

#### IV. The Standard of Character for Appropriate Thinking

The character of Jesus has not only been the highest pattern of virtue, but the strongest incentive in its practice, and has exerted so deep an influence, that it ... has done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists. – W.E.H. Lecky<sup>1</sup>

Because a person's thinking is so closely linked with his or her character and because the ideal standard of character was set by Jesus Christ, this chapter will serve as a reminder of God's vision for us to grow in godly character. Such character is only possible through an increasingly intimate relationship and open communication with Jesus Christ. This is the best insurance against both external and internal distorted thinking.

My presupposition is that Jesus, as the only begotten son of God (John 1:14), the second person of the ontological Trinity<sup>2</sup> (each are eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, immutable, and omnipresent, etc.), being the exact image or representation of the invisible God (Col. 1:9, 15; Heb. 1:3), having been crucified (Luke 23:33), buried and risen again (1 Cor. 15:3-7), is the perfect example for proper and appropriate thinking. Therefore, he cannot be guilty of distorted thinking because it is incompatible with his holiness, truth, and love (as well as with his many other character qualities) to distort anything. Christ's thinking and character is the standard to which we are encouraged to conform (Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 2:1-5; 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 2:1). We should

---

<sup>1</sup>Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000), 4.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 135. Note: Not Tritheism ("three distinct Gods") or Sabellianism ("Trinity of revelation, but not of nature"), but one "in essence, as well as of purpose and endeavor" (Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19-20; John 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2).

not forget that “everything he did was calculated for effect.”<sup>3</sup> Our goal in whatever we think say or do is to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

A prerequisite to this, however, is to understand our natural tendency to distort reality, especially our proclivity to distort the biblical view of God. The hypothesis that this chapter addresses is:

Most types of distorted thinking are based first and foremost in an erroneous understanding of God, the result of a nonexistent or less than an optimally intimate relationship with him.

Among all the recovery guides for various problems people have had to deal with as seen in titles such as “Recovery from Family Dysfunctions,” “... Shame,” “... Bitterness,” “... Abuse,” “... Loss,” “... Addictions,” and “... Codependency,” is one entitled, “Recovery from Distorted Images of God.” The six distortions exposed therein are:

The God of Impossible Expectations, Ps. 103:1-14  
 The Emotionally Distant God, Heb. 4:14-16  
 The Disinterested God, Ps. 139  
 The Abusive God, Matt. 20:29-34  
 The Unreliable God, Ps. 145:8-21  
 The God Who Abandons, Luke 15:1-7<sup>4</sup>

When these main distortions are overcome, then one is more likely to know, respect and appreciate God for who he is and one will then begin to understand more about his character and attributes. This will in turn increase one’s reverence for Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit since they are all three working together and have the same character and attributes.

When a person intentionally ignores the truth of God and his guidelines revealed throughout scripture, it is actually a claim of superior intelligence. Stated simply, it is rebellion

---

<sup>3</sup>Shelby Foote, (no title, n.p., n.d.) quoted in Sol Stein, *Stein on Writing* (Griffin, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 10. Full quotation: “Lincoln was highly intelligent. Almost everything he did was calculated for effect.” Stein describes Foote as a historian.

<sup>4</sup>Dale and Juanita Ryan, *Recovery from Distorted Images of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990), 3.

against God, a complaint that God is not living up to a certain aspect of character—such as not being fair, just, loving, merciful, etc. But in reality he is the fairest (Isa. 11:4; Col. 4:1), the most just (Luke 11:42; Acts 17:31), most loving (John 13:34-35; 15:12; 17:22-25; 1 John 4:17) and most merciful (Luke 6:36; James 5:11; Heb. 8:12) of all. Such complaints or accusations against God result from some type of distorted thinking.

The character of Jesus Christ is more multifaceted than a diamond. One site on the Internet lists 104 character qualities of a godly person and invites anyone to suggest others since there is no such thing as an exhaustive list.<sup>5</sup> Jesus practiced what he preached (Luke 23:14; John 8:46); he never failed to fulfill the two greatest commandments (loving God above all others, and loving his neighbor as himself, Luke 10:27). He served others (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:26-27) even above himself (Phil. 2:3-8). He maintained a very close relationship to God the Father, spending much time in intimate and detailed communication through prayer (Luke 6:12; 10:22-24) and never tried to force his Father to conform to his own personal preferences, but submitted his own will to his Father's (Luke 22:42).

