

Christian Character - a Qualification

by John Follette

The sermon emphasizes the importance of developing Christian character through discipline and the work of the Holy Spirit, distinguishing it from the gift of salvation.

Scripture: Matthew 22:11, Matthew 25:14, Acts 2:4, Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 4:13, 2 Peter 1:4, 1 John 3:2, Revelation 3:4, Revelation 19:7

Topics: "Christian Character", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Follette emphasizes the importance of Christian character in qualifying us for Christian living, distinguishing between the divine nature received through salvation and the ongoing development of Christian character through discipline, trials, and spiritual growth. He highlights the goal of salvation as conformity to God's image and likeness, not just reaching heaven, and the Holy Spirit's work in shaping believers into the image of Christ. Follette stresses that Christian character is not a gift but a product of training, discipline, and spiritual living, leading to a deeper fellowship with God and qualification for the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Transcript

We have been considering the subject of Christian character from several viewpoints. Let us think of it as qualifying us for Christian living, and trace its importance as suggested by some scriptures I shall read. Let us consider two pictures together--one from a positive, the other from a negative point of view.

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: For the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." Rev. 19:7, 8.

"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to his servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen." Matt. 22:11-14.

By way of suggestion, remember that the called are always referred to as saved people. The very word translated church means the called-out ones. Look up the references concerning called, calling, call, etc., and you will find they refer to saved people. Food for thought.

When we consider this subject we must at once remember the difference between the divine nature and Christian character. If we do not, there is confusion and much of the process of building life and the necessary discipline loses its significance. Only as we keep the difference in mind and see the need of building character are we able to interpret many of the disciplinary measures God permits to come our way.

The divine nature of which we are partakers (2 Peter 1 :4), the new creation, salvation, or new life (there are several terms to express it), that experience of salvation, is a free gift. God so loved the world, that He gave

We become recipients of the new life and nature by faith in the finished work of Christ for us. We become babes in Christ by a new birth (a gift of God). We neither merit it nor can we earn, buy or work for it. We receive it as a token of His love, grace and mercy. This new life of course is not fully developed in the individual, that is why we are called babes in Christ, and must grow. There are untold possibilities latent in the new creation and it is the desire of the Holy Spirit to develop them in the personality and life of the individual. For this reason He has baptized us in the Spirit and introduced us more fully into the life of the Spirit, and by His ministry and our co-operation He can lead the yielded heart into fuller and fuller revelation of Christ and His purpose.

The desire of God and the purpose of salvation are not merely to get a man saved and land him in heaven. The man's salvation is not unto heaven. (That is given to him as a place after death). Salvation is unto a conformity to God, His image and likeness. Remember, heaven is a condition before it is a location. Even if you consider heaven in purely material terms, as golden streets, etc., your power to enjoy, understand, and correctly fellowship there is first determined by condition. The disciples were very concerned about a material kingdom (which was right and will eventually come) but Christ corrected them and placed the emphasis where it belonged then and now. "The kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:21. Heaven is never spoken of as the goal of Christian living, but perfection of Christian character is, and is clearly taught by Christ. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Matt. 5:48. Note the position of this statement in the teaching and discourse of Christ.

The work of the Spirit today is the conforming, molding and shaping of the individual into the likeness and image of God. He is after Christian character. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." Rom. 8:29. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Cor. 3:18. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God (new birth, salvation), and it doth not yet appear what we shall be (the fuller development and growth of character)." 1 John 3:2. "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Eph. 4:13.

Here is where many Christians fail, losing sight of their objective in the technique, mechanism and method of trying to attain it. They become absorbed in the process and seemingly rest there and are defeated, not because they did not do but they did not relate the do with the objective. Do not be deceived, Christian character is never given as a gift. Righteousness is imputed to us on the basis of His redemption, but never Christian character--this is the product of training, overcoming, discipline, trial, hardship, and intensive spiritual living. I cannot work and earn salvation, but I can apply myself to intelligent and spiritual living and build-a character. He keeps the goal in mind (even when I fail to do so) and leads me through a thousand experiences to make in me a manifestation of His life. I cannot earn salvation, but by His grace I

can overcome and thus become Christ-like in life and character.

