

You're Born With It!

"Why is it that I can't control myself? I know what's right and wrong—I just don't seem to be able to do it!" This frustrated plea came from a fine young businessman who had come to me for counseling. It wasn't the first time I had heard that plaint in one form or another; in fact, it is a very common experience.

The Apostle Paul no doubt felt that same way when he said, ". . . for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." (Romans 7:18-20)

Paul differentiated between himself and that uncontrollable force within by saying, "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." The "I" is Paul's person, the soul, will, and mind of man. The "sin" that dwelled in him was the natural weaknesses that he, like all human beings, inherited from his parents.

We have all inherited a basic temperament from our parents that contains both strengths and weaknesses. This temperament is called several things in the Bible, "the natural man," "the flesh," "the old man," and "corruptible flesh," to name a few. It is the basic impulse of our being that seeks to satisfy our wants. To properly understand its control of our actions and reactions we should distinguish carefully between temperament, character, and personality by defining them.

Temperament

Temperament is the combination of inborn traits that subconsciously affects man's behavior. These traits are arranged

genetically on the basis of nationality, race, sex and other hereditary factors. These traits are passed on by the genes. Some psychologists suggest that we get more genes from our grandparents than our parents. That could account for the greater resemblance of some children to their grandparents than to their parents. The alignment of temperament traits is just as unpredictable as the color of eyes, hair, or size of body.

Character

Character is the real you. The Bible refers to it as "the hidden man of the heart." It is the result of your natural temperament modified by childhood training, education, and basic attitudes, beliefs, principles, and motivations. It is sometimes referred to as "the soul" of man, which is made up of the mind, emotions, and will.

Personality

Personality is the outward expression of ourselves, which may or may not be the same as our character, depending on how genuine we are. Often personality is a pleasing facade for an unpleasant or weak character. Many are acting a part today on the basis of what they think a person should be, rather than what they really are. This is a formula for mental and spiritual chaos. It is caused by following the human formula for acceptable conduct. The Bible tells us, "Man looketh on the outward appearance, and God looketh on the heart," and "Out of the heart proceed the issues of life." The place to change behavior is inside man, not outside.

In summary, temperament is the combination of traits we were born with; character is our "civilized" temperament; and personality is the "face" we show to others.

Since temperament traits are received genetically from our parents and hence are unpredictable, one should keep in mind some of the character factors that influence temperament. Nationality and race certainly play a part in one's inherited temperament. We use such expressions as, "an excitable nationality," "an industrious nationality," "a cold nationality," to describe what seems to be apparent.