impossible to become Christlike, if it were impossible that we could be presented holy and without blemish, do you think that Christ would have died and attempted it? No. Therefore the very fact that Christ died and attempted to sanctify the Church and present it holy and without blemish reduces it to a glorious possibility.

There are still other texts that teach the same thing. Take Ephesians 3:14-19: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in Heaven and in 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 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 fulness of God.*" What does it mean to be filled with the fulness of God if it does not mean to be filled with Godlikeness? That is the only reasonable way that we can be filled with the fulness of God while in the flesh.

Here again the possibility of becoming Christlike is taught. God knew that our weak faith and our terrible depravity and our failure to make ourselves holy by our oft-repeated efforts would cause us to doubt the possibility of becoming Christlike by becoming filled with all the fulness of God. Yes; the thought of becoming a complete overcomer seems clear beyond the range of possibility. I once asked a brother, "Do you think it is possible to obtain the experience described in these verses?" He replied, "It is for some." Another replied to the same question, "According to their capacity." You see how they doubted the possibility. But now note carefully, thoughtfully and believingly every word of the 20th verse, and note that it is referring to the grand experience described in the previous verses. "Now unto Him who is able to do *exceedingly abundantly* above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." You see He can do not only as much as you can conceive or ask, but abundantly more. It takes real faith to believe God can make you holy or Christlike. But the Scriptures say *He is able*. If we cannot find words with which to pray, we can point out these verses to the Lord and in faith ask Him to fulfil them *to us*.

Again, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness [righteous heart or character] for they shall be filled" – made holy. (Matthew 5:6.) "And sin [sinful disposition] shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under Law, but under grace." – Romans 6:14.

So we see there is no question as to the standard now. It is Christlikeness or holiness. And *it is possible*. And we can scarcely overestimate the importance of being thoroughly convinced of these two truths. If we are fully and deeply persuaded that we *must become* Christlike, or we cannot inherit eternal life, or the Kingdom, and if we are also fully persuaded that *we can* become like Christ in character we will arouse ourselves to seek to attain it. If we indulge the thought that our desire to be good, to be holy, to be Christlike, is all that is necessary, we will never be willing to seek to become holy

with sufficient earnestness, or willing to endure the trials and take the crosses that will perfect us in love. Do not let the enemy deceive you. But let this thought ring in your ears; I must become Christlike and I can. There is a path that leads to it and I will find and follow it.

Now we will consider a few Scriptures that show the necessity of developing Christlikeness. Since Christ's character is the standard to be reached, and since it is reached gradually, we must get busy developing this character; or sooner or later we shall become completely and forever separated from our relationship with the Lord. (John 15:2.) "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit." You see the branch was in the vine and yet did not bear fruit – did not make the effort to become *Christlike*. What shall become of such branches? "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He *taketh away*." Your standing in the Lord is not because of your knowledge simply, but because you are becoming Christlike. Are you growing? Are you bearing increasingly the fruits of the Spirit? Do you know what it means to become like Christ? Do you have a clearer insight into what Christ's character is like? Wake up, brother, before you are cut off! If you have not been developing the various qualities of Christlikeness, start now by surrendering fully to the Lord and begin active obedience to God's Word. No more excuses!

Again, we must develop more and more the Spirit of the Lord in order to be useful now. First, by example. "Be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7,8.) Are you growing? Are you becoming an example to others? Is the life, or spirit, of Christ being manifest in your mortal body? (2 Cor. 4:10.) God expects this of you. The brethren need such an example and stimulus as you can give.

Once more: In Ephesians 6:18, we are told to pray one **[R5901 : page 156]** for another with all prayer and supplication; and

in James 5:15,16, we are told that the prayer of *faith* shall save the (sin) sick, and that the prayer of the *righteous* man *availeth much*. You see it is the prayer of a righteous man and the prayer of faith that is to bring results. A righteous man is not necessarily yet perfect, but he is obedient and growing. In John 15:16, you will notice that Jesus points out that the more we bear fruit (grow in holiness) the more successful will we be in prayer. Christ has chosen us to *bear fruit*, that whatsoever we ask the Father in His name He may give it us. You see, the more we develop in character the more we can serve the brethren by obtaining blessings and enlightenment and mercy for them through prayer. Have you the love that gives you the longing to thus help the brethren? or are you cold, critical and indifferent? If you are, you are in a dangerous position. Do you pray the prayer of faith and the prayer of the righteous man in behalf of the brethren? Does your love prompt you to this? You can have such a love if you will. (1 Thessalonians 3:12.) "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another."

Once more: The great work that the Lord has for us to perform in the coming Age demands that we become Christlike. No other character would do. We see how hard it is to deal with one another now owing to our lack in courage, faithfulness, patience, mercy, humility, firmness, etc. Nothing but the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 will fit us to deal with the fallen race. "Herein is love (to be) made perfect in us, that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment, because as He is, so are we (to become) in this world." (1 John 4:17.) God has a love that is *not discouraged* with the deepest moral degradation in His object, but follows the welfare of the sinner with an unchilled devotion, though He hates the sin with a hatred no less than infinite; and we are to be "filled with all the fulness of God." You must grow, grow, *grow* into Godlikeness.

