

# Character

The word character is defined as “the combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person, group, or thing from another” (AHD 259). Christians are known to have a ‘distinguishing’ character from that of the world. We often refer to this as being “sanctified” (cf. I Cor. 1:2). What is it that distinguishes the true Christian from the world? What distinguishes a true teacher from a pseudo teacher? We are hearing more and more from brethren who say that we cannot judge a man’s character, yet these same brethren tell us that the Christian is sanctified (distinguished) from the world. Why is it that we can make a judgment of the character of the world yet when it comes to making a judgment on the character of an erring brother in Christ it suddenly becomes impossible? This short article will examine the idea of character in the Word of God. The purpose will be to illustrate that truth is the standard whereby all men are judged to have good or bad character. The definition of the word character demands a judgment be made regarding the “qualities or features that distinguish one person from another.”

## The spirit of man

The Word of God has much to say about the spirit of man. The word spirit can refer to one’s mind (thinking) (II Cor. 2:13; 7:1; Eph. 4:23), disposition (Isa. 57:15; I Cor. 2:12; 4:21; Eph. 2:2; I Jn. 4:6), one’s character (I Cor. 6:17; II Cor. 4:13; 7:1; Eph. 1:17; II Tim. 1:7; I Pet. 3:4), and one’s teaching (II Cor. 11:4; I Jn. 4:1, 6). Collectively, these terms identify who or what a man is inwardly. Christians do not have the power to read others hearts; however, we can know what is within a man when his mind, disposition, character, and teaching comes to be known (cf. Matt. 7:20). Once the inward spirit of a man is made known I am to make righteous judgments (Jn. 7:24). The apostle John said that we are to “prove the spirits” as opposed to “believing every spirit” (I Jn. 4:1). To “prove” (dokimazo) is to “test metals, to see if they be pure... of persons, to put to the test, make trial of, scrutinize then, to approve” (LS 208). My judgment will be on another’s “spirit” (i.e., their character, mind, teaching, and disposition). I will make the judgment based on the standard of God’s word (I Jn. 4:6). That which distinguishes the Christian from the non Christian is an individual’s stand in truth. A false teacher is distinguished from a true teacher by what they teach (Matt. 16:11-12). If I cannot judge one’s teaching I cannot judge one’s character. If I cannot judge one’s character I am hopelessly doomed to be a spiritual child who is “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind or doctrine...” (Eph. 4:14).

## There is one standard

We are hearing that to judge one’s character as false is to make the assessment that he/she is “crafty” (Eph. 4:14), “covetous, denying the Master etc.” (II Pet. 2:1ff). Why do you suppose Jesus, Paul, or any other apostles and prophets who taught the truth were not considered “crafty, covetous, and operating by the sleight of men?” Why is it that only those who are termed false teachers can be “crafty...?” When we compare the two groups (i.e., those who teach truth and those who teach error) we find that they both have the same objective and that is to make proselytes. Paul went on many preaching tours for the purpose of teaching the gospel to all who would listen. What makes one right and the other wrong?

The apostle Paul tells us that there is only one faith (Eph. 4:4). One faith equates to a standard that must be followed. Those who do not follow this standard (or pattern) are trying to peddle their own message (cf. II Cor. 2:17). Therefore, their efforts are against the truth and are thereby defined by the truth as craft, sleight of men, and wiliness. The words used in II Corinthians 2:17 are “corrupting the

word of God.” The word “corrupt” is to “sell (as in retail), to peddle, corrupt, adulterate” (LS 400; Moulton 212). If I peddle truth it is not corruption; however, if I peddle error I have corrupted the truth. What these notes indicate is that truth distinguishes the character of a man and defines him as either having a bad or good character. The good character adheres to and teaches Biblical truth. The bad character is one that does not adhere nor teach truth. Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount that you can know a man by his fruits (Matt. 7:20).

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion is a simple one. The character of a good or bad man can easily be determined by what he does or does not represent. Truth defines a man to have a false character of error when one’s teaching, thinking, and disposition does not plumb with that truth. I can therefore, have a personality that is bubbly, likeable, friendly, warm... etc.; however, if I do not represent the truth then the Word of God terms me to have a spirit of error (I Jn. 4:6). I am commanded to make said judgments based upon what I see and hear (Jn. 7:24; I Jn. 4:1). One’s disposition, thinking, and character are identified as good or bad based upon one’s position in truth. John said, “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother” (I Jn. 3:10). That which distinguishes the true Christian from the world and a true teacher from a false teacher is the standard of truth. Brethren, to make judgments on the world's "spirit" finding in them faults yet cringing at the thought of judging an erring brother's spirit is setting double standards when the word of God is one (Eph. 4:3ff).

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