So let us keep this distinction in mind and not deceive ourselves by thinking because we have had certain genuine experiences, such as salvation, the Baptism in the Spirit, healing, or consecration, that any one or all can in themselves give us character. They are like a series of crises through which the Holy Spirit leads the hungry heart in its quest for truth. These experiences are open doors through which we pass (not one is finality). We must surrender to the purpose of the crisis--yield to the Holy Spirit and be taught and walk in the Spirit and possess our inheritance.

When we keep in mind the objective for the building of character and conforming to the likeness of God, we are able to understand more fully the movements of God in this dispensation. What He is doing in the life of the individual He is doing in His Body during this dispensation. If I hold any other goal or objective in mind, such as the establishment of His kingdom on earth, the redemption of the political chaos, "making the world safe for democracy !" or any other fine, good, religious-sounding scheme, I am at once confused and end in defeat. I cannot trace God in any of these schemes. They sound noble, mighty, uplifting and very religious, but they are not what God is doing just now. "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name." Acts 15:14. This is the work of the Spirit in this dispensation.

Some will at once get jittery now thinking I do not believe in the salvation of souls and evangelism. Do not fear. There is a place absolutely for salvation and evangelism in the plan of this age, but He is not planning in this dispensation to redeem the world and usher in the kingdom. Let both (wheat and tares) grow together until the harvest. However, He does want the note of the evangel to sound, clear and strong, to the ends of the earth (as a witness). That is why I am a lover of all missionary work. It is so genuinely Scriptural. The evangelist is needed to bring in fresh material, new-born babes for the body--all for building. The world is so needy. Let us be thankful for any and every agency He can bless today in bringing broken humanity to God.

God is making a man. He is building a race. Look at Eph. 4:11-13. "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Note the teaching here. The purpose is quite evident from verse 12, "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," etc. Here we find all the gifts to the church as named are unto the perfecting of the body. All move unto a new man. It is clearly shown that it is the perfecting and maturing of the body He is after. Perfection here, or the word perfect, does not mean sinless perfection but rather being full-grown and mature.

I know people at times are annoyed at me for bringing this phase of truth to our attention. I have noticed so many times in meetings where they were all saved and nearly all baptized, the service moves nearly always along evangelistic lines, even when they are all saved. This is no doubt due to tradition, custom, and religious habit. The dear saints have been told that beautiful story from so many angles they wonder if there can be anything MORE in the Bible for them now that they are saved. This practice I am sure is not balanced. Count up the meetings for the children of God, the saints--meetings of instruction, illumination, correction, building and feeding. I am very sure you do not strike a balance. Now be honest! Do not ask me to maintain a balance when there is none, please. Surely the sinner needs salvation--but O the body of Christ--weak, torn, undernourished, and so feeble!

"Is there no message for us?" so many ask me. I wish some of you could hear the confession of need and the cry for food some saints (saved and baptized for years and fine workers too) pour into my ears. God placed a basket on my arm and also put something into that basket. Then He said, "Go out now and feed My sheep." So that is all I hope to do--share with you truths which have taken hold of me and revolutionized my life. My burden is for the sheep. In my heart I can hear them cry and bleat. Why do we find dozens of evangelists to one teacher who can feed ?

Let us turn to the text quoted from Rev. 19:7, 8. Here we find teaching about the Second Coming--but the picture is rather unusual. It is so different from the pictures usually given when one preaches on the Second Coming. As a rule the message revolves about the external aspect--dealing with the national and prophetic phases, the signs of the times, the return of the Jews, the restoration of the Roman kingdom, etc. But here we find a picture relating to His return and touching upon the most vital point as God sees it. We are called upon to rejoice and be glad. Why? Is it because the Jews have at last all returned to Palestine? because the Roman empire has taken more definite form ? because all the signs at last do focus properly? No, strange to say, although all these are accompanying features--the real feature is, "and His wife hath made herself ready.

