**Character & Our Leaders**

*by Harry Osborne*

Does character matter anymore? Do you care whether the one you support as a political leader tells the truth, exemplifies fidelity, avoids intoxication, manifests humility rather than pride, controls anger or exhibits other factors consistent with good character? The polls for the presidential race over the past few months suggest many voters in both major parties are willing to vote for candidates having significant and obvious character flaws. In fact, the leading candidates in both parties have had a shocking level of character flaws on flagrant display. Potential voters have been asked repeatedly about the effect those flaws might have in influencing their vote. The answers given have been clear – many voters discount the importance of character in our leaders. The support I have seen from some of my own brethren for such candidates on social media has been even more alarming. Has it come to the point that the salt has so lost its savor that we divorce the question of character from our evaluation of public leaders?

The same trend of separating character from the assessment of people is evident in our society as a whole. One need not think very hard to come up with several cases of esteemed athletes widely used in advertising and other ways who have been caught in various unlawful or unethical actions. The defense for continuing their use is that the athletes are not intended to be role models, even though they are taken as such by many young people. When disciplinary action is taken against offenders, it rarely amounts to more than a slap on the wrist.

The disregard of character is often taught at an early age. Have you seen coaches of young children seeking to win at all cost – even if cheating is a means to that end? The uncontrolled rage of both parents and coaches too often ruins what should be a fun, team-building, respect-learning effort that instills proper values. It is a sad fact that youth sports are being marred by adults who bring foul language and alcohol usage into the presence of children. Is that a proper influence upon our children’s character or does it even matter to us anymore?

The same questions could be asked about the effect of teachers, “religious” leaders and others who have influence in our society. The sexual scandals we see with startling regularity should serve as a wake-up call to our culture. If one’s character is flawed, can that person be trusted in any given place? Character spills over into every facet of one’s life. It is the foundation from which one decides on his/her thoughts and actions. The Bible declares that character issues should be carefully viewed and that one without good character should not be trusted as a leader. For example, notice these statements of Scripture about the importance of good character in leaders.

**Regarding the need for reverence and respect of God** – *“Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling”* (Psalm 2:10-11).

**Regarding the need for righteousness** – *"It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established by righteousness. Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him who speaks what is right"* (Proverbs 16:12-13).

**Regarding the need to seek justice, not pervert it** – *“The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: ‘He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God”* (2 Samuel 23:2-3). *“The king establishes the land by justice, but he who receives bribes overthrows it”* (Proverbs 29:4).

**Regarding the need to speak the truth** – *"Excellent speech is not becoming to a fool, much less lying lips to a prince"* (Proverbs 17:7). "*The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment"* (Proverbs 12:19).

**Regarding the need to shun promiscuity** – *"Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings"* (Proverbs 31:3). *"Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonor he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away"* (Proverbs 6:32-33).

**Regarding the need to avoid intoxicants** – *"It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes to seek intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted"* (Proverbs 31:4-5).

**Regarding the destructive effects of sinful pride and arrogance** – *“When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom”* (Proverbs 11:2). *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”* (Proverbs 16:18). The inspired prophet Daniel noted the devastating results of Nebuchadnezzar’s pride: *“But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses”* (Danial 5:20-21).

If the need for character was seen by those guided by God's inspiration, why is our society showing increasing disregard for the importance of character? If a man or woman's words cannot be trusted, how can his/her leadership? If one shows no fidelity to marriage vows, how can we expect other vows or oaths to be respected? If one's words are filled with filth or anger, should we expect anything different from his/her actions? If one is given to drugs and alcohol, how are we to have any confidence of the essential sobriety and wise judgment needed to lead? If one demonstrates a narcissistic arrogance, why should we think he or she will not lead us to a destructive end inherent to sinful pride? If politics is the prime consideration rather than justice, truth and right, one leads a nation in a way opposite to God’s intended purpose for government. God’s fundamental intention for government is simply stated:

*For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil* (Romans 13:3-4).

The role of government, according to God, is not primarily to protect liberty, enhance wealth or promote welfare. It is to encourage good and punish evil as defined by God the Creator. If one cares nothing about the distinctions between good and evil, one is not fit to fulfill the function God gave government! Whether it is a Hillary Clinton on the left or a Donald Trump on the right (or claiming so for the present), Christians need to take a long look at their values when it comes to supporting those who would lead us. On the one hand, Mrs. Clinton manifests a blatant disregard for the truth. On the other, Mr. Trump’s history of open immorality, not to mention his narcissism, should be seen as warning signs, not resume enhancers. There can be no doubt that one can be just as ungodly as a Republican as any Democrat and still be politically popular. It is a sign of our national decay that we have descended to such a state!

Yes, character does matter! In fact, one's character is the best gauge we have by which to judge one's fitness for leadership. If we disregard flaws in one's character and put him or her in a place of leadership, we are inviting disaster upon ourselves and our nation. God has always blessed righteousness and punished evil. If we excuse evil in our leaders, we fail to heed God's exhortations about the importance of a character guided by truth.