

ELEMENTS OF A NOBLE CHARACTER

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"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Genesis 39:9b.

"Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt." Exodus 3:10.

"Be strong and of good courage." Joshua 1:6a.

Young people today face a chaotic world. The nations are in commotion. Our time is characterized by rapid and radical changes. This is an age of uncertainty, uneasiness, instability, and confusion. Men and nations are groping their way in the deepening shadows cast by the gravest problems with which civilization has ever been confronted. To the timid and the fearful the outlook is appalling, but to the resolute and the courageous the prospect is challenging.

Why is society in such a critical condition? It is not on account of the lack of resources, either financial or natural. Neither is it for lack of knowledge, initiative, or industry. The deficiency is that of the right sort of manhood and womanhood. The problem is a moral and spiritual one. The world is in the mire today because of the bankruptcy of character. Its primary need is that of moral and spiritual strength.

Each of us has the privilege of making a contribution to the progress of humanity. One of the greatest contributions we can make is that of a noble and godly character. What elements of character are needed today?

I. Confidence. Genesis 12:4a.

"Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him." Real confidence is one of the foundation stones of character. Confidence is exemplified in Abraham. He is a spiritual giant after all these centuries. With the passing years his influence increases rather than diminishes. He has been called the friend of God. Millions pay tribute to him for one reason, and that is, he was a great believer. He had faith in spite of terrible odds. His faith called him to venture out in great undertakings. He became a great achiever. All great achievers are great believers.

Abraham made of life an illustrious adventure. Life is a series of adventures. All that lies between the cradle and the grave is an adventure. Every voyage of discovery, every friendship, every advance in industry, every experiment in freedom, every movement for reform, every investigation of science, and every approach to an ideal of truth and justice has its unpredictable elements. It is an adventure just to live, to go through the mysterious years, to meet life's joys and trials, its branching roads, its opening and closing doors.

What a gorgeous adventure the Christian life is! It is the adventure of adventures. It is an adventure at the beginning. Faith is a great adventure of the soul. All the way through the Christian life is an adventure. Think of Abraham, something tugging at his heart, pulling him out in search of final and ultimate truth, making battle triumphantly with the giants of temptation, now overcome, beginning again, become in the end a founder of a new faith and the religious teacher of mankind.

Youth needs the confidence and faith that God is ruling the universe. It is not ruled by fate or blind chance. Men do not make progress in the broken-down vehicle of unbelief. There is no power in what you do not believe. Oliver Wendell Holmes said:

"It is faith in something and enthusiasm about something which makes a life worth looking at." Unbelief, wandering in darkness pathetically exclaims, "I cannot find my way, there is no star." Faith says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

II Timothy 1:12. In despair the disillusioned cry out, "Life is a long headache in a noisy street." One trusting God said, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Romans 8:37. The voice of faith says, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."
I John 3:2.

Youth needs confidence in Truth and in Right. All of us will do well to believe that there are fundamental things of life which are imperishable and of priceless value. All good things are deathless. Trickery and deceit and dishonesty may gain the victory of the hour, but we must still believe in the ultimate triumph of right.

"I know that right is right;
That it is not good to lie;
That love is better than spite,
And a neighbor than a spy.

In the darkest night of the year,
When the stars have all gone out,
That courage is better than fear,
And faith is truer than doubt.

And fierce though the fiends may fight,
And long though the angels hide,
I know that truth and right
Have the universe on their side.

Cling to confidence in God and in Right. Through faith Abraham became the friend of God, the leader of men, and a beacon light in history. We shall do well to walk in his way.

II. Cleanliness. Genesis 39:9b.

"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" This is certainly an element of a noble character. Cleanliness of thought, of word, and of life are indispensable elements of the character that endures. I know of no better illustration of this fact than Joseph, the young Hebrew officer in Egypt. Through integrity and industry this young man rapidly gained promotion. Then into his life suddenly came the temptation to impurity. To his would-be seductress he replied, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Thus Joseph chose imprisonment rather than participation in impurity; to be falsely accused rather than to live falsely.