From this text it looks as though He will come when He has something ready to come for. "Be ye also ready.' It is a question of readiness, fitness. Look at the next verse and find why she was ready. In what does this fitness consist? "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." The preparedness relates to a garment. I will read it as it is given in the Greek and as rendered in the Revised Version. "And it was given unto her to array herself in fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints," or as some translations give it, the righteous conduct of the saints.

Here is a beautiful and Scriptural illustration of the truth I am teaching. Salvation is always a gift, while character (a privilege granted) is a result of co-operation in building and arraying. We see at once this is not a garment of salvation--this is very evident. The garment of salvation was wrought out (or woven) on the loom of Calvary by Christ our Lord. He worked out the finished act of redemption; He made the garment of salvation. We never could. We had absolutely nothing to do with it it was His work, noble, profound, and eternal. Amen!

In this text it says, It was granted her--a privilege--to array herself. It was something she could accept or reject--to array herself--something she could do. When we were saved it was Christ who put the garment of salvation upon us. It was Christ who made the garment and Christ who put it upon us. We stood still--poor helpless sinners. But here is a wedding garment which we weave. It says distinctly the linen is the righteous acts of the saints. No righteous act of the saint ever made a garment of salvation. It says here it is the garment of a saint. (He is not talking about sinners, but the bride). It was her readiness, fitness, preparedness, qualifications which gave her this position. She has all the necessary training and equipment in character to move in this capacity and to hold this lofty place. She has passed all the tests and holds the qualifications necessary for this heavenly, spiritual, holy and sacred union. She is not a stranger to the atmosphere of this place--she speaks the language of the Bridegroom. She has learned.

This garment speaks dearly of preparation. It is a process, not a gift. How does one get it? He does not get it by going to the altar and saying, "I will now take a wedding garment," or "I will now take a Christian character." That is quite impossible. But he may at the altar offer himself as a candidate for this lofty place and submit himself to the Spirit for the necessary discipline and training to qualify for it. Then will the Holy

Spirit take him in hand and train him by way of the many experiences through which he is asked to go.

When we see this truth it helps us to RELATE (what a difficult thing) the many phases of service, the gifts, ministries, conduct, and LIFE as God sees them all--acting upon us. The whole scheme of life is reactionary. We are by creation reacting agents and God works from that point of understanding. All is unto the building, the arraying in fine linen (the righteous conduct of the saints).

For a moment, keeping this line of truth in mind, review the story of the talents. Matt. 25:14-30. Did you ever notice what the man who gave the talents really was after ? Be careful here and do not clutter your picture with all the pounds gained--you will miss the point. It was the commendation, not the works. The works were there and necessary but wholly for the reaction found in the user of the talents. Look at verse 21. "His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Let us stop there now. Three commendable character-qualities had been wrought out in this man's life. Well done---not how much done. The quality, not quantity. Good servant--Godlike. A quality of Godlikeness is found in him. Faithful servant --another qualification. No word as to the magnitude or extent of work. That was all a means unto an end. The end was the training of the man.

Listen. "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." You see it was qualification which made that possible. He was already a servant (not a sinner). The gifts and ministries are so alluring and captivating to some souls that they forget that a/l this, even tongues, shall pass away--but the likeness and character of Christ etched upon the immortal spirit abideth forever. Amen! The gift of salvation never qualifies a soul to reign and rule with Christ. Crowns are not given as souvenirs--they are won.

So in the picture of the Bride, she hath arrayed herself, made herself ready. Surely not for salvation--she is already saved and wears a garment of salvation. But she is now able to enter into the deeper reaches of fellowship with the Son. It is not a question of God's loving one soul more than another. He is not a respecter of persons--all may qualify if the soul so desires. It was granted unto her--a privilege. What could thrill a soul more or stimulate love and devotion to our adorable Lord than such a glorious experience ? The new creation is made for the highest heaven may offer--then why not yield, and let life and all go under the leading yoke of the Spirit and let Him conform us ?