It is helpful to understand the ideals a person should strive for in the intentional development of their spiritual character. The word “character” could be summarized by the Greek term *dikaiosunē*, which Willard has paraphrased as “‘what that is about a person that makes him or her really right or good.’ For short, we might say ‘true inner goodness’ ... because it retains a note of emphasis upon relationship of the soul to God.”<sup>6</sup> Basically it refers to the reputation of a person who actually abides by the spirit or originator of the law, not just the letter

---

<sup>5</sup>Handley, 204.

<sup>6</sup>Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 145-6.

of the law as mentioned by Christ in Matt. 5:21-48, a person who does what is not against the law (Gal. 5:22-23).

An Old Testament equivalent term is *hqd̄x* as in Gen. 15:6: “And Abram believed God, and it was accounted to him as *dikaiosune*” (Septuagint). The term is usually translated into English as “righteousness.” But the best efforts of righteousness Abraham or anyone else can do apart from Christ is equated with dirty rags, according to Isa. 64:6, because without Christ, the vine and source of life, we can do nothing worthwhile that will last (John 15:5 vs. Phil. 4:13). God’s thoughts and ways are far superior to anything we could ever devise (Isa. 55:8-9): “The task of Christian ethics is determining what conforms to God’s character and what does not.”<sup>7</sup>

Luke portrays Jesus communicating to anyone who will listen. The purpose of his communication is that the citizens of the new community he came to establish will have a better, more completely transformed perspective compared to the accepted view of the culture (the ruling Jewish religious culture back then). He provided ample evidence that the character of the religious leaders of that day was patently offensive to God, a charade, all “lip service,” “smoke and mirrors,” a pseudo religion with no heart for God, and no love for one’s neighbor.

This distorted perspective (and all others not conforming to God’s reality) was summed up by Jones as sin:

Sin always tends to make us blind to our own faults. ... We need a friend [not a “yes man”] to stop us from deceiving ourselves that what we are doing is not so bad after all. We need a friend to help us overcome our low self-image, inflated self-importance, selfishness, pride, our deceitful nature, our dangerous fantasies, and so much else.<sup>8</sup>

Jones strongly recommended that such a friend be honest and proactive.

---

<sup>7</sup>Noebel, 81.

<sup>8</sup>Timothy K. Jones, *Mentor and Friend* (Batavia, IL: Lion Publishing Corporation, 1991), 42.

Among other reasons, then, Christ came to earth to set the standard for and demonstrate by example the character qualities God desires us to aim for throughout our lifetime (Matt. 11:29; 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6). Although there are many, we will review several which may be most helpful in understanding the extent to which we can be like Christ in this life and then refer the reader to other resources.

Jesus not only had all the characteristics mentioned below (and many besides), but he has called us to have them as well. Though we will never be omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, “omnicompetent” or immutable, and will experience many of the other attributes to a much lesser extent in this life than Jesus did and does, we are encouraged to allow the Holy Spirit to produce the character traits of Jesus in our daily lives (Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 5:15-6:18). May we strive to imitate Jesus’ example as we yield to the control of the Holy Spirit in at least the following:

### **Holy ἅγιος**

Descriptions of holy include: set apart to or by God, consecrated; sacred; morally pure, upright.<sup>9</sup> As mentioned earlier in this chapter, holiness (ἁγιασμός) is God’s and Jesus’ most distinguishing characteristic. No other character quality is mentioned three times in a row in scripture (Isa. 6:3, v/dq; Rev. 4:8), so it is the cornerstone of all the others. Without holiness or truthfulness, who could trust him or believe him if he lies and cannot keep his promises, no matter how powerful, or anything else he may be (Num. 23:19; Ps. 89:34-35)? Unless we have

---

<sup>9</sup>*Translator’s Workplace*, version 4.0 [CD-ROM] (Dallas, TX: SIL Translation Department, 2003). This and other Greek or Hebrew words researched in this chapter were derived from the following on this CD: Barclay M. Newman Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1971; United Bible Society, *Greek-Trilingual Lexicon*, 1971; and Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, 1988.

holiness (the holiness of Jesus Christ within us, Eph. 4:23-24) we will never see God (Heb. 12:14). Several times we are commanded to be holy even as God is holy (Lev. 11:44-45; 20:26; 1 Pet. 1:15-16).

### **Truth ἀλήθεια**

The Hebrew word for truth, אֱמֶת, refers also to “firmness, faithfulness” and can include the concepts of sureness, reliability, stability, and continuance. The Greek word may pertain to being in accordance with historical fact, to being truthful and honest, to being real not imaginary, to being genuine, authentic, sincere, and dependable.

