

“BUILDING GODLY CHARACTER”

PART 4

OBJECTIVE: STUDY THE WORD OF GOD CONCERNING CHARACTER BUILDING AS A CHILD OF GOD. CONSIDER THE ELEMENTS OF OUR LIFE WHICH EITHER MAKE US MORE LIKE GOD IN LIFESTYLES OR FAR FROM GOD THROUGH OUR LIFE PATTERNS.

KEY SCRIPTURES:

2 PETER 1:2-11

HEBREWS 11:1-6

JOHN 15:1-5

MATTHEW 6:33

THE NEXT TENETS OR PRINCIPLES WE WILL LOOK AT IN THIS PART IS BEING FRUITFUL AND PRODUCTIVE AS WELL BEING AWARE OF SATANIC INFLUENCES IN OUR LIFE!

**BE FAITHFUL AS WELL AS FRUITFUL**

ONCE WE HAVE FOUND GOD AND WE SENSE A REWARD FOR OUR SEARCH, WE NOW HAVE TO PRODUCE FRUIT. IN **JOHN 15:2**, WE READ, "EVERY BRANCH IN ME THAT BEARETH NOT FRUIT HE TAKETH AWAY: AND EVERY BRANCH THAT BEARETH FRUIT, HE PRUNES IT, THAT IT MAY BRING FORTH MORE FRUIT." IN VERSES 16-17 OF THE SAME CHAPTER, JESUS STATES, "YE HAVE NOT CHOSEN ME, BUT I HAVE CHOSEN YOU, AND ORDAINED [APPOINTED] YOU, THAT YE SHOULD GO AND BRING FORTH FRUIT, AND THAT YOUR FRUIT SHOULD REMAIN: THAT WHATSOEVER YE SHALL ASK OF THE FATHER IN MY NAME, HE MAY GIVE IT TO YOU."

CHRISTIANS ARE APPOINTED TO PRODUCE FRUIT. THAT PUTS FRUIT BEARING IN A CATEGORY OF GREAT RESPONSIBILITY. THOSE WHO DO NOT PRODUCE FRUIT ARE PURGED AND CAST AWAY. DO WE UNDERSTAND THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS? JESUS IS PLAINLY TELLING US THAT UNLESS WE PRODUCE FRUIT, WE

WILL NOT MAKE IT INTO HIS KINGDOM. HE WANTS THE FRUIT BEARER TO KEEP PRODUCING MORE. IT IS ANALOGOUS TO THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (**LUKE 19:11-27**). THE ONE WHO WAS GIVEN FIVE TALENTS WENT OUT AND GOT FIVE MORE. THE ONLY ONE WHO WAS "TAKEN AWAY" WAS THE ONE WHO ONLY HAD ONE TALENT AND THEN HID IT BECAUSE OF FEAR. HE PRODUCED NO FRUIT!

JESUS IS ALSO EXPLAINING THAT FAITHFUL FRUIT BEARERS CAN ASK ANYTHING OF THE FATHER AND HE WILL ANSWER. DOES THAT MEAN THE SLOTHFUL AND UNPRODUCTIVE DO NOT GET ANSWERS? IT WOULD CERTAINLY SEEM SO! JESUS PUTS A VERY HIGH VALUE ON PRODUCTIVITY. HE SAID, "MY FATHER WORKS, AND I WORK" (**JOHN 5:17**). JESUS DEMANDS THAT WE BE PRODUCTIVE! HE EXPECTS A RETURN ON HIS INVESTMENT IN US. HE CREATED US, DIED FOR US, AND NOW INTERCEDES FOR US. THE LOGICAL QUESTION IS, "WHAT ARE WE DOING FOR JESUS IN RETURN?"