At once I know some are saying, "Ah! That is all too selfish, self-centered, and not as aggressive as we should be." I have heard that for years--but like Paul, "none of these things move me." In the year 1908, when God wonderfully baptized me in the Holy Spirit, He gave me understanding as to His desire and purpose along this line. And had it not been for the faithfulness of the Spirit to keep me true to that vision I should have been swept off my feet or completely discouraged. He keeps me under the power of the truth He gave then--absolute surrender, death to the old creation, the overcoming life, the spiritual life in a new creation, qualification for the fellowship of Christ in a new age, etc. In the meantime all my service, teaching and ministry have been means unto an end. It has mattered very, very little to me the form, size, and general display of the service I undertake--but the growth in the knowledge and wisdom of Christ has kept to the foreground.

It seems that only as one swings wholeheartedly into the meaning of qualifying and training is he swung free of the binding that too often comes with too intense and feverish attitudes of service.

God is not so concerned with how much we may do for Him, as He is with the question, What has all the service done to us in its reaction upon our nature and spirit? Has it all reacted in developing the man or

woman into the person of faith, strength, love, and yieldedness He so desired to find ? Did all the man did really mellow, subdue and conform that man into the new creature God wanted? According to our creation we are reacting agents and God is wonderfully interested at this point. What is all my conduct and ministry doing to this strange personality? It is continually registering upon my immortal spirit and weaving a garment. Shall it be a wedding garment?

Now let us turn to the story given in Matthew 22. Here is a man without a wedding garment. As a rule this story is used to represent a sinner trying to move in the realm of salvation without the garment of salvation. But let us look at it more carefully. Get the setting of the story correctly. This chapter is so important in its relation to what precedes and follows. The public ministry of Christ has covered a period of three years and in a few days He will offer His life in a sublime testimony by a vicarious death. As never before it seems He is anxious to present to His nation the offering of God's grace, mercy and truth. And never before has the Jewish hierarchy shown more malignant opposition. On His way to Jerusalem He speaks several parables, all of which were to show them the supreme folly of rejecting Him as their Messiah.

We must remember that the parable has a double application: First, to the Jew as a body at His first advent; second, to the church at His second advent. So often preachers and teachers and evangelists are not careful or perhaps brave enough to make the application where it belongs. Sometimes tradition causes it too. How often the portions of Scripture containing teaching, admonition, correction or warning for the Christian (because it is not pleasing) is turned over either to the sinner or to the Jew ! The poor Jew has his plate full now of scriptures some do not know just what to do with. It is convenient to have the sinner around to give certain bits of Scripture which might upset smug theology or tradition. This picture does not relate to a sinner, as we shall see. He is giving truth for the saint--only it is not so pleasing.

Just as in the first application where we find the Jews (because of their own doings) made themselves unworthy of the kingdom, so at His second advent when the marriage supper is due, there are elements in the saved group who by their lack of preparation and qualification are unworthy of the fellowship and privilege offered in the picture of the marriage feast, etc. The analogy is here very dear. There are many Christians today who refuse the necessary discipline and training needed to qualify, while there are others who embrace the cross and suffer the loss of all things that they may satisfy the desire of God in getting a Bride worthy of the Son's fellowship. Note the word of the king, Friend. He is not talking to a sinner about his sins. He says, Friend. John 15:14. Ye are my friends.... Sinners are never spoken of as friends; they are rebels. He does not rebuke or chide the man about his sins--it is rather a point of place or position. How camest thou in hither? Place, location!

The garment again speaks of character, and fitness. He had no fitness or adequate degree of fellowship and understanding to move in the sphere of a wedding feast and all that this type suggests. He had no garment--no qualifying attributes to adapt himself to the order of life suggested.

And note too he is not cast into hell, sheol, gehenna, or the pit. Outer darkness, is the word. Some may ask, "What is the outer darkness?" You will find Jesus using the same term in Matt. 8:12. Here it does not refer to hell, the pit or gehenna, etc. He is speaking of the lack of faith and appreciation on the part of the Jews (the children of the kingdom). And because of their refusal to accept and move into the kingdom of heaven (verse 11) they are cast out into outer darkness. Any one knows that when the Jews refused to accept Christ and the kingdom they were not cast into hell or the pit. But they were turned into outer darkness where they are today. As far as Christianity is concerned, and the kingdom Christ came to set up

in the hearts of men, they are in outer darkness. They are denied (by their own choice and doing) the privilege and fellowship of the kingdom.