All of these are observable both in God and in Jesus Christ if one makes the effort to seriously investigate the truth (Prov. 8:1; Jer. 29:11-13). King David called upon the “Lord, the God of truth” (Ps. 31:5). God is ἀληθής—“true, truthful, honest; real, genuine” (John 3:33) and cannot lie (Num. 23:19). Jesus claimed to be the ἀλήθεια - “truth, truthfulness, reality” as well as the Way and the Life (John 14:6) and no one could ever claim that he lied or did anything wrong (John 8:45-47; 18:20-23). Jesus pointed out a great example of this trait in Nathaniel, a man who would never tell a lie or deceive anyone; a stark contrast to his ancestor Jacob who was a deceiver before he was touched by God and his name was changed to Israel (John 1:47, cf. Gen. 27:35; 31:26).

We too are encouraged to buy the truth, not sell it (Prov. 22:23, to demonstrate truthfulness in love (Ex. 20:16; Lev. 19:11-18; Ps. 15; Prov. 10:9; 20:28; 22:21; Eph. 4:15), demonstrate right motives (Phil. 1:18) and to preach the truth which is reality as God sees it (Eph. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:2-5). It is possible to become known and trusted as a person who never lies or deceives and never puts any “spin” or embellishment on the truth (James 5:12). Each day we are to put on the belt of truth along with the rest of the armor of God (Eph. 6:14).

## Love ἀγάπη (agape)

This includes unconditional concern for, or interest in someone, a desire or longing for them, or designating them first place in one's affections. God loves (אהב) his people, the Israelites. Just as "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16), so is Jesus (John 15:9-10, 15, 17; Phil. 2:4-8). Anyone can love those who love them, but that is not enough (Matt. 5:46-47; Luke 6:32). We are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39), which includes our enemies (Matt. 5:43-45) and everyone in between (1 John 4:7-5:2). Love is the identification mark of a true follower of Christ (John 12:34-35; 1 John 2:5-6). We are even expected to love others more than we are able to love ourselves—we are expected to love as Christ loved us when we were still his enemies (Rom. 5:8), which is the same quality with which he loves the church to the point of dying for her (John 15:13; Eph. 5:25).

There are, however, some things we are definitely warned not to love:

1. "the world or anything in the world" (1 John 2:15-17);
2. "sleep or you will grow poor" (Prov. 10:13);
3. "to swear falsely" (Zech. 8:17).

In fact, we are to hate:

"pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech" (Prov. 8:13).  
 "every wrong path" (Ps. 119:104).  
 "what is false" (Prov. 10:5); "falsehood" (Ps. 119:163).  
 "bribes" (Prov. 15:27).  
 "ill-gotten gain" (Prov. 28:16).  
 "the practices of the Nicolaitans" (Rev. 2:6). "They apparently taught that spiritual liberty gave them sufficient leeway to practice idolatry and immorality."<sup>10</sup>  
 "evil" (Amos 5:4); "wickedness" (Ps. 45:7).  
 "divorce," since God hates it (Mal. 2:16).

---

<sup>10</sup>*NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972).

## Wise σοφός

This can refer to being experienced, clever, learned, skilled, and having insight, understanding, intelligence, and knowledge. There is only one God whose wisdom (חָכְמָה) supersedes everyone else's: "to the only wise God" (Rom. 16:27). He knows and understands everything and everyone, even their thoughts and motives before they say or do anything (Job 39-41; Ps. 139:4; Ecc. 11:5; Ezek. 11:5). Jesus also knew what people thought before they spoke (Matt. 22:15; Luke 5:22; 6:8, 15; 9:47; 11:17; John 1:47-50; 2:24-25; 6:15). Jesus claimed to be wiser than Solomon (Luke 11:31), and Paul wrote that Christ was "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). He also admonishes believers to "Be wise" (Eph 5:15-16), and Solomon encourages everyone to "walk with those who are wise" (Prov. 13:20). James describes the characteristics of godly wisdom: "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17). Wisdom is closely related to φρόνιμος ("understanding, wise,"<sup>11</sup> as well as sensible, thoughtful, shrewd).<sup>12</sup> The disciples (and we in turn) were advised by Jesus to be as shrewd, understanding, enlightened, prudent, sagacious, clever, or cunning "as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16). Jesus is also the following and wants us to be as well: discerning, aware, alert, thoughtful, thorough, purposeful, sensible, reasonable, respectful, etc.

