Glad Tidings

Strong Character Without Absolutes?

By (Jerry Fite)

Character is defined as "moral force; integrity." It sums up the attributes that make us upright and a blessing in any society. Character responds accordingly to a moral force from within, not from outside influences. It has been well said that character is what you do when no one else is watching. What happens when the deep sense of right and wrong which generates moral force is based upon relevancy, and not absolutes?

For over a decade, warnings have been sounded regarding the moral decline in our country. By the title of the book: *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an age Without Good or Evil*, you get the idea of what the author, James Hunter, thinks. He sees a decline in "character" in America. He writes, "…educators misled by psychology, treat morality in terms of preferences, supposing that the inherently moral self should be liberated to make autonomous decisions. That never works, he claimed; history and experience show that morality stems from strongly held, socially shared beliefs about absolute rights and wrongs." Could Mr. Hunter be right when he believes Americans are only " *'tinkering with the system' when they promote slogans ('just say no'), complain about Hollywood, post the Ten Commandments, impose curfews,* or *require school uniforms and metal detectors.?"*

David Wells, in his book *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* believes most Americans *"do not believe in the existence of truth, which is absolute and enduring and to which appeal can be made."* He believes the church today is undoing itself in its *"de-emphasis on doctrine and a decline on serious preaching."*

According to these two authors, educators teaching "values clarification," where moral decisions can change with the next situation, and the modern evangelical movement, where "self-help" lessons are considered to be central instead of "orthodox truth," are leading and may unknowingly be aiding the decline of character in our society.

The Bible asserts the fact that "the truth" already exists and we can "know" it. If you abide in His Word, Jesus says you will know the truth *(John 8:31-32).* Molded by this truth, one will develop the character of telling the truth instead of lying, working to share with others, instead of stealing from others, and edifying others with uplifting speech instead of corrupting our surroundings with coarse speech *(cf. Ephesians 4:25-29).*

When these demands of Christ are no longer considered absolute, one may give in to lying when it helps protect his job; justify stealing when it allows him to get what he thinks he deserves; and succumb to vulgar speech, when it is overlooked or promoted among one's peers.

"Absolutes" forming the chain linking a human being to a noble character cannot be broken at any point. Believing the absolute truth that Jesus is Lord *(Acts 2:36)* leads to the demand of doing what He says *(Luke 6:46),* and the resultant noble character of the Christian *(Ephesians 4:20, 24).* If Jesus is no longer the absolute Lord, then we do not have to absolutely do His will. Strong dependable character will be lost on the heap of weak relevancy.

Young people, train yourself to be godly in character. Develop your moral force within by honoring God from the heart. Why? Because godliness is profitable for all things, *"having the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come."* Who has promised this? God, *"who cannot lie" (Titus 1:2).* This far reaching promise for time and eternity is therefore a "faithful" saying, "worthy of all acceptation." *(I Timothy 4:8-9).* Absolutely!