

the character of God shone through him wonderfully.

Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7:58-60

Andrew

The apostle Andrew preached the gospel far and wide. As an old man he came to the town of Patras in Greece. His evangelistic work in Patras was so successful that the proconsul Aegeas became enraged and ordered that Andrew be crucified. Picture the scene:

A cross had been set up on the sea shore. Andrew, however, protested that he was not worthy to die on the same kind of cross as his Lord, and had them fashion the wood into the shape of an X. Aegeas had ordered that Andrew be tied, not nailed, to the cross to prolong his sufferings.

For three days and two nights Andrew hung there exhorting the Christians and pleading with the unsaved to turn to the Lord. The crowd, which had swelled to more than two thousand, marvelled at the wise words of this gentle and pious white-haired man of God.

Finally...at around seventy-five years of age, Andrew passed into the presence of the Lord he had served so faithfully for almost forty years.*

** Whatever Happened to the Twelve Apostles, by Elva Schroeder, p.27, Peacock Publications. Copies are available from the author who can be contacted by phone, 08 85529035, or email, jimelva@ozemail.com.au*

The fragrance of Christ

As a flower or leaf releases its fragrance when it is crushed, so the love of Christ is to be revealed in the 'Christ-ones' when they are being persecuted for the sake of Christ.

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads **the fragrance of the knowledge of him** everywhere. For **we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing**, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but **as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.** 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

Rod James

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Character evangelism

Mankind—the image and likeness of God

Mankind was created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26,27). Among other things this means that Man was intended to be God's representative on the earth, having dominion over the creation (Genesis 1:28). But it also means that he is to be the representation of God, bringing God's character and presence to the creation

Sin—the reversal of the image

Genesis chapter 3 tells us that Satan subverted the image of God in humanity by luring the first couple into trusting their own ideas about right and wrong rather than obeying God's commandments. This 'fall' of Mankind did not erase the image of God, but reversed the moral character of the image.

Instead of	Purity of heart	there was	double mindedness
	Fidelity		unfaithfulness
	Truth speaking		false witness
	Righteousness		wickedness
	Generosity		greed
	Love		hatred
	Suffering bearing		suffering causing
	Humility		pride
	Servanthood		self-serving

The holy people of God

To re-establish His image and presence on the earth God chose one nation to be his special, holy people.

"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. Deuteronomy 7:6

In the books Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy we see that God carefully outlined to the Israelites how they were to be and to live as His representative people on the earth.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. Do not turn to idols or

make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the Lord your God.
Leviticus 19:1-4

Israel, however, did not keep the covenant God had made with her and continually went off to be like the other nations. The prophets therefore foretold the coming of Messiah who would truly be **the Righteous One** (Isaiah 53:11), the second or **last Adam** (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Jesus, the Son of God and the image of God

As the Son of the Father, Jesus fulfilled the purpose that God intended for Adam, i.e. to be the representative and the representation of God upon the earth. Jesus said,

"If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" John 14:6-9

The apostles assure us that we can know the nature and character of God simply by looking at Jesus.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,
Hebrews 1:3

He is the image of the invisible God ...For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, Colossians 1:15,19

Unlike the wickedness of fallen human beings, who sacrifice others for the sake of themselves, Jesus was the representation of the righteousness of God, i.e. His holy love in action. As the 'friend of sinners' he sacrificed himself for the sake of others. God foretold that

...by his knowledge shall **the righteous one**, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities. Isaiah 53:11

In the mind and action of Jesus we see the amazing character of God—His love, mercy self-sacrifice and servanthood.

...Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11

their wives— when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with **the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit**, which in God's sight is very precious. 1 Peter 3:1-4

Godly character does not replace the actual sharing of the good news of Jesus, but it is an essential part of God's self-revelation that **we have the mind of Christ** (1 Corinthians 2:16), and that **as he is so also are we in this world** (1 John 4:17).

The image under attack

When Jesus began his ministry he underwent the same attempt by Satan to subvert the image of God as did Adam and Eve. Unlike them, however, he overcame that temptation and the image remained intact. Likewise our life as Christ-ones suffers the same attempt by Satan to subvert the image as he tempts us to depart from the will and character of God. This be a recurring battle, but each occasion of attempted subversion is followed by an opportunity to represent and reveal the presence and character of God. On each occasion the believer can overcome the enemy through faith in Christ.

Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Revelation 12:10-11

Examples of character evangelism

Jesus

When **Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified** (Galatians 3:1) we were able to see the character of God. While suffering on the cross he prayed for those who crucified him saying, '**Father, forgive them for they know not what they do**' (Luke 23:34). On the cross he ministered to the penitent thief and said to him, '**Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.**' (Luke 23:43). The character of God so shone through Jesus in his death that **when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"** (Mark 15:39)

Stephen

Our true character is seen when we are under pressure. When Stephen was under the pressure of being martyred by his countrymen

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though **formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent**. But **I received mercy** because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, **and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus**. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost**.

God's grace to Paul was to be an example for other sinners that they might hope in Christ too. Paul continues,

But **I received mercy** for this reason, that in me, as the foremost (of sinners), Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience **as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life**. 1Timothy 1:12-16

Thus, in our witness to unbelievers, we as objects of His grace are to model the penitence, gratitude and faith which God is seeking from all people. A humble, penitent and thankful spirit (rather than a superior, self-righteous and angry spirit) is part of the winsome character that persuades people to examine the state of their own soul before God. Those who are thus winsome will surely win some!

Character evangelism

The following are some passages where character is encouraged as part the Christian witness. It is good to meditate on such Scriptures.

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We **refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God...For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake**. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

...but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; **yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame**. 1 Peter 3:15-16

...that you may be **blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world**, Philippians 2:15

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, **so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of**

The salt of the earth and the light of the world

God's plan was for His representation and presence in Christ to be continued in **the body of Christ**, the church. It is stunning to realize how much of Jesus' teaching and of the apostle's instruction has the objective in mind that those who are **in Christ** will demonstrate to all the peoples of the earth the character of God with a view that the nations might repent of their evil and be reconciled to God. Jesus said,

"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, **let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven**. Matthew 5:13-16

In his first letter Peter was writing to Christians who were a persecuted minority. It is illuminating to read excerpts from his first letter with the above objective in mind.

But **you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light**.

...Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. **Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation**.

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. **For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people**. For **this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly**. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

...**For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps**. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. 1 Peter 2:9-24

The people of the Name

The word 'church' in New Testament Greek is *ekklesia*. *ek* means 'out' and *klesia* is from the verb *kaleo*, 'to call'. The church, then, is that body of people who have been called out by God to bear His name among the nations. It is awesome to realise that God has determined to reveal Himself in this way. Paul lamented the fact that in Israel's chequered history God's name was often dishonoured among the nations because of Israel's behaviour.

You who boast in the law dishonour God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." Romans 2:23-24

Likewise those who have come alive in Christ Jesus bear his name before the nations. They are 'Christ ones' or Christians. Sadly throughout Christian history the biggest obstacle to the gospel has been the character of God's people.

Many Christians talk too much, covet too much, eat too much, buy too much, own too much, worry too much, judge too much, resent too much, squabble too much.

Many Christians pray too little, praise too little, listen too little, repent too little, love too little, sacrifice too little, forgive too little, give too little,.

To pray "Our Father in heaven, hallowed (holy) be your name" means to ask God to make the representation of His name on the earth to be true to His actual character so that the world may know Him as He is. This petition comes first in the Lord's Prayer because it is fundamentally important to God being revealed clearly to humanity.

The character of God and the character of Man

Character is not the same as deeds. You can have good deeds and still have bad character. Character is seated in the heart, i.e. the will and motives, the inner soul of a person. It is in our inner being that we were created in the image of God to have the personal, relational, moral character of God. It is important to remain aware that God's character is so qualitatively different from fallen human character.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9

When Isaiah saw the holiness of God he was devastated by this qualitative difference and cried out,

"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Isaiah 6:5

If this difference is so, how can we sinful humans represent in our being the character of God? As in Isaiah's case it is the revelation of this difference between the character of God and the character of sinful humanity which brings with it the possibility and the beginning of change.

Character regeneration

As sinners, we cannot have the character of God without God's work of grace in the cross of Christ, and his regenerating power through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Titus 3:3-6

Satan's grip on human beings is because of our guilty conscience which pollutes the image of God. By making atonement for our sins Jesus has cleansed the conscience of the believer and so broken Satan's grip. The gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us makes our bodies temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), and restores the image of God in us as the Holy Spirit bears His fruitage of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control (Galatians 5:22). It is not the moralistic character of our own person or deeds which bears testimony to the world, but the presence and character of God dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit.

The persuasive power of penitence

Jesus said that we are to let our light shine before others in such a way that when they see our good works they will give glory, not to us, but to our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). This kind of light, like the moon's light, is reflected light. The righteousness that is to shine out from God's people is not self-righteousness but the righteousness of God in His mercy towards us as sinners. Paul modelled this humility, penitence and faith in Christ in his own testimony.