Wisdom is better than power, strength, or weapons of war (Eccles. 9:16, 18), "a wise man has great power" (Prov. 22:5). Wisdom is the principle thing we should strive for along with understanding (Prov. 4:7). We are encouraged to "get wisdom, discipline and understanding" (Prov. 22:23). Although both wisdom and money may provide shelter or a defense, wisdom is

---

<sup>11</sup>Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, ed. Cleon Rogers. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976, 1980), 29-30.

<sup>12</sup>*Translator's Workplace.*

more effective in preserving one's life (Ecc. 7:12). Just as Jesus is the wisest and ultimate counselor (Isa. 9:6), we too should strive to gain wisdom knowledge and understanding to comfort the bereaved, those who mourn (Isa. 61:2), "strengthen the weak" (Job 4:3-4; Isa. 35:3-4), as well as "correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2).

### **Power δύναμις**

The Hebrew equivalent, **יָצַח**, can refer to one who is mighty, strong, powerful, great, brave, and prevailing. God's awesome power (Ps. 68:34) is easily "understood by the things that are made" (Gen. 1-2; Ps. 136: 4-9; Rom. 1:20), by his mighty (**יְבַרְכֵּנוּ**) acts, which include his control over nature and nations (Ps. 106:2; 118; 136:10-25; 145:4; 150:2). He is the "God of gods" (Deut. 10:17; Ps. 136:2; Dan. 2:47), "the blessed and only Ruler [Potentate, KJV], the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). All the heavenly angels will testify, "Salvation and glory and power belong to our God" (Rev. 19:1). "For the message of the cross ... to ... us who are being saved ... is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18; also Rom. 1:16).

Referring to Jesus, δύναμις implies supernatural strength, ability, capacity, meaning, and significance. John the Baptist declared that Jesus was more powerful than he himself was (Matt. 3:1; John 1:7). Jesus had power to prevent anyone from killing him before the chosen time and he had power to raise himself up again (John 10:18). Jesus prophesied that He would sit at the right hand of God, implying that he would be given power to rule all creation (Luke 22:69). Jesus actually created all things and sustains them by the power of his word, and rules over all (Eph. 1:19-23; Col. 1:15-20; 2:10; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 4:8-11; 5:12-14). He is also referred to as the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). Paul refers to Christ as being "the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). Jesus promised to share his power with the disciples and all who

believe in him (Acts 1:8; Rom. 13; Eph. 4:11-16). But we need not be discouraged when we feel powerless because God's grace is sufficient to make our power perfect even though we are weak (2 Cor. 12:9).

### Perfect τέλειος

Included under this heading are: complete, whole, full-grown, mature, finished, accomplished. Christ himself clearly stated the standard for righteousness: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48, based upon Lev. 11:45; 19:2; Deut. 18:13). This means:

1. Righteousness cannot be confined to a stipulated, limited response (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28).
2. Righteousness is not merely something external, but comes from within the life (Matt. 5:16; 6:1-6, 16-18; 12:35).
3. Righteousness is not purely “internal” in the sense that it can be measured by one's emotions (Matt. 7:16-20).
4. The new righteousness that Jesus announces claims the whole man (Matt. 12:36-37).
5. Righteousness ... is not merely passive or negative ... no one is righteous simply by default. It requires an attitude of initiative and risk in implementing God's commands.<sup>13</sup>

God considered Noah as being “perfect [תָּמִים—sound, complete] in his generation” (Gen. 6:9), and King Asa as being “perfect all his days” (2 Chron. 15:17). The scriptures were given to us that we should be made perfect (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We are also to strive to build up one another to be perfect (Col. 1:28). The promise of being perfect is peace, completeness, and lacking nothing (Ps. 37:37; James 1:5). After having been fully trained (κατηρτισμένος), we shall be perfect like Jesus (Luke 6:40).

One English Bible dictionary defined “perfect” as follows: “1. Of the very best possible kind, ‘As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless’ (Ps. 18:30), 2. Complete,

---

<sup>13</sup>Glenn W. Barker, William L. Lane, and J. Ramsey Michaels, *The New Testament Speaks* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1969), 95-7.

with nothing missing, spoiled, etcetera.”<sup>14</sup> Mortals who like to claim to be examples of this quality tend to pair it with pride, arrogance, selfishness, stubbornness, etc. But pride is not the example portrayed or recommended by Jesus. In fact, he warns strongly against being proud (Prov. 6:16-19; 8:13; 13:10; 29:23; Mark 7:22-23; and others mentioned below). Instead, it is highly recommend that we cultivate the next quality.

