

Test Of Character

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The real test of character is not how others treat us but how we react to the way that others treat us. Jesus said, *"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you"* (Luke 6:27).

Following a snowstorm, two motorists started down a street from opposite ends. The trail through the snow was too narrow to pass. When they met in the middle of the block, one driver rolled down his window and shouted, "I never back up for an idiot!"

"That's all right," said the other driver as he shifted into reverse. "I always do."

Allowing others to determine our character by what they do to us just isn't very smart. The Bible teaches that each person will be judged by what he does, not by what others have done to him.

We like to think that love and understanding will resolve all of our difficulties. However, in life it just isn't always that way. While many problematic relationships can be improved by following God's rules of forgiving others, returning good for evil, and praying for our adversaries, the Bible recognizes that good relationships ultimately depend on all persons involved.

Even Jesus was unable to resolve the conflict between himself and the religious leaders of his day. St. Paul recognized both our responsibility to act in love and our limitations to change others when he wrote, *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everybody. Do not take revenge"* (Romans 12: 17-19).

The biblical teaching is this: We are accountable for what we do, not for what others do to us. While we cannot control everything everyone does to us, we are in charge of how we react to what they do.

Everyone knows that you can't fight a fire by pouring gasoline on it. You would think that we'd also understand that we couldn't defuse anger by becoming angry ourselves.

Years ago, my grandfather was a foreman of a thrashing crew. Two of his workers got into a disagreement. One of them approached Grandpa and angrily said, "Do you know what he just told me? He told me to go to hell."

To which Grandpa simply replied, "Well, you don't have to do what he says."

Once we accept the responsibility for our own actions, we are less effected by the things others say and do. We begin to realize that while what they do may hurt us, it no longer controls us. By releasing others, we ourselves are set free.

The main difference between a thermometer and a thermostat is that the former simply reflects the temperature while the latter controls it. We are called to be thermostats and not thermometers. Instead of being controlled by our circumstances, we are to help change the moral climate around us.