

What's More Important? Character or Anointing

A dear friend once asked me, "Leon, if you could choose just one, which would you take: character or anointing?" I asked him what he was getting at. He went on to share some examples of anointed people who lacked credibility because of their lack of character.

I told my friend that as believers we should not desire one over the other; anointing and character must exist together as two equal forces in our lives.

To be a Christian means to be like the Anointed One, and that means to be truly Spirit-filled. Ephesians 5:18 instructs us to be filled with the Spirit, for this is the way of true Christian living.

But being filled with the Spirit does not excuse us from the necessity of developing character traits that confirm the reality of Christ in us. To be filled with the Spirit requires us to be Christlike, meaning that our attitudes, motives, words and deeds must be pure.

If we do not conduct our lives in a way that corresponds to the description of the Spirit-filled life in the Bible, we are a contradiction. If we have character but no spiritual passion, we are merely good, moral citizens. And though a good, moral life is commendable, it is not enough.

A person of character, virtue and dignity must also be a God-possessed person overflowing with spiritual zeal; these two aspects go hand-in-hand and are absolutely inseparable. Barnabas exemplified this balanced kind of life: He was a man of character who was also zealous for God.

As a result, he won many people to Christ. The Bible tells us:

“For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord” (Acts 11:24, NKJV).

True spirituality is not evidenced by our ability to quote from the Bible, pray eloquently, lay hands on the sick or cast out demons. Rather, it is evidenced by the way we treat one another.

As I left the sanctuary one night after a powerful revival meeting, I noticed a small group standing around one of the ushers. From their scowls and animated gestures, I gathered they were not engaged in passionate prayer.

When I began walking toward them to find out what was going on, I was told that a disgruntled couple was reprimanding the usher because he had asked their teenage daughters to stop talking while I had been preaching. In fact, I had seen him go over to the girls to quietly ask them to stop disrupting the meeting.

Just a short while earlier, these parents had been lost in worship, standing with uplifted hands and tightly shut, tear-filled eyes. The anointing and presence of God had filled the house, yet not five minutes later we had a boxing match in the making.

What happened? Where was the anointing?

The anointing does not remove personality, emotions or free will, nor does it guarantee that we will do or say the right thing in the right way. Remember Peter, who, moments after being commended for recognizing Jesus as the Christ, was rebuked for not being mindful of the things of God.

Jesus said to him: “‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men’” (Matt. 16:23, NKJV). As powerful as it is, the anointing will not inexorably lead us to always do or say the

right thing; neither will it replace the need for character.

D.L. Moody used to say that “character is what you are in the dark” when there is no one looking, no one listening. It is the thought, the desire, the intention that counts in the sight of God. We should not present a different personality in public than we do in private; there should be consistency between who we are and who we appear to be.

Character is the measure of our Christ-likeness.

There is no denying that we need more of the anointing in our lives, but we also need character. Some who desire a deep walk with God in the realms of the anointing will invest much time and effort in reading books. I believe they would do well to invest equal time in the development of their character.

As the many examples of gifted Christians around us make clear, being anointed does not guarantee maturity or character. We can have power without the traits listed above—but in the end this one-sidedness will lead to our demise.

On the other hand, it’s important to remember that we all have growing up to do; none of us has arrived or is fully developed and conformed to the image of Jesus. We are Christians under construction—and making a mistake or acting immaturely in a particular instance does not mean we lack character.

We also have to keep in mind that character does not develop overnight but is a lifelong process of becoming more and more like Jesus. It is developed in the crucible of life, formed through trial and conflict and through Spirit-led introspection. As we honestly evaluate ourselves, recognizing our flaws and taking the necessary steps to overcome them, we are certain to more closely walk the talk.