### **Humble ταπεινός**

This includes being: lowly, meek, poor, not complaining, not proud, haughty, arrogant, or puffed up, not demanding one’s rights. The Hebrew word for humility is עֲנָוָה. Jesus demonstrated all of these throughout his life (cf. Isa. 53; Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-8). Aside from Christ, Moses was the most humble man in all the earth (Num. 12:3). James 4:10 and 1 Pet. 5:5-6 strongly admonish us to humble ourselves before God, not only because of the promises for those who do humble themselves (2 Chron. 7:14; Matt. 5:5; 18:4), but also because those who do not humble themselves will be humbled (Deut. 8:2, 3, 16; Isa. 2:11, שָׁפֵל; 5:15; Phil. 2:10-11). So humility is a crucial character trait that is not difficult to maintain as finite creatures within a healthy Christian community since there will usually be some one who is more gifted than we are in one area or another.

### **Good ἀγαθωσύνη**

Other implications of good include: right, upright, just; kind, generous; beneficial, sound, clear of conscience. God is good (טוֹב, Ps. 34:8). Jesus rebuked one man for flippantly or

---

<sup>14</sup>*All Nations Dictionary: The Complete Christian Dictionary for Home and School, 1996, in Translator’s Workplace.*

flatteringly calling him “good” in Luke 18:19 by saying that “No one is good—except God alone.” Jesus did not imply by this response that he himself was not good or even that he was not God, but he knew the man was being sarcastic and did not really mean the compliment. Jesus claimed to be the Good Shepherd, implying that he cared more for them and knew them better than any other shepherd (John 10:10-18). Believers, those who hear his voice and follow him, are his sheep (John 10:26-27).

Jesus always went about doing good (John 10:37-38; Acts 18:38), doing the things that pleased the Father (John 8:29) and he commands us to do likewise (Luke 6:27, 35; Rom. 2:1, 5; Gal. 6:9; 1 Tim. 6:18; Heb. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13; 3:8; 4:19) knowing full well that without his help we cannot do anything good (Ps. 14:1,3; Rom. 3:9, 23; 7:19; Phil. 4:13). He said we should let our good works shine for others to see and glorify God (Matt. 5:16). Paul states that we were created to do good works (Eph. 2:1) and John said that those who do good are of God (1 John 1:11).

### **Patient ἀνεξίκακος or Longsuffering μακροθυμία**

God as well as Jesus is very patient (tolerant and longsuffering) up to a certain point: “God is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9, KJV). Christ will rule one thousand years on earth before his final judgment of the living and the dead (Rev. 20:4, 12-15). Paul and James strongly recommend that servants of the Lord be patient (1 Tim. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:24; James 5:7-8). James also encourages us to be “slow to speak,” thus taking time to make sure the other person was understood and that we not respond quickly with a “knee-jerk” reactive comment, or anger (James 1:19).

Hebrew utilized a phrase for this trait which refers to being slow of anger: אָרַךְ אֲפַיִם (literally long of nose). Longsuffering is the fourth fruit of the spirit mentioned in Gal. 5:22. But

we are not capable of manufacturing the patience or longsuffering God desires in us. This trait is foreign to our natural tendency to react quickly in speech and anger. The battle we are in is too much for us (Eph. 6:10-18). Patience or longsuffering can only occur as we yield our will to the control of the Holy Spirit, who is able to produce it in our life.

### **Faithful πιστός**

This refers to being faithful, trustworthy, reliable, dependable, responsible, believing, sure, true (cf. Acts 10:45; 13:34). The similar Hebrew term for faithfulness is אֱמֻנָה. Jesus was faithful to his task (Heb. 3:1-2) thereby demonstrating the faithfulness of his Father (Lam. 3:22-23). God's faithfulness cannot be nullified (Rom. 3:3-4). The meanings for the word אֱמֻנָה includes unfailing goodness, kindness, loving-kindness, mercy, and perhaps loyalty. Christ desires that we be faithful, and encourages us to begin by being faithful in the little things, so that we may develop sufficiently to be trusted with more or larger responsibilities (Luke 16:9-13).