The term is used again by Jesus in the story of the talents and servants (not sinners) Matt. 25:30. The sinner has no talent or pound for which he must some day give an account. But the servant (the Christian) has. In this story the reward (verse 21) was a privilege of ruling (because he had qualified) and also the joy of the Lord. The unprofitable servant (not sinner) because he had not qualified and had No results to show at the reckoning, was cast into outer darkness. He was not burned up but he lost the reward of ruling and the joy of the Lord. He was excluded from the special fellowship which he might have had had he trained and educated himself for it.

So from the teaching of Jesus, outer darkness does not mean hell or the pit but rather the LOSS and denial of a great privilege. The Jews are alive today, not in a pit, but they are in outer darkness, because they refused Christ. The glory and joy of the marriage feast is light. They are excluded from it or rejected.

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain." 1 Cor. 9:24. (Note one does not run for salvation---it is not a prize. He runs because he is saved and is after a prize---the real goal.) If he is cast into the pit to be burned up, why bind him hand and foot? Here we find him in outer darkness and bound. The hands represent service. He is not qualified to serve in this realm. He may know service in the natural, religious life and service in the sphere of the flesh (natural and to some quite wonderful) but he does not know spiritual ministry--so is bound. The feet represent the walk. He may have traveled thousands of miles in the energy and power of the natural life, and fairly exhausted himself. But he does not know the "walk in the Spirit." That was always too demanding and restricting for him. He may have walked all around the Lord but not with Him. So his feet are bound. He has no power to enter into such fellowship as is suggested by the picture. And alas! He might have had. What a mercy he is cast out. God is yet kind to him not to subject him to the embarrassment and confusion of face to find himself TRYING to fit in where he has absolutely no qualifications. It would not be love for a principal of the High School to take a fourth or fifth grade child and place him in a class of university students. That would not be love. God does no such cruel things. We are now qualifying, and God will place each soul in the realm for which he has fitted himself.

Can you imagine the disappointment and ache in the heart of Jesus to find in that day that so many have not valued His deepest fellowship enough to cultivate and build a life for it here and now ? God does not arbitrarily say, "You go to heaven; you go to hell. You reign over ten cities; you are cast out. You may enjoy the kingdom; but you can't come in." That is silly and very unscriptural. Each soul determines his own destiny. The sinner goes to hell because he so chooses. The saint has or has not the rewards of fellowship and future association because he either does or does not desire it. The carnal Christian even though baptized in the Spirit may be saved, but miss the reward and glorious privilege Christ holds out for him.

He that is spiritual suffers the loss of all things that he may know Christ in the deeper and fuller relations. His garment is the Christian character wrought in him by the Spirit as he surrenders. "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white: For they are worthy." Rev. 3:4.

Do not confuse the gift of salvation with character. No one experience can change you so you are thus qualified. The prize is given to him that overcometh--not to him that is saved, or baptized, or is a great

worker. Look at Rev. 2:7, 17, 26, and Rev. 3:12, 21. All this relates to the saints overcoming and thus qualifying--not to a sinner's getting saved.

In the face of this message there comes a challenge to any Spirit-filled saint. Could God hold out to us a more lofty and glorious life ? One encouraging feature I find among spirit-filled folk is the hunger and desire on the part of so many for something more than the initial teaching of salvation, Acts 2:4, and the general line of truth given to babes in Christ. God has given us a wonderful and more responsible message. By His grace let us enter more fully into the power of its meaning. These are preparation days and He is AFTER Us---His people.

We are looking to Him and long for His return but remember the scripture, And His wife hath made herself ready. The days are trying and God is leading His own into trials and testings and is faithfully disciplining the souls who dare and love Him enough to die and let go the natural, thus to live in Him and discover the joy and wonder of a walk with the adorable Lord.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-follette/christian-character-a-qualification/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net