Today we often make the mistake of confusing liberty and license. They are the very opposites. It is through obedience to the highest laws of life that we find true freedom, and it is by uncontrolled living that one comes to bondage. We must be on guard constantly against compromise with low ideals and low standards. To live by the philosophy of, "When in Rome do as the Romans do," leads to moral disaster. We must not shape our character according to the dictum of the crowd. Our generation has thrown off restraint and self-discipline, and we are reaping the inevitable results. Across the courthouse in Worcester, Massachusetts, the slogan, "Obedience to law is liberty," is engraved in large letters. Disobedience to the laws of God is bondage; obedience to His laws leads to the largest liberty. Whatever you do, do not confuse liberty with license.

This battle for cleanliness of thought and act is one of life's severest struggles. But failure here mars every other victory of life. The secret of a clean life is found

in gaining the victory first in the heart and mind. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." "As we think and desire, so will we be."

Be loyal to the royal within you. You are a single link between the generations before you and those who will come after you. Do not be a rotten link in that chain.

III. Consecration. Exodus 3:10.

"Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt." Thus God challenged Moses to devote his life to an unselfish and arduous task. He challenged him to a service that was fraught with many dangers. There was a mighty conflict in the soul of Moses that day. He was called on to change the plans of his life, and to give himself, his talents, and his training to what seemed to be a hopeless cause. Moses could think of so many excuses for not going at God's command. So can we when we are confronted with a call for unselfish and sacrificial service.

A great need was presented to Moses -- a people to be led from bondage into freedom. His task was to transform a multitude of slaves into a nation dedicated to God's purposes. When he said "yes" to God that day, Moses gained a great victory on the battlefield of his soul. From that day he devoted his life to the cause of his fellowman. The people who have a place in our hearts today are the ones who went beyond the narrow confines of self-centered programs and invested their lives in some hard and unpopular cause.

Recall the casket scene in the "Merchant of Venice." There were three caskets, one of lead, one of silver, and one of gold. One of them contained the picture of Portia. The lover who chose that one would be rewarded with the hand of Portia herself. The inscription on the golden casket is, "Who chooses me shall gain what many men desire." The inscription on the silver casket is, "Who chooses me will get as much as he deserves." The inscription on the leaden casket is, "Who chooses me must give and hazard all he hath." The key to the motto is found in the second verb of each inscription. The first is, "shall gain," which is an appeal to cupidity. The second is, "will get," which is an appeal to vanity. The third is "must give and hazard," which is an appeal to the soul that is capable of self-sacrifice. It is the person who responds to the last challenge who always wins the best in life.

You who are at the age of service are in one of the neediest times of the world's history. The crying need of the hour is for people of godly character.

Some years ago a boy living on an isolated farm in Wisconsin was taken dangerously ill. A man with a team of horses was sent to get the nearest doctor as soon as possible. When the doctor arrived he was taken to the room where the sick boy lay. Anxiously the father and mother awaited his decision. In that room there was another person who was greatly distressed. He was the brother of the sick boy, a little fellow who hid behind the furniture and looked on.

After examining the sick boy and giving him some medicine, the doctor turned to the father and mother and said, "Have no fear, he is going to get well." The little fellow behind the furniture could not see the doctor, but he could see the faces of his parents, and he never forgot the flood of light that came into their faces when the doctor said, "Have no fear, he is going to get well." The boy felt that he could worship the man who brought such relief to his parents, and he resolved that when he became a man he would do things which would bring light to people's faces.

That lad fulfilled those resolutions for he became the famous Doctor Rosenow of the Mayo Clinic, one of the greatest bacteriologists of modern times. His contribution to the cure of infantile paralysis, as well as various other contributions which he has made to the science of medicine, has brought light into the faces of thousands of people.

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IV. Courage. Joshua 1:6a.

"Be strong and of good courage." Facing a conquest which involved risks and hardships, Joshua knew that fortitude was essential to victory. "Be strong and of good courage."

Much talent is lost because of the lack of courage. Nothing great has been achieved except by the display of courage. Our times demand courage enough to resist the wrong and persist in the right. We must have courage if we are to meet our personal problems, our difficulties, and our handicaps. The majority of the greatest benefactors of the human race have been greatly handicapped. William Shakespeare was the son of a bankrupt butcher and a woman who could not write her name. Beethoven's mother was a consumptive and his father was a confirmed drunkard. Schubert had a peasant father and a mother who was a domestic servant. Michael Faraday was born over a stable. His father was an invalid blacksmith and his mother was a drudge. Michael began his education by selling papers on the streets of London. Louis Pasteur, who was the greatest Frenchman, was the son of a tanner. If you would build a noble character you must have strength and guidance from above.