JESUS IS A PRAGMATIST IN THAT HE GIVES US INSTRUCTIONS, SETS AN EXAMPLE OF PERFORMANCE, AND EXPECTS US TO FOLLOW HIS GUIDANCE. SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT ONCE WE ARE BAPTIZED, WE JUST COAST INTO THE KINGDOM. THIS IS A DAMNABLE NOTION THAT SATAN WOULD LIKE FOR EVERY ONE OF US TO BELIEVE. THE TRUTH IS, SLOTHFULNESS IN OUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT CAN BE DISASTROUS. IT TAKES WORK TO MAINTAIN 5: MARRIAGE; IT TAKES WORK TO BE FINANCIALLY SECURE; AND IT TAKES WORK TO GROW SPIRITUALLY.

FRUIT PRODUCERS SUCH AS THOSE WHO HAVE APPLE ORCHARDS, PEACH FARMS, ORANGE GROVES, AND PEAR TREES HAVE A LOT OF LABOR INVESTED IN THEIR ENTERPRISE. THEY HAVE TO START WITH SEEDLINGS AND CARE FOR THEM TILL THEY CAN BE REPLANTED. THEN AS THE TREES MATURE THEY HAVE TO BE PRUNED! THE FRUIT PRODUCER IS CONSTANTLY WATERING, PRUNING, HARVESTING, AND CARING FOR HIS CROP. THE MANAGER OR OWNER HAS BEEN APPOINTED TO KEEP THE GROVE AT MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY. A RETURN ON THE INVESTMENT IS EXPECTED! ANY MANAGER WHO WOULD ALLOW

THE TREES TO GROW WILD AND GROW UNPRODUCTIVE SPROUTS (SHOOTS) AND LET THE HARVEST DWINDLE WOULD BE FIRED! THIS PROCESS IS THE PURGING JESUS CHRIST WAS REFERRING TO WHEN HE SAID HE WOULD "PURGE" US SO WE COULD PRODUCE MORE FRUIT. THE FRUIT TREES AND OUR FRUIT ARE VERY SIMILAR IN CONCEPT.

OUR FRUIT PRODUCTION INVOLVES VIRTUALLY EVERY FACET OF OUR LIVES: OUR JOBS OR VOCATION, OUR CHILD REARING CAPABILITIES, CHURCH ATTENDANCE, HOLY DAY ATTENDANCE, TITHING AND GIVING, OUR LOVING DEMEANOR TO OUR BROTHERS IN CHRIST, AND OUR MARRIAGES. IF WE ARE SLOTHFUL AND UNPRODUCTIVE, JESUS WILL EVENTUALLY CAST US ASIDE. HE MAY BE FORCED TO CASTIGATE US IN ORDER TO CREATE IN US A DESIRE TO DO OUR WORK. THIS IS A HARD WAY TO LEARN A LESSON. BUT WE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF GOD REPRIMANDS US FOR NOT DOING WHAT WE WERE APPOINTED TO DO. IF WE SEARCH DILIGENTLY AND HONOR GOD, WE SHOULD BE PRODUCING FRUIT, WHICH IS THE VERY SUBSTANCE OF GODLY CHARACTER.

### BEWARE OF SATANIC AND WORLDLY INFLUENCE

ONE WAY TO FAIL IN BUILDING GODLY CHARACTER IS TO ALLOW SATAN AND THIS WORLD TO LURE US FROM OUR DUTIES. PAUL ADDRESSES SATAN'S WILY CRAFTSMANSHIP IN **EPHESIANS 6:12,16**: "FOR WE WRESTLE NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST PRINCIPALITIES, AGAINST POWERS, AGAINST THE RULERS OF THE DARKNESS OF THIS WORLD, AGAINST SPIRITUAL WICKEDNESS IN HIGH PLACES....[TO COUNTER THIS EVIL INFLUENCE, TAKE UP] THE SHIELD OF FAITH, WHEREWITH YE SHALL BE ABLE TO QUENCH ALL THE FIERY DARTS OF THE WICKED."

