

## Character

by Wayne Goff

Character is “the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual.” While privileged to visit the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, I saw and heard much emphasis placed upon character. The goal of the Academy is “to educate, train, and inspire men and women to become officers of character motivated to lead the United States Air Force in service to our Nation.” The Honor Code is “Don’t lie, don’t cheat, don’t steal, and don’t tolerate those who do.” These are noble qualities which many nations and armies before have instilled in their troops. Perhaps this is the reason why we see soldiers in the New Testament who became Christians!

For example, there is Cornelius (Acts 10) who was the first Gentile convert to Christianity. He was a Roman centurion who had great character. Luke says of him that he was “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always” (v. 2). This speaks of great character.

The apostle Paul was bound as a prisoner in his first trip to Rome, but he proclaimed that “it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ” (Phil. 1:13). Those soldiers guarding Paul understood that he was not a criminal, but a preacher of the Gospel and was “bound” because of it! What did these men care? Obviously they had been taught the rigors of discipline through mental, physical, and spiritual exercise and it began to pay off as they observed the apostle Paul’s life and message. Even some from “Caesar’s household” obeyed the gospel (Phil. 4:22). It is interesting what happens when character and truth are combined in an individual. The “seed” of God’s Word lodges in the good and honest heart. Some of these are soldiers, men of character.

**I’m sure I would not care to be  
So elegant a man  
That I should be ashamed to see  
The spot where I began.**

**For in a life of ups and downs,  
We all may win or lose,  
And some wear chains and some wear  
crowns,  
And some wear cast-off shoes.**

**But if I don’t put on air  
Of high and mighty pride,  
I think that few will see or care  
What I put on beside.**

**For what are trappings, after all,  
But camouflage and sham?  
By character I stand or fall --  
Not what I wear -- but AM.**

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