One more reason: The very character of God demands that we become holy. Habakkuk 1:13 says: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold [look on with approval] evil; Thou *canst not* look upon

[countenance] iniquity." You see we must be purified from all iniquity and evil before we can have the approval of God. Every defect in our character is evil. So you see we must perfect character before God could eternally endure us. (Psalm 5:4,5.) "For Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; evil *shall not* dwell with Thee – Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity"; not only in its grosser [R5902 : page 156] and outward forms, but in its finer, more polished inward forms. God detects the smallest deflection in our hearts, and His character is so holy that He cannot but hate it. And this fitness of character to meet God's approval must be accomplished while in the flesh. Death and the resurrection will not make any change in our characters. The new body will only give us a better medium of expressing our true selves. This argument can be summed up thus: God, being holy, could not eternally endure an imperfect character. Therefore we must in this life become Christlike, or perfect in character; or else we cannot eternally dwell with God. "Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."

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The foregoing article in many respects is excellent, and fully in accord with our presentations in *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES* – with but a few exceptions. In presenting the matter of holiness, perfection of character, Christ-likeness, we have been careful, in *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES*, to point out that this does not signify a perfection in the flesh, which, the Bible shows us everywhere, is an impossibility. We have shown that it does mean a perfection of heart, of intention, of will, of endeavor. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds." – Matthew 5:8; 1 Peter 3:15; Romans 12:2.

All this may be exactly what Brother Toole had in mind; but since he has not stated the matter thus, there is, we believe, a danger that some might misapprehend his meaning. Some might think that

he meant perfection in the flesh and might go to the extreme to which people have gone in the past of claiming that in act, in word, in thought, they were perfect as the Lord. This might lead to a kind of spiritual pride which would be very injurious, as it is unscriptural. On the other hand, some of the more conscientious of the Lord's people, realizing the imperfection of their flesh – their conduct, words, thoughts – might become wholly discouraged and give up the race entirely.

Some might even go to the length of imagining that they would become so perfect in the flesh that they would no longer need the Robe of Christ's Righteousness. This would be a serious mistake, as illustrated in the parable of the Wedding Garment – which shows that the taking off, or the rejection of the Robe of Christ's Righteousness would work the rejection of the individual from the company of the Lord's people. He would be cast into the outer darkness of the world – be cut off from the knowledge and illumination of Present Truth. We should always remember the force of the Apostle's statement, "Ye are complete in Him" (Colossians 2:10), and the Master's words, "Without Me ye can do nothing," and again, "If ye abide in me." – John 15:5,7.

The subject is a difficult one to many for various reasons. When first we heard the Gospel call we were "children of wrath even as others." (Ephesians 2:3.) As we sought to reach the Heavenly Father we found that He would not receive us except as we would come through the appointed Doorway – Jesus. We found next that Jesus would not accept us and become our Advocate and make it possible for us to come into the family of God unless we would make a full consecration of our lives to Him – surrendering our own wills, engaging to bear the cross, and following in the Master's footsteps. When we made such a self-surrender our Redeemer imputed to us His own merit, covering all our blemishes and making us acceptable to God. This, His gift, is figuratively styled the *wedding garment*.

But this imputation of the Savior's merit was not given to the New Creature, but to the *old creature*. It was when we were thus *robed by our Savior* that we were acceptable to the Heavenly Father, who justified us in spirit, in mind, and begat us with His Holy Spirit. From that moment we were embryo New Creatures, but without any proper spirit bodies. The Lord left us in the fleshly bodies *covered with the Robe of Christ's Righteousness*. It is the Father's will that while we as New Creatures thus tabernacle in the flesh, we should grow in grace, grow in knowledge, grow in love – grow in all the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit.

It is not the flesh that is to grow up into the Anointed in all things, but the *New Creature*. And the New Creature never was a sinner. From its very start or begetting it was holy. The New Creature, therefore, does not pass from sin to righteousness, but from one degree to another degree of knowledge and appreciation of righteousness. Every step of the New Creature is progress in Christ – progress along spiritual lines. The Lord has provided spiritual bread and spiritual water for the New Creature in the Bible, and its progress will be in proportion as these are recognized and assimilated.

Character-development is thus a daily, yea, an hourly, experience to these New Creatures. The character of Jesus becomes more and more their spirit, their disposition. If they maintain their original consecration, if they practise the lessons of the Lord's Word, and if they grow strong in the Lord through partaking of the Lord and His Spirit, they are thus becoming more and more copies of God's dear Son. They were copies of Him, so far as purity and consecration were concerned, at the very start. Their testing is along the lines of continued obedience, continued devotion, as they reach larger degrees of knowledge of the Word of God, of the Plan of God. Like their Redeemer they must demonstrate that they are faithful, even unto death – fully submitted to the Heavenly Father's will, fully loyal thereto.

