

# Julian Edelman and the Modern-Day Character Crisis

It seems every Super Bowl yields an unlikely hero. This year's version is Julian Edelman, the New England Patriots receiver whose amazing catch continues to generate conversation. And revenue for the player as well: Edelman has released a T-shirt titled "THE CATCH" with a picture of his spectacular play.

Edelman is beloved by his team not just for his athletic achievements but for his character as a teammate. Coach Bill Belichick gives Edelman his highest praise, calling the receiver "as good of a competitor as anyone that I have coached."

By contrast, one of the greatest receivers in NFL history did not make this year's Hall of Fame. Terrell Owens was named a first-team all pro receiver five times. He ranks second all-time in receiving yards and third in touchdowns. However, he played for five teams and carried a reputation as a bad teammate with him throughout his career. According to Dan Fouts, that reputation cost him the Hall of Fame this year.

What we see matters, but what we don't see matters more.

According to the *Harvard Business Review*, communication breakdowns can be avoided if we are truly present in the conversation, listen with curiosity and interest and strive to be open to opposing positions. These behaviors build trust, which is critical to successful teams and relationships. And they start with who we are, not what we say.

A football player named Jordan Marshall is generating headlines with his tearful video tribute to the friend who introduced him to the game. Marshall will attend Morgan State University in Baltimore next fall on a full scholarship. But his success would not have been possible without his now-

deceased friend. "This scholarship is for him as well," Marshall says.

Who we are influences the world more than what we do. Achievements are quickly forgotten, but character forms eternal souls. Billy Graham was right: "When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, everything is lost." Chuck Swindoll adds: "The swift wind of compromise is a lot more devastating than the sudden jolt of misfortune."

The Denison Forum exists to fuel a movement of culture-changing Christians. However, we remind ourselves regularly that we must be the change we wish to see. We cannot give what we do not have or lead people where we won't go. Why would the culture want to change if it doesn't see in us a change worth seeking?

While character is vital to our relationships with others, it is even more vital to our relationship with our omniscient Lord. The prophet said of him: "The one who forms the mountains and creates the wind, who reveals His thoughts to man, who turns the darkness into dawn and strides on the heights of the earth—the Lord, the God of Hosts, is His name" (Amos 4:13).

The God of the universe knows your thoughts this moment, your attitudes and sentiments and the rest of you that the rest of us don't see. His Spirit is ready to form the mind of Christ in your mind (1 Cor. 2:16) and manifest his fruit in your character (Gal. 5:22–23). But you must want to be more Christ-like before you will be. You must decide that character is worth its cost, that holiness is your greatest success.

In a culture inundated with sinful movies, media and messages, we can be "blameless and harmless, sons of God, without fault, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine as lights in the world. Hold forth of life ..." (Phil.

2:15–16).

The choice is ours today. But the consequences are eternal.  
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