OUR TASK IS TO PRECLUDE THE MASTER DECEIVER FROM DETERRING US FROM OUR GOAL OF DEVELOPING GODLY CHARACTER. IT IS SOMETIMES DIFFICULT FOR US TO

COMPREHEND THAT SATAN WANTS TO DESTROY ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE. SATAN IS AGRESSIVE WITH CUNNING DEVICES TO CAUSE US TO STUMBLE, GET DISCOURAGED, STAY AWAY FROM CHRISTIAN BRETHERN AND CHURCH SERVICES, WORK ON THE SABBATH, AND CAUSE DIVISION.

THERE IS A REVEALING STORY IN ACTS ABOUT SATAN'S INFLUENCE THAT WE NEED TO TAKE TO HEART. IN **ACTS 5:3**, WE READ, "BUT PETER SAID, ANANIAS, WHY HATH SATAN FILLED THINE HEART TO LIE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND TO KEEP BACK PART OF THE PRICE OF THE LAND?" IN THIS SCENARIO, ANANIAS AND HIS WIFE WANTED THE APPROBATION OF THE CHURCH, THE APOSTLES, AND FELLOW BELIEVERS. THEY WERE WILLING TO DO ANYTHING TO GET APPROVAL AND LOOK GOOD IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, SATAN GOT IT FOR THEM! HE SAW THE LARCENY IN THEIR HEART AND WORKED ON THEIR MINDS TO CONVINC THEM THAT THEIR PLAN WAS A GOOD ONE. THE TRAGIC RESULT WAS THAT TWO PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES. SATAN USES US, PLAYS US, AND LURES US, AND THEN HE IS OFF ON ANOTHER JOURNEY WHILE WE SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR ACTIONS. WE WILL NEVER BUILD GODLY CHARACTER AS LONG AS WE SUCCUMB TO SATAN'S INFLUENCE.

THIS LESSON IS A POWERFUL ONE. SATAN WILL TAKE THE AMBITION, DESIRES, LUSTS, AND SEEMINGLY GOOD INTENTIONS OF ANYONE AND LEAD HIM OR HER ASTRAY. ANANIAS WAS PROBABLY A GOOD MAN IN MANY WAYS. HE MAY VERY WELL HAVE BEEN A PERSON WE WOULD HAVE ENJOYED HAVING IN OUR CHURCH. ANANIAS WAS NOT COGNIZANT OF SATAN'S AWESOME POWER! IF ANANIAS HAD THOUGHT CAREFULLY, PRAYED TO GOD, AND MEDITATED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES, HE PROBABLY WOULD NOT HAVE CARRIED OUT HIS CHARADE.

SATAN CAN ALSO LEAD MINISTERS AND CHURCH LEADERS ASTRAY THROUGH THE AMBITIOUS DESIRES THEY POSSESS. OUR HEARTS HAVE TO BE PURE, OUR INTENTIONS PRISTINE, OR WE CAN EASILY FIND OURSELVES IN A POSITION LIKE ANANIAS. EACH OF US MUST BE ABLE TO WALK AWAY FROM ANY SITUATION. WE

HAVE TO POSSESS THE ABILITY TO SAY "NO" WHEN IT IS APPROPRIATE. ANANIAS SHOULD HAVE SAID "NO" WHEN HE WAS TEMPTED! HIS FAILURE SHOWS US THAT WE NEED TO BE VERY SENSITIVE TO SATAN'S AWESOME POWER AND INFLUENCE.

