

The Doctrine of Interaction

Lesson 9

The Issue: Character formation is not to be considered merely a result of our interaction with the world of the material order. Character formation in the believer is a direct outgrowth of our exposure to the Word of God which reveals His character.

Underlying Assumptions as Expressed in Everyday Terms:

- 1) My character will emerge out of my interaction with the world of matter and energy. In other words, character emerges out of my environment. I am the way I because I have had these experiences here in the world.
- 2) Personal character formation is a purely moral developmental process. As long as I stay within my moral heritage and acceptable cultural parameters, then anything I do is “good.”
- 3) Knowledge of the material world and character are two separate things, although admittedly intertwined.

The Generalization: (In continuation of the previous lesson): The believer will interact with the world of matter and energy based upon his or her grasp and implementation of the higher character of God Himself.

The Scripture Passage: Psalms 25: 6, 7

The Lesson:

- 1) David is not perfect, as he acknowledges. But God is. Therefore David’s understanding is that the higher character of God is a rock hard foundation from which to interact with the material world. It means that, based on his trust in the Lord, God is for him and not against him. It further tells us that God will favor David and not penalize him.
- 2) This implies that there is to be a link between the higher character of God and human aspiration.
- 3) As we interact with the world, then, we should aspire to the higher character of God. Interaction with the temporal order does not and cannot have the final word on character formation.

4) There is a choice: a) Our character will be formed by our relation to God and aspiring to be like Him. Or b) Our character will emerge out of our interaction with matter and energy. This second “option” is altogether unacceptable to the Lord.

5) David aspires to have the character of the Lord. But love, mercy and goodness are only three of the Lord’s many qualities. His character is a virtual storehouse of unique help and unlimited resources. So one’s relation to God is THE PRIVILEGED POSITION from which to interact with materiality.

6) If this is true, then character is much more the fruition of aspiration (what we want) than the result of our experience with the temporal world.

7) So we must make sure that our character is the result of our relation to God, and not of our struggles with the temporal world. We are not Spartans, we are Christians.

8) This introduces the question of function. What is the function of character? This applies to both the character of God and human character. In a word, the answer is “domination. Character determines how I interact with materiality. Therefore, materiality does not and cannot determine how I interact with it.

9) Character rides above materiality just as love, mercy and goodness rise above materiality.

10) Consequently, I do not interact with the temporal order based solely on ideas. Even revealed ideas are insufficient. No--I need character of a certain quality. I have the ideas, let us say, and I believe these ideas and I apply these ideas. But they are not enough. I need something else. I need a certain character to interact with the material world.

11) What does it mean to have a lack of character? The problem is not ignorance. If we want the character of God it indicates that we are in a state of dissatisfaction with human ways of being. We are dissatisfied with a character that is the result of pressures from the temporal order.

12) We should want a character of a higher order. And this kind of character stands as a bulwark against the temporal order. Higher character serves as a wall of protection for the mind against temporal pressures.

13) Character is a personal dynamic that is forced into the interaction with matter and energy. This dynamic, this kind of personality is injected into-- or better said, forced onto--the temporal order.

14) Character is tested by interaction with temporality (the passage of time) and materiality (pressures exerted by physical factors of the world.)

15) Thus we can discern twin dynamic axes: a) One axis runs from character to the temporal order; and b) The temporal order will test character. Higher character, this psalm shows us, is the only way to correctly interact with matter and energy. If that is true, then we would not need more or better techniques with which to interact, as much as we need higher character.

Discussion Questions

- 1) If David's trust in the Lord would allow him to conclude that God was for him and not against him, would bless and not penalize him—then what could we generalize from that? Write out a generalization that reflects this truth, and demonstrates the relationship of trust in a forgiving God, to His action on material circumstances.
- 2) The last time you were feeling deplorable because of your past failures, did the thought that God's *character* could overcome your circumstances have any impact or credibility for you? Why or why not?
- 3) Choose a memorable story from Scripture that demonstrated the power of God. How does that event illustrate the following statement? "Character is a personal dynamic that is forced into the interaction with matter and energy. This dynamic, this kind of personality is injected into-- or better said, forced onto--the temporal order."
- 4) Think of a current problem you are facing. How would you apply the statement to your situation? ("Character is a personal dynamic that is forced into the interaction with matter and energy. This dynamic, this kind of personality is injected into-- or better said, forced onto--the temporal order.")
- 5) What steps are you prepared to take in order to implement your understanding that your aspirations to godly character carry more results-oriented weight than your direct manipulation of your troublesome situations? List some strategies.
- 6) What does it mean to have a lack of character?
- 7) Describe the twin dynamic axes and give an example from Scripture.