**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**Rolla, Missouri**

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**Marks of Great Character (Part 2)**

Last week on Bible Talk we began looking at some marks of great character, a character that pleases God.

Now when we talk about character, we are talking about what we really are. We mentioned last week there is a difference between CHARACTER and REPUTATION. Reputation is what others think of you. Character is what you really are. A good reputation should be important to us. It is something we should strive for. Proverbs 22:1 says, *“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold.”* To have the kind of name that when it is spoken it brings to peoples’ minds honesty, integrity, goodness. That is indeed wonderful. But the primary focus of our life is to build a great character -- the kind of character that pleases God. And if we will build for ourselves a character that pleases God, then our reputation will take care of itself. But to try to build a good reputation without the accompanying character is called hypocrisy.

Some people do not think that character matters. It seems that a lot of Americans do not think character matters when it comes to our political leaders. Some people think that competency and efficiency are more important in leadership than character. It is true that success as a leader does not require integrity and high moral standards. Many of the leaders of Nazi Germany who ordered the holocaust were very efficient and competent as leaders, but I don’t think we would characterize them as men of integrity and high moral standards. Competency and efficiency without great character will produce great evil. Character matters because character matters to God. Proverbs 11:3 says, *“The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them.”*

In this lesson we are talking about marks of great character. Last week we mentioned that a person of great character is just as concerned about doing right when he is all alone, as he is when he is in the presence of others. And a person of great character is one who admits his failures without any alibies or excuses.

Thirdly, a person is of great character when he lives up to his agreements, or if he is unable to do so he is straightforward with the one or ones who are affected. All of us enter into agreements, contracts. You buy a car (or a house), and you set up monthly payments, you have entered into an agreement. Or you may not sign a contract, but by word of mouth to someone you agreed to render a service. It is your word. You have entered into an agreement. When we enter into such an agreement what should we do? Proverbs 3:27-28 says, *“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give it,’ When you have it with you.”*

There are at least four possibilities of what could happen when we enter into an agreement. First, I could enter the agreement with no intention whatsoever of fulfilling the agreement. This is sin. It is lying. It is stealing. Secondly, I could fulfill the agreement to the letter. This is what the Lord wants me to do. This is a sign of great character. The third possibility is, after entering the agreement I may realize later that it was not to my benefit. I come to realize that it will cost me thousands of dollars. I have entered this agreement but it is to my hurt. What do I do then? One thing I could do is go to the person with whom I have made the agreement and say “I made a mistake. This decision was not helpful to me, and I should not have signed the agreement.” It is possible that He may release me from the agreement. That is forgiveness. If he chooses to do so, he has been gracious to me. But what if he does not release me from the agreement? Psalm 15:1 says, *“LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?”* Several ones are listed, and then in verse 4 it says, *“He who swears to his own hurt and does not change.”* A person who has a character that pleases God is one who fulfills his agreement even if it is to his own hurt.

A fourth possibility is that I enter into an agreement with the full intention, in good faith, to fulfill the agreement, but adversity strikes (I get sick, or I lose my job) and I am not able to fulfill the agreement. What do I do then? I should go to the person with whom I have made the agreement and speak with him truthfully and in a straightforward manner. I let him know that I am willing to make whatever sacrifices I can make to meet the agreement. I should do all I can to meet the agreement, and hopefully he will understand concerning what I am not able to do. We are talking about integrity. We are talking about honesty. I need to be straightforward and honest with the people with whom I do business. This is a mark of great character.

Now, many in the world around us think different about this matter. Some think that whatever is legal is ethical. But it is possible to be legal but still defraud your neighbor. It is legal for a man to cheat on his wife, but it is certainly not ethical. It is not what a person of great character will do. There are some who will do whatever, even if it is illegal, if he can get by with it. But Christians are not of the world. Paul says in Romans 12:2, *“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.”* We must fulfill our agreements if it is possible, and if it is not possible we are to be truthful and straightforward with the one or ones who are affected.

Fourthly, a person is of great character when he keeps his heart pure…when he is morally clean from the inside out. A person of great character is not only concerned about what people see of him on the outside, but he is also concerned about what God sees. We need to remember that God sees our hearts and is concerned about our hearts. In 1 Samuel chapter 16 we read of Samuel being sent by God to anoint one of Jesse’s sons to be king. When Samuel saw Jessie’s son, Eliab, he thought this is the Lord’s anointed. *“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’”* (1 Sam. 16:7). In Matthew 5:8 Jesus said, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.”* A person of great character is one who will strive to be pure in heart. Again, he is not only concerned about what people see on the outside, he is also concerned about what God sees on the inside. He genuinely wants to be what God desires of him from the inside out.

First he must keep evil out of his heart. Proverbs 4:23 says, *“Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.”* Therefore, he guards his heart from evil. He is concerned about what he watches on TV, and the movies he goes to see, the music he listens to and the books he reads. Why fill his heart with evil when he is trying to keep his heart pure? Now, he knows he will not be able to avoid all exposure to evil in the world, but he surely can control what comes into his home. He does not want evil to lodge in his heart. As someone has said, “You can’t keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can sure keep them from building a nest in your hair.” And then secondly, he will fill his heart with what is good. Philippians 4:8 says, *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things.”* One who is of great character will strive to keep his heart pure…to be morally clean from the inside out.

And then fifthly, a person is of great character when he does what is right as soon as he learns it is right. We must train ourselves to always do what is right. Ephesians 6:1 say, *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”*  Why should children obey their parents? Because it is right. A person of great character does what is right, because it is right.

And a person of great character does what is right as soon as he learns that it is right. He doesn’t wait until it is more convenient to do it. He doesn’t do it just when he feels like it. When he knows it is the Lord’s will and it is right, He doesn’t vacillate as to whether he is going to do it or not. He does it as soon as he learns it is right. In the book of Acts we read of people coming to see themselves as sinners and being told what to do to be saved from their sins. When they learned what they needed to do they did it immediately. When the Jews on the day of Pentecost heard the gospel preached, they were cut to the heart, recognizing they were sinners, and they wanted to know what to do. Pete told them what to do. He said, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* (Acts 2:38) In verse 40 it says, *“And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’”* Verse 41, *“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”* These Jews who learned what they needed to do to be saved obeyed that very day. They didn’t put if off to another day. In Acts 8:35-39 we read of Philip preaching Jesus to an Ethiopian eunuch. When the eunuch learned what he needed to do, he said, *“See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”*  He didn’t delay. He obeyed right then and there. Verse 38 says, *“So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.”* In Acts 16:29-34 we read of Paul and Silas preaching the word of the Lord to a Philippian jailer and his household. Verse 33 says, *“And immediately he and all his family were baptized.”* When they learned what they needed to do, they obeyed immediately. A person who is torn between two worlds (the devil’s and the Lord’s) and who is trying to live in both will rationalize his delays to obey. He will put it off because he really doesn’t want to obey. But the one who loves God with all his heart and who desires to please Him will obey as soon as he knows it is the God’s will for him to do so. That is a mark of great character.

We have been talking about marks of great character. A person of great character is one who will do what is right when he is all alone. He is one who will admit his failures without any alibies or excuses. He is one who lives up to his agreements, and if he is unable to do so he is straightforward with the one who is affected. He is one who keeps his heart pure. He strives to be clean from the inside out. He is one who does what is right as soon as he learns it is right. Are you of great character?

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