



Gospel Ministry Wisdom

Lesson 3

Character and Example

In the gearbox of gospel ministry is **trust**. Without *trust*:

- Most people will not follow. People do not follow those they distrust.
- Without trust, you have no platform, no pulpit; there is no effective gospel ministry without a platform or pulpit.
- Trust is fragile.
 - It takes time to gain it. (Usually 5 years for a pastor.)
 - Once it is lost/shattered, it takes a long time to regain it. Often it is never regained; rarely 100%.
- Trust-breakers have a way of following you. **Numbers 32:23**. Like a ghost; even with full repentance, they haunt you. (Pastors with old marriage failures.)
- At the heart of *trust* is *character*.

I. CHARACTER:

A. Character is *the main or essential nature which distinguishes us*.

1. Webster says character is *“the complex of mental and ethnic traits marking and often individualizing a person, group or nation.”*
 - a) Your character is your essence, your core, who you really are.
 - b) It is who you are, what guides you and what you would do in the dark, when nobody is looking, when you could *get away with it*, your guiding principle.
2. A person's character can be good or it can be bad.
 - a) Any of us can cheat, lust, lie, steal, take advantage and live for self.
 - b) Any of us can be honest, live right before God and respect the person and property of others.

- c) Our character is solely our choice. No external being except God has the power to make our character good or bad. There is no one to blame for bad character except self. Nobody makes us choose evil.

B. Satan is constantly testing our character. “Seeking whom he may devour,” 1 Peter 5:8.

- a) The case of Job. **Job 1-2.**
- b) My dad and the atheist at the Lufkin Foundry. *Hutson, how much would it take? What’s your price?*
- c) Testing exposes or flushes out your character; reveals how much is conviction and how much was merely preference and expediency.
 - (1) Here’s an opportunity to pocket money and no one would ever know.
 - (2) Pornography is right there on the grocery store shelf. Pretty and sexy women are all around and you could allow yourself to look and lust.
 - (3) There are things you know are wrong, but you could let them slide because touching this would mean war in the church. This person gives lots of money to the church. I might lose my job.

C. The qualifications for a gospel minister are mainly about character.

***1 Timothy 3:1-11. *Titus 1:5-9**

- 1. Preachers are notorious for their propensity to act like bulldogs on details that seem to support their personal circumstances while ignoring the overall, big picture. That’s especially true when it comes to qualifications.
 - a) Zoom in on previous marriages or just how *holy* a man must be to qualify while overlooking the elephant in the closet, which clearly calls for exceptionally high character in a man of God.
 - b) A correct interpretation of any Bible passage demands honesty to the context.
- 2. The two qualification passages place the emphasis on overall holiness, and that is in total harmony with the overall ministerial picture seen throughout the Bible.

D. No man void of good character will be able to gain and keep the trust of people, and be a fit gospel minister.

- 1. Some, but not all of the traits that will reveal and manifest poor and bad character are:
 - a) Dishonesty in word or deed.
 - b) Disrespect for the person or property of others.
 - c) Capitalizing on the weakness or vulnerability others especially the naïve or innocent.

- d) Abuse of power.
 - e) Hypocrisy which includes lying and double standards.
 - f) Efforts to hide sins including denial and refusal to accept responsibility.
 - g) Underhanded, shady and questionable behavior.
2. Bad character gets around. It destroys trust and undermines a man's ability to command respect and follow after righteousness in most people.
- a) He may gain and turn on followers for a honeymoon period, but once they see his true character, they usually fall away.
 - b) This is one reason (not the only reason) why many preachers never gain and maintain a very large following of people who truly accept him as their pastor. It also explains why it takes most pastors about 5 years to truly become the pastor of a given church.
 - c) When people do not fall in love with you and get on your bandwagon, do not jump to the conclusion that they are unspiritual and you deserve better. Your past shady shenanigans, heavy-handed ways, poor planning and homework, hot quick temper and shallowness may have destroyed their trust in you.

II. EXAMPLE. Example is closely akin to character; character becomes the example.

A. The role of preacher, especially pastor, puts a man in the public eye.

1. Like it or not, for the better or the worse he is an example. People are watching. They are always making judgment calls about him, deciding whether he's for real or a fake.
2. Invariably the example of a preacher, especially a pastor, influences many people. His sphere of influence is much greater than that of most people.
 - a) If his example is good, he has the potential of influencing the lives of many for the better. ***Hebrews 13:7.** Through the years, many good men of God have greatly inspired and influenced me: Suskey, Johnson, Fort.
 - b) If his example is bad, he has the potential of doing much damage to the cause of Christ, especially those in his immediate sphere of influence.
 - (1) When one preacher proves corrupt or takes a fall, all of God's preachers take a hit, a broadside. David. **2 Samuel 12:14**
 - (2) The Jimmy Swaggart incident.

B. The Bible places great emphasis on example.

1. Jesus led by word and deed, and is our example in all things.
 - a) *“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you,”* **John 13:15**. He had just washed the disciples’ feet. This was an example of humility and of service.
 - b) We are to *“follow his steps”* in all things. **1 Peter 2:21**. *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,”* **Philippians 2:5**.
2. Special Bible emphasis is placed on the example of gospel ministers.
 - a) In one of his letters to preachers, Paul stressed example. ***1 Timothy 4:12**.
 - b) Peter emphasized this same truth. ***1 Peter 5:1-3**.
3. Any time a preacher’s example violates and does not match what he preaches, he will be seen as a hypocrite.
 - a) At that moment trust, is shattered and he falls from his pulpit and power with people. ***Job 8:13-19. *Job 20:5-9. *Job 27:8**
 - b) I have personally seen repeated cases of this very phenomenon. A preacher flying high, and suddenly he’s out of here. In shame! Bro. Charles Thomas told me of a young man who grew up in the Dallas area. The man was in a bar in an out-of-state town when in walked his pastor. The young man never went back to church.

C. In closing I will mention areas where good examples are especially needed.

1. **Consistency.**
2. **Practice what you preach.**
3. **Temperance/self-control.**
4. **Good treatment of your wife and family.**
5. **Absolute honesty.**
6. **Objectivity.**
7. **Diligence.**
8. **Integrity.**
9. **Purity.**
10. **Humility.**

Good character and good example; they are both vital to effective gospel ministry. Neither has anything to do with intelligence, doctrinal soundness, administrative skills, personality, financial status, vision or seminary training. They have everything to do with trust and whether or not people will hear and follow you.