RETROSPECTIVE REFLECTION ON BUILDING AND SUSTAINING CHARACTER

Introduction

Character is defined as the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual. One's character defines his personality, nature, mentality, qualities, traits, spirit, identity, feelings etc. Character is what defines you as a person.

Most of the times character and reputation are used interchangeably but it is not supposed to be like that because reputation is what people think of you based on how you portray yourself to them while character is who you really are.

When someone is said to be courageous and at some point runs away from a situation, people will wonder and say, "that is not the way we know him". And some would not believe that he backed off from a situation because according to them, that is his not character that defines that particular person in such circumstances.

As Christians, our character matters a lot. If we are to have an impact on the society, we need to be exemplary and without questionable character. Without having a Godly character, we cannot enter heaven and we cannot advance the great commission.

God Looks for Character in Us

Exodus 4:14 reads;

Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.

God uses our character to advance his goals on humanity. He used Moses because of his courage, confidence and boldness. But Moses was not fluent. So when it was clear that Moses would not be able to speak fluently, God had to look for someone who was fluent and it was Aaron as read in the verse above.

Similarly, the angel of the Lord described Gideon as a mighty warrior. God chose Gideon as a judge because he had perfected his fighting skills and became a great warrior. He was the right man at that particular time to lead the Israelites

The above topic, Building and Sustaining Character, suggest that character is built and after being built, must be sustained. As a Christian, you need to build a character that God can use like the way he used Aaron. If Aaron wasn't fluent, God could have chosen someone else. If Gideon had not perfected his skills to become a perfect

warrior God could have found someone else to use. Our prayer should be that whenever God seeks certain characters, we should be the one possessing such characters.

We might have lost opportunities whereby God wanted to use us but we lacked the character that God was looking for. Some of us we might have missed promotions because we have not perfected our skills at work and believe that with prayer God will bless us and we will "receive". God does not look for people who He needs to work on before He assigns them. These are the last days and God is looking for people who are passionate about Him and have perfected their character. These are the ones that ready for use at any time.

And for those that are parents, the question is, what is the character of your child? Are you building a character that is Godly? For the rest of us the question is: what is the character in us that is pleasing before God to the extent that He can use us? It is high time we got serious about preparing ourselves not only for the bride, Jesus Christ, but also for our availability to be used by God.

Godly Character vs Wicked Character

Wicked Character

2 Timothy 3:2 – 4 reads;

> *People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, **3** without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, **4** treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.*

If you look at the characters that have been mentioned in the above verse, they are all characters that are associated with the body. To understand the wicked character we must first look at how a human being operates.

A human being is a spirit that has a soul and lives in a body. The spirit part of man is the image of God. The soul is where our love, intellect, intelligence, hatred, memory etc. lies. The body is the one that is connected to the world directly through the five sense.

God communicates with us through our spirit. The devil communicates with us through the body (five senses). Both communications go to the soul where the mind is. This is where a decision is made. Now, if your soul is controlled by the spirit, your decision will be Godly but if your soul is controlled by the flesh, your decision will be worldly.

So if someone portrays the characters that are mentioned in the above verse, it means that his soul is being controlled by the flesh or the flesh has some influence on his soul when it comes to that particular character. As such, if one wants to change character, he must first get rid of the flesh so that the soul is controlled by the spirit.

Wicked character will always be at the door steps because the Bible says in the last days people will be lovers of evil. So as a Christian, the first thing to acknowledge and accept is that we are in the last days and wicked character is amidst us. I thank God that I was born in a time such as this because God knows I will make it and will make a difference in this world. You too should feel likewise. It takes the grace of God and discipline for Christians to ignore ungodly character and carve Godly character.

For us, each one of us, we must ask ourselves, how do I treat others? How do I treat myself? How do I look upon myself? How am I quick to portray a bad character than good? Do people feel aggrieved by my character?

Sources of Wicked Character

1 Corinthians 15:13 reads;

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

Most of the times Christians tend to be casual. During my Master's Degree classes in South Africa, every Friday evening the class was organising a party and usually it will be at a bar or on campus but lots of beer. I have never attended. People have persuaded me and labelled me anti-social or someone who does not associate with others. I asked one of them, can you join me at church on Sunday? He said, I will be very tired and busy. I said, it means you are anti-social and do not want to associate with others. As Christians, we must be disciplined to know what to allow and accept. Bad company will always corrupt our good character hence we must always be guarding our good character in readiness for the bride, Jesus Christ.