### **Just δίκαιος**

Both God and Jesus were considered just, right; fair, proper, and honest (Acts 3:14; 1 John 1:9). Several people came to Jesus in hopes of hearing a just and fair decision. Only those who proactively live by faith are considered as being in a right relationship to God and thus able to demonstrate behavior which is just, right, fair, proper and honest (Rom. 1:17). We are not to deny justice to anyone (Exod. 23:6; Deut. 16:20; Prov. 25:1; Isa. 5:23). "When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers" (Prov. 21:15), but sometimes it may be best to balance this with grace and mercy if there is genuine repentance and perhaps appropriate compensation (Ps. 103).

### **Merciful ἐλεήμων**

God is merciful (Exod. 11:19 uses a form of רַחֵם for mercy [KJV] or compassion, and 2 Chron. 36:15 uses a form of רַחֵם, pity) to those he favors (those who are genuinely repentant and strive to obey him). Jesus was a merciful and faithful high priest (Heb. 2:17). We are commanded to be merciful just as our Father in heaven is merciful (Luke 6:36; Jude 1:22). Those who are merciful will be blessed (Matt. 5:7), but those who are not merciful will be judged without being shown any mercy (James 2:13).

### **Generous εὐμετάδοτος**

Because of his great love for each one of us, God generously offered the greatest sacrifice anyone could possibly give, his one and only son—his pride and joy, since this was the only means of ransoming us from our bondage to the evil one (John 3:16; Heb. 9:9-28). The Hebrew equivalent, נָדַב, may also mean noble, willing, inclined. Another related Hebrew word refers to being lavish, שָׂבַע. God's willingness to offer his only son proves that he could then freely give us anything or everything he deems helpful to us (Rom. 8:32) as his adopted children (Eph. 4:4-7) and ambassadors for his Kingdom (2 Cor. 5:20). God is able and willing to supply all our needs (Phil. 4:19) as we ask in faith and seek him first, not worrying or doubting (Matt. 6:25-34; Luke 11:9-10; John 16:23-24; Phil. 4:6-7; James 1:6). The righteous "are always generous and lend freely, their children will be blessed" (Ps. 37:26). Generous people will be blessed (Prov. 22:9; 11:25).

Jesus told his disciples (and all future disciples implicitly) to freely give as we have freely received (Matt. 10:8). The only caution is not to give what would not be received with the appropriate respect for the value or the thing(s) given (Matt. 7:6). He has promised (as God did

in Mal. 4:10-11) that our generosity will be repaid with more than we have given (Luke 6:37-38). We are commanded to be generous (1 Tim. 6:17-18), to lend to others (Matt. 5:42) and to give (Matt. 5:40-42) even cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6-8) yet not expecting anything returned in this life (Luke 14:12-14).

### **Eternal αἰώνιος**

This and related words have the meaning of both a supernatural quality of life as well as an unending life: always, forever, everlasting, for all time, for all ages. The Hebrew word for this trait in Isa. 26:4 refers to a long duration, עוֹלָם: “For in God the Lord, we have an everlasting Rock” (NASB). Both God and Christ claimed to be the eternal “I am” (Exod. 3:14; John 8:23, 58), and Jesus Christ claimed to be the “Alpha and Omega” (Rev. 1:11; 2:8; 22:12, 17). Christ through the eternal Holy Spirit offered himself as the required blameless sacrifice to God (Heb. 9:14), thereby making it possible that we who are called by God may gain both the quality of eternal life with Christ as our elder brother (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 5:11-20) as well as receive our eternal inheritance (κληρονομία), that is our future eternal property, possession(s), etc. (Rom. 8:17).

### **Everywhere present and helpful**

God is a spiritual being, not limited to any physical form, thus not subject to the laws of nature as we experience them (John 4:24). No one can hide from God (Ps. 139:7-12). He is always present to help anyone anywhere who calls on him when they are in trouble, and he can do this simultaneously to everyone (Ps. 46:1). He fears no one; he fears nothing, and helps those who fear him (Job 37-38; 40:7-9; Isa 40:10-42:9). Although we cannot be everywhere present, we are to live in the present (not in the past or future) and are to be helpful as we go wherever go

and wherever we stay with whomever we are may be (Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 6:31; 10:27; Rom. 2:5; Gal. 6:7-10; Phil. 2:2-5; 2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 10:22-25; 1 Pet. 2:13, 18).

### **Conclusion**

Even if only the above fourteen traits were, by the grace of God (and perhaps through being mentored by others), to become observable in our lives, the other ninety plus character traits would probably improve significantly. Significant improvement in the life of any disciple of Christ in any of the character traits listed above will result in a noticeable reduction of the types and frequency of distorted thinking engaged in.