# Godly Character

Character can be defined as what makes a person distinct from others, often with a particular emphasis on moral qualities. When we think of a person who has good character, we often describe them with terms like integrity, honesty, strong moral fiber, care and concern for others, and the like. Character is demonstrated in actions but true character resides in the heart.

Christian character begins with faith in Christ. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is what separates Christian character from mere civility or secular morality. There are many reasons for a person to do an outwardly good or moral act (Matthew 5:46-48; 6; 7:11). However, it is not solely the outward act that makes behavior godly, but the motive behind the act that matters. In Matthew 23:27–28 Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." True godliness includes both right action and right motive (Matthew 5—7). To have Christian character is to have a heart aiming to please and glorify God (1 Thessalonians 4:1; Colossians 3:23–24).

Christian character is the product of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who changes the believer's heart from a state of stone-hearted rebellion and unbelief to warm-hearted faith and love (Ezekiel 36:26). It is the Spirit of God dwelling in the believer's heart that produces a love for God and others, as well as a desire to deny sin and self in order to please God (Romans 5:5; Titus 2:11–12). It is the Holy Spirit that produces the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, long suffering, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). This fruit of the Spirit is what forms the foundation of true Christian character. Because Christian character is the result of the Spirit's work, it is forbidden and nonsensical to boast of it as if it were our own doing (Ephesians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 1:29–31). Christians are to boast not of our own righteousness, which does not exist, but of the righteousness of Christ which we have received through faith (1 Corinthians 1:30–31; Isaiah 64:6; Galatians 3:21–22).

Having said that, we are called to walk in the Spirit and not quench Him (Galatians 5:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Although it is the grace of God that produces good works in us, we are still called to work with and not against the Spirit. First Corinthians 15:10 says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder

than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." Because the Spirit of God lives in the Christian and provides the grace and power that make godly living possible, we are encouraged to make use of this great power (Philippians 2:12–13).

Second Peter 1:5–8 gives a list of things Christians should pursue that reflect godly character: "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Finally, God uses our life circumstances to exercise the grace and faith He has given to us, thereby causing us to grow in Christ-like character. One might say that Christian character is forged in the crucible of experience and affliction. Paul wrote in Romans 5:3–5, "Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." Similarly, in 1 Peter 1:6–7 Peter wrote, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

In summary, Christian character is not to be confused with mere morality. Christian character is made possible only through faith in Christ. The Spirit of God is responsible for creating and growing Christian character. Christians are called to work with and not against the Spirit in this endeavor. God uses circumstances to refine Christian character.