But we must not mistake these New Creatures and too closely identify them with the flesh. "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." (Romans 8:9.) The flesh has its natural tastes, appetites and disposition through heredity. These will never be overcome entirely. Hence, as the Apostle says, there is continually a warfare between the flesh and the Spirit in the New Creation. The flesh warreth against the Spirit and the Spirit warreth against the flesh; and the two are contrary. (Galatians 5:17.) The New Creature fights his good fight of faith in that he stands loyal to the Lord and continues to seek in every way the will of God, as did the Savior. This may mean various encounters with his own flesh. As St. Paul says, it signifies brow-beating himself – keeping his body under. According to the Bible, it will be a fight to the finish. If the flesh conquers, the New Creature dies – and that will mean the Second Death. If the New Creature conquers, it will be by the death of the flesh.

It is impossible for us to judge one another in this matter. Some of the Lord's most loyal people may have a great fight with their flesh. On-lookers might be inclined to judge them severely and to think that they were not sufficiently loyal. But God alone knoweth the heart. In some instances, as St. Paul intimates, it is difficult even for one to judge himself [R5902 : page 157] aright – difficult to know to what extent the New Creature has done all in its power to war a good warfare against the flesh, and to what extent the New Creature may have been partially excusable for some failure to come up to its highest ideals. St. Paul says, "It is a light thing that I should be judged of you or of any man, yea, I judge not mine own self. There is One that judgeth me." (1 Corinthians 4:3,4.) Sometimes the battle is so closely drawn, sometimes the New Creature is so beset by the world, the flesh and the Adversary, that his victory may seem to outsiders to be rather ignoble. God alone knows to what extent better results were possible.

Every Christian, however, has recognized that, if his heart has been faithful to the Lord and the victory has been only a partial one even, nevertheless valuable lessons have been learned by the New Creature, and its faithfulness and endurance have demonstrated its loyalty to the Lord and the principles of His righteousness, His government. We *would* be perfect; but we, as New Creatures, have this treasure in earthen vessels, and they are imperfect; hence our results are not satisfactory according to the flesh. They are satisfactory, however, to the Lord, if we are loyally striving for righteousness, laying aside weights and hindrances and seeking by every failure to make ourselves the stronger to endure further temptations, tests, trials.

The test of Jesus' character was humility, resignation to the Father's will in everything, even unto death, even the death of the cross. This demonstrated His love to the Father, His loyalty to the principles represented in the Father's character and government. These are the tests upon all the followers of Jesus. Whoever has this love and this loyalty is, to that extent, a copy of God's dear Son – not in the flesh, but in the spirit.

Let us all be fully agreed as to the grand perfection of character of the Heavenly Father and of our Savior and as to the fact that this heart-desire must be in us if we would have the mind of Christ. It is for the Lord to permit increasing trials and tests to come upon us as we grow older and stronger. Sometimes He permits a great fight from within or without, or both; and the New Creature is put to the test of endurance. It is not the Lord's intention that these trying experiences shall crush the New Creature; but, on the contrary, that the putting forth of endeavor to resist the Adversary and every evil shall make the New Creature the stronger. We have the promise, "He will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with every temptation provide a way of escape." – 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Thus it was with our dear Redeemer: At the very close of His ministry came His most severe tests, and He cried in an agony of spirit, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from [R5903 : page 157] Me." The triumph of the New Creature is shown in the succeeding sentence, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done." As with the Savior, so with the disciple – there is a struggle, a fight, to the end of the journey. With the Master every trial brought a victory. With His followers, because of their inherited weaknesses of the flesh, this is not so except as the Lord by His grace turns a partial defeat into a victory.

The New Creature, even partially defeated, is exhorted by the Apostle to come with courage to the Throne of Heavenly Grace, to obtain mercy and find grace to help for future needs. In doing this, he is doing what God intended and foreordained for him. But "if we say we have no sin [and as respects our flesh, no imperfection of act, word, thought] we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. [But] if we confess our sins [our shortcomings], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity." (1 John 1:8,9.) He is just, for this is His Plan. This is the arrangement He has made, that He might be just and yet be the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

In making this provision for the weaknesses of our flesh, God is not compromising with sin. And in accepting this provision, we as New Creatures are not compromising with sin, either. It is not the New Creature that sins. Its hopes, aspirations, desires are proper. But because of the weaknesses of the flesh and surroundings of evil, the New Creature cannot do all it would, but must be continually striving, attaining and setting its mark higher and higher, as clear knowledge of the Divine will is gained. This is fruit-bearing, character-development, acceptable in the Lord's sight through Jesus Christ, but not acceptable in any other way; for our very best endeavors are more or less blemished by the imperfections of our flesh.

Thus we perceive the necessity for our continuing under the robe of Christ's righteousness – wearing the wedding garment which He has provided – until our glorious "change" shall come, the resurrection change. Then we shall be through with our flesh and through with every provision which God has made for the covering of its blemishes; for we shall be New Creatures complete, spirit-bodied as well as spirit-minded. The Apostle emphasizes this, saying, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." We must all be changed. He explains the change, saying, "Sown in weakness, raised in power; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown an animal body, raised a spirit body." – 1 Corinthians 15:42-44.

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