

Discipleship and Christian character

- 1) The development of Christian character ought to be the goal of every believing man, even if he does not aspire to become a deacon or an elder. ***Why is it biblical and reasonable that the Christian character described in Titus chapter one, and 1 Timothy chapter three should be the goal of each believing man?***
- 2) ***What are some of the advantages of a local church having a very clear, well-marked path to eldership, with guides, helpers, and mentors stationed at every point along the path?***
- 3) ***Explain why growth in Christian character is not merely for the purpose of achieving progress in personal sanctification, but that the man of God might more effectively serve Christ by diligently serving other believers in the Body of Christ.***
- 4) Christian character is to accompany the role to which every believing man is called—that is, to be *a spiritual influencer*. In other words, by one's life, character, words, and service, each believer is to be utterly intentional in nurturing the growth of the disciples around him. ***What are some of the ways you could be more intentional in edifying and influencing the disciples in your sphere?***
- 5) Christian character is central to faithfulness, for every believing man is a link in the chain of God's *truth transmission mechanism*. The faithful man of 2 Timothy is a steward of God's truth, in order to transmit that truth (2 Tim 1:13-14). ***What are some of the ways a layman can begin thinking in the above manner?***
- 6) ***Review from 2 Peter 1:3-11 the fact that growth in Christian character is the fruit of saving faith.*** Every true believer is a 'partaker of the divine nature', and is thus an 'escapee' from the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet 1:4). Our obedient response to these inestimable gifts is to pursue Christian character with all of our might (2 Pet 1:5-8). Here are some of the promises made to those who diligently cultivate Christian character: "For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. **Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you**" (2 Pet 1:9-11).
- 7) The development of Christian character is a life-direction based upon the intent and resolve to follow Jesus as His learner and disciple. Thus, the reason so many professing Christian men are lacking in Christian character is NOT because the

resources for these virtues are absent, but, because it has never been their life-altering intent to become a man of Christian character through loyal obedience to Christ. ***Address how discipleship would effectively deal with this immense lack.***

8) In our age of *selfism*'s ruthless independence and privacy, there is a deep tendency to imagine that the thoughts and desires of our inner world affect only ourselves. Not true, for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Lu 6:45). But, sinful desires can also prevent us from speaking what we ought to be speaking. By contrast, the believing man who is growing in Christian character is also developing a sensitivity to the fact that those around him are in great need of his holiness. In this sense, every genuine Christian man is an indispensable leader and an example. There are really no private, covert Christians. For, the believer, by his very profession of knowing personally the King of the cosmos, the Lord Jesus Christ, is saying by his Christian testimony and walk, 'My life, both public and private is a product of the miraculous grace of God in Christ.' ***Discuss the above in light of what Christ said about gathering with Him, or scattering from Him (Lu 11:23).***

9) The development of Christian character is necessarily joined to holy boldness. By contrast, hypocrites (men without Christian character) will not have the 'moral authority' which accompanies a holy life—in other words, they cannot, with a clear conscience, expose the sin around them that needs to be addressed and resolved by the gospel of Christ (Eph 5:8-11). ***Discuss the fact that as we pursue Christian character, we are striving to be the kind of man who can bring loving correction, can silence lies, and can bring the tools of gospel grace to those around us.***

10) The cultivation of Christian character is tied strongly to intentionality. In our age of spontaneity and immediacy, there is often little incentive to prepare the heart and set the affections before one is ever faced with temptation. 1 Peter 1:13-19 is a powerful cure for that tendency: "Therefore, **prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, 'YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.'** If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear **during the time of your stay *on earth***; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ.*" ***Discuss how the heart is prepared, and the necessity and role of a prepared heart in our obedience and in overcoming temptation.***

11) God's gracious redeeming call by His Spirit is a calling that will ultimately see every true believer conformed to the image of Christ: "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, **that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ**" (2 Thess 2:13-14). A genuine commitment to Christ is demonstrated in the controlling purpose to grow in Christian character. For, the Father's purpose is that each child of God be transformed to the image of Christ, so that in glory the Son of God might have His throne surrounded by 'brethren' made like Him in holiness (Rom 8:29). That transformation has begun now! Thus, is it any wonder that we must be proactive in this matter, and not fall into the trap of confusing grace with passivity? For, if we only emphasize what we have been *saved from*, and, seldom, if ever mention what we are *saved to*, (holiness) we may look at the mandate for Christian character as something which is optional. ***Discuss why God's grace and glory are a goad to holiness, not a pillow for passivity.***

12) No discussion of growth in Christian character would be complete if we did not discuss the following: 1) our resources in the Word of God, and from the indwelling Spirit of God. 2) our resources found in the fellowship of close relationships in the body of Christ. 3) our resources found in the spiritual disciplines. 4) our resources found in co-crucifixion with Christ (identification truths). 5) our resources found in caring disciplers. ***Discuss why it is absolutely vital for disciple-makers to help their disciples develop a working, appropriating knowledge of their spiritual resources (HINT: actively appropriating one's resources is necessary for spiritual growth, and for risking ministry).***