



GUIDELINES DAILY COMMENTARY ON LIVING WITH DR. HAROLD J. SALA

Subject: Character/Crisis/Habits

Date: November 17, 2016

THE BATTLEGROUND OF CHARACTER

Bloodthirsty men hate a man of integrity and seek to kill the upright. Proverbs 29:10

Your reputation is what others think of you, while character is what you really are. Your character is revealed, of course, by what you do, either negative or positively, but Ralph Waldo Emerson used to believe that, more accurately, your character is defined by what you think. He wrote, "People seem not to realize that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character."

In recent days we have heard more than a few decry the lack of character, especially among youth today (who, of course, have not seen a lot of this quality in the lives of their parents). Convictions produce character, which may account for its scarcity today. When people have no firm convictions of right or wrong, their moral life is a replay of uncertainty, a combination trial and error. When people's beliefs are put to the test, it is their character or lack of it which reveals how much integrity is within.

Though everyone prefers to avoid conflict, it is this which is the real testing ground of character. When you are challenged, or more specifically, when your views of right and wrong are challenged, you have to make a decision to compromise and go along with what violates your sense of right and wrong, or face the consequences.

That was exactly the situation years ago when a Persian queen whose name was Vashti was asked to dance before a banquet of rowdy military officers. Women, in those days, didn't challenge the requests of their husband, but Queen Vashti knew that it would be a debauched and drunken group of men leering at her. She also knew that the consequences could mean divorce and even banishment from the throne. The conflict produced a decision which was costly, and in the event that you don't remember your history of the book of Esther, it was Vashti's refusal which cost her the throne. Character comes with a price tag attached.

Bill White found that out as well. He was one of four principals in a thriving electronics business when the quartet of businessmen went to a convention. The senior partner told about the great evening that he had arranged, which included a girl for each one, to top off the evening. "No," said Bill, explaining that he was happily married and that he would prefer to go back to the hotel after the evening conference. "Aw, come on, Bill. Don't be a killjoy," his colleagues urged. But he stuck with his convictions, which revealed his true character. From that point on, he faced conflict with his partners, who had been best of friends until that crisis.

When you are faced with conflict or challenge, you don't summon character as a resource to give you strength to do the right thing. Either it's there or it's not. It's the crisis that reveals what your true character is. As Senator Dan Coats put it: "Character cannot be summoned at the moment of crisis if it has been squandered by years of compromise and rationalization. The only testing ground for the heroic is the mundane. The only preparation for that one profound decision which can change a life, or even a nation, is those hundreds of half-conscious, self-defining, seemingly insignificant decisions made in private. Habit is the daily battleground of character."¹

In summary, your convictions are the basis of your character. Your habits are the mold for your character. Conflict is the testing of your character; and it is the measure of your courage which determines the extent of your character. The following puts it well: "Be careful of your thoughts/ For your thoughts become your words. / Be careful of your actions/ For your actions become your habits. / Be careful of your habits/ For your habits become your character./ Be careful of your character/ For your character becomes your destiny." (Author unknown).

Resource reading: Titus 2.

¹ Dan Coats, "Points to Ponder," *Reader's Digest*, June, 1996, p 252.