Similarly when it comes to marriage, I will get this one with bad character and I will convert her/him. Do you have any powers to convert someone? That is God's job. After all, the Great Commission calls us to preach/teach and make them disciples **and not** marry them and make them disciples.

In Hebrew, character is *ethos* which means moral habits. Corrupt is *phtheiro* which means to ruin, spoil, defile and wither. The term corrupt in English can refer to being affected partially but if you go to the original word, Hebrew, you get the real meaning.

Godly Character

Galatians 5: 22 -23 reads;

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

In agreement with the above, Colossians 3: 12 – 15 reads;

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

The above verses explain to us what Godly character is all about. Our character is tested when things are wrong or when we are under pressure. Assuming you are late for an exam and someone bumps into you and you fall down. What will be your reaction? Will you be able to control yourself? If you cannot then you must work on self-control. Or for those looking for a job, imagine you are late for an interview and someone tries to do something annoying that will delay you, what will be your response? It is our response or reactions in such moments that define our true character.

There are many sources of wicked character but the purposes of this topic, company will be the only referred to source. Our passion for bad things can also be a source of wicked character.

Building Character

Romans 5:3-5 reads;

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

And 2 Peter 1:6 reads;

And in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness.

Finally James 1:3 reads;

Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

Most of the times as Christians we have looked at sufferings negatively because we tend not to look beyond our present moment. The Bible says we must glory in our sufferings. Why? The answer is: Sufferings produces perseverance. Now, we need perseverance because in our Christian walk we meet challenges of different kinds. Without perseverance, we will not be able to contain and overcome challenges as we will always be weak, a walk over for the devil. And the Bible says perseverance produces character. Now this is where we need to understand, without sufferings and perseverance, there is no character. Putting it in a simple manner we can put it like this, if you are a promiscuous person, each time you see someone attractive you tend to be tempted to the point of succumbing to the temptation. So when you resist the temptation, you are actually persevering. And upon resisting the temptation for a number of times, the temptations fall off because you have conquered through perseverance. At the end of the end of the day, your character changes from that of being a promiscuous person to a non-promiscuous person.

Similarly, when you are going through a financial crisis, it might be that God is trying to deal with something in your life that could have compromised your future financial success or your holiness. At the end of the day, when you have persevered, your life changes and your character too changes.

Iron Ore that has impurities goes through a blast furnace where it is heated to the maximum so that the impurities are taken off. At the end of the day you get pure iron that is fit for use. As a Christian, you must go through the blast furnace so that all the impurities are taken off and you become fit for usage by God. Similarly when harvesting sugar canes they set the sugar canes field on fire so that all the unwanted vegetation, snakes etc. are out of the fields. The result is that the sugar concentration in the canes increase and the field is free of any contamination. This makes the harvesting process easier. The sufferings increases the concentration of our love for God in our lives. It becomes easy for God to use us because the unwanted characters in us would have been removed.

As Christians, we must strive to build Godly character. We must thus glory in the trials and tribulations that we go through as they are beneficial for our spiritual growth.

Sustaining Character

Upon building character, one must sustain it. Some people might fake their characters but at some point, they will be unlucky and their true character will be exposed. It is

common these days that we tend to hide our character in many ways. Some of us we do that by being visible and active at church or fellowships. We are quick in doing charitable work publicly so that we market ourselves as someone who is having Godly characters.

Luke 8:18 reads;

For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

And Proverbs 27:19 reads,

As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man.

One of my professors once gave an example of him driving beyond the 120Km/hr speed limit because it was at night and there was no one on the road. His daughter asked him why he was over speeding, he replied, it is because there is no one on the road and it is late at night. The daughter then asked him, did you not say we must adhere to values and rules despite no one watching us? The gentleman realised that his true character has been exposed and he had to slow down. It is difficult to sustain fake character. As the Bible says in the above two verses, nothing can be hidden and truly whoever we are will always reflect.

Character that has gone through the due process of sufferings and perseverance sustains itself because it is the true character. Iron if placed under the same heat like in the stage of heating iron ore in the blast furnace, will not melt because initially it was melting due to the impurities that were in the ore. It is stronger now as pure iron than earlier as iron ore which has impurities.

We must wear the armour of God to sustain our character. We must stand firm on the word of God for us to sustain our character. We must spend more time in prayer. Finally we must avoid bad company. Let us flee from the devil.

Remember, we plunder hell in order to populate heaven. We touch heaven in order to change earth. Nsungwi ikhale nsungwi, nzimbe ikhale nzimbe (Undiluted Gospel).