SO MANY PEOPLE NAIVELY SAY, "I JUST TOLD THE OL' DEVIL TO GO AWAY!" THEY, LIKE MOST PEOPLE, DO NOT REALIZE THE POWER AND CUNNING OF SATAN. JAMES SAYS TO "SUBMIT YOURSELVES THEREFORE TO GOD. RESIST THE DEVIL, AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU" (**JAMES 4:7**). RESISTING IS MORE THAN JUST SAYING NO TO SOMETHING. RESISTING TAKES AN ACTIVE, CONSCIOUS EFFORT TOWARD AVOIDING WHAT SATAN IS TEMPTING US WITH. ANANIAS IS AN APT EXAMPLE OF NOT RESISTING! ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS KEEP OUR MINDS KEENLY AWARE THAT ANY THOUGHT FUELED BY LUST, GREED, JEALOUSY, ENVY, PRIDE, OR STRIFE GIVES SATAN A CHANCE AT GETTING TO US. WHEN TEMPTED BY SATAN, JESUS HAD THE PRESENCE OF MIND TO QUOTE SCRIPTURE TO HIM AND NOT WAVER IN HIS CONVICTIONS. READING AND STUDYING THE BIBLE OFFSETS WRONG MOTIVATIONS AND HELPS US ACQUIRE THE MIND OF CHRIST.

WE DISCUSSED SATANIC INFLUENCE; LET US NOW DISCUSS WORLDLY INFLUENCE. JOHN, THE APOSTLE OF LOVE, HAS THIS TO SAY: "LOVE NOT THE WORLD, NEITHER THE THINGS THAT ARE IN THE WORLD. IF ANY MAN LOVE THE WORLD, THE LOVE OF THE FATHER IS NOT IN HIM. FOR ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD, THE LUST OF THE FLESH, AND THE LUST OF THE EYES, AND THE PRIDE OF LIFE, IS NOT OF THE FATHER, BUT IS OF THE WORLD" (**1 JOHN 2:15-17**).

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA WERE NO DOUBT ENAMORED BY THE "PRIDE OF LIFE"; THEY WANTED RECOGNITION—AND IT COST THEM THEIR LIVES! WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO SEE THE VERY CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORLDLY DESIRES AND SATANIC INFLUENCE. SATAN WILL DO HIS CUNNING BEST TO CONFUSE OUR SENSE OF RIGHTNESS. IT IS OUR DUTY TO DILIGENTLY RESIST THE EVIL INFLUENCE OF SATAN AND THIS WORLD.

**WHENEVER ANY OF US HAS AN INSATIABLE DESIRE TO HAVE WEALTH, RECOGNITION, OR STATUS, WE NEED TO BE EXTRAORDINARILY CAREFUL BECAUSE OF THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF BECOMING ENSNARED BY OUR OWN LUSTS AND SATAN'S INFLUENCE. THE CHRISTIAN MUST REMEMBER THAT WE ONLY "SEE" THIS WORLD; WE DO NOT "SEE" GOD BECAUSE HE IS A SPIRIT. IT IS EASY TO FORGET GOD BECAUSE WE CANNOT SEE OR HEAR HIM. WE SEE THE ACTIONS OF FAMOUS PEOPLE WHO GLAMORIZE INFIDELITY. THE SAME IS TRUE OF LUST. DAVID AND BATHSHEBA ARE A STARK REMINDER OF THE ENSNARING PROPENSITY FOR THE "LUST OF THE EYES"! OUR CORPORATE LEADERS CAN BE ENSNARED IN GREED AND THE "PRIDE OF LIFE," AND THE LURE OF MONEY HAS CAUSED MANY TO STUMBLE. FOR THESE REASONS, SOME ARE BEING CONVICTED IN OUR LEGAL SYSTEM FOR FRAUD.**

**IF WE ARE DILIGENTLY SEEKING GOD, HONORING GOD, AND PRODUCING FRUIT, WE WILL BE MORE DISCERNING ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR LIVES. WE WILL BECOME SENSITIVE TO WHAT GOD WANTS VERSUS WHAT WE WANT! OUR DECISIONS WILL BECOME MORE CHRIST-CENTERED RATHER THAN SELF-CENTERED. THIS CAUTIONARY STEP MAY PREVENT DISASTER IN OUR LIVES. WE MUST DEVELOP WISDOM, UNDERSTANDING, AND THE ABILITY TO FOLLOW A SURE STEADY PATH.**