

## More on Bible Character

Man's character is under consideration in Ephesians chapter 4. The word character is defined as "the combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person, group, or thing from another" (AHD 259). Paul refers to the distinguishing characteristic that differentiates the "*old man*" of sin (Eph. 4:22) and the "*new man*" of righteousness and holiness in truth (Eph. 4:24) as a "*walk*" (Eph. 4:1, 17). Before people become Christians, they "*walk in the vanity of their mind*" (Eph. 4:17) as "*sons of disobedience*" (Eph. 2:2; 5:6). The spirit of man is "*renewed*" when introduced to truth through hearing and learning (Eph. 4:20-23). Let us contrast and compare the two characters of the old and new man as does Paul in Ephesians chapter four.

Paul begins the chapter by commanding the Ephesian Christians to walk in accordance with truth (Eph. 4:1). Paul justifies his command by revealing that there is only one church, hope, faith, baptism, and God (Eph. 4:4-6). Oneness in God's spiritual kingdom equates to a standard to be followed. Teachings that do not wholly represent the standard of truth are unacceptable to God (II Jn. 9). Let us remember that the power of the gospel (truth) rests in its ability to forgive man of his sins (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 7:18-19). Forgiven sinners (The new man) are distinguished from sinners in that they walk in truth striving for spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:13), kindness, tenderhearted, and willing to forgive others (Eph. 4:32). The Christian's language is "*truth in love*" (Eph. 4:15). The "new man" is new because he at one time had the "*spirit of the sons of disobedience*" (cf. Eph. 2:2-3; 5:6), walking in religious error (Eph. 4:17), and being "*corrupt after the lusts of deceit*" (Eph. 4:23).

He that "*gives place to the devil*" is marked by another character, spirit, or mind (Eph. 4:27) and is known as the "*old man*" (Eph. 4:22). Said individual is governed not by truth but by "*the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error*" (Eph. 4:14). The old man of sin walks by "*vanity, lust of deceit, falsehood, thievery, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, railing, and malice*" (Eph. 4:17, 22, 25, 28, 31). Note that Paul states, "*that ye no longer walk...*" inferring that the Ephesian Christian's did walk so once (Eph. 4:17). When did the Ephesian Christians walk in craft, deceit, falsehood, etc...? Paul tells us that it was when they walked by the standard of the devil (i.e., the vanity of their minds). Consider that Paul states, "*Let no man deceive you with empty words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon **the sons of disobedience***" (Eph. 5:6). At Ephesians 2:1-2 Paul states, "*And you did he make alive, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein ye once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the **sons of disobedience**.*" The connection is a simple one. The Ephesians walked by craft, deceit, falsehood, etc. when they were governed by "*empty words*" and thereby identified as "*sons of disobedience.*" God's standard, i.e., the truth, identified them as such. Now we clearly see that any teaching, conduct, disposition, character, etc. that does not represent truth is identified as error. Again, we

ask, where is the “good ole boy” who does neither good nor bad; i.e., he is neutral? Dear brethren, if I cannot judge another’s character by the actions and teachings they represent, how am I to judge whether I (myself) represent truth? The word of God commands that I make righteous judgments (Jn. 7:24) and that I prove the teaching and character of all (including self) by the standard of truth (I Jn. 4:1-6).

Remember, character is defined as “the combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person, group, or thing from another.” The very definition demands a judgment of others! Paul refers to the Corinthians as being “*sanctified*” from the world through their position to truth (I Cor. 1:1-2). Paul made a judgment of the Corinthians based upon their stand in truth. Interestingly, many want to judge the world yet they will not judge their beloved brethren. The truth knows no partiality (James 2:9). Truth divides the true disciple from the pseudo, and there is no middle man (I Jn. 3:10). One cannot represent some truth and some error and claim to have a godly character. Paul’s admonition to the Ephesians is to “*be angry*” at sin (Eph. 4:26) and to the Romans he said to “*abhor*” sin (Rom. 12:9). What spirit or character do you represent?