

Friday Night Theology, 29th January 2010

The demise of reliability

Employers have long considered reliability to be a desired character trait amongst employees. However, in the news this week, we've discovered that thinking such as this might be discriminatory!

[The Telegraph](#) reported that a Jobcentre Plus in Norfolk refused to display a job advert which concluded with the line, "must be very reliable and hard-working". The reason: fear that it would be seen as discriminating against unreliable workers!

It's quite possible that this story is an isolated event, a result of an individual being over cautious. We may never hear about it again. On the other hand, it raises an interesting and significant human development issue that is always bubbling beneath the surface. Are there character traits that are bad? As individuals should we be seeking to improve our character? It is appropriate to encourage others to change?

When behaviour is challenged, people are often quick to make excuses. "I can't help it, this is who I am." "It's in my genes." "It's how I was raised." "A leopard can't change its spots." To some degree and to a certain extent, these responses may be valid. However, the Bible contains a message that cuts right across the idea that our character is fixed and therefore inevitably determines our behaviour. Not only does the Bible make it clear that change is possible, it instructs us to walk a path of transformation. Just take a look at Philippians 4:12-14 and Colossians 3:1-17.

The Bible also has much to say about character traits that should be desired. The 'fruits of the Spirit', listed in Galatians (5:22,23), describe attributes that most people would be prepared to describe as positive. "...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Likewise, most would consider their opposites to be negative. If we ask probing questions, we soon discover that the vast majority of people consider some character traits to be favourable while others are less welcome.

This leads naturally to the next set of questions. Should we attempt to change? And, is change possible? If asked, both questions would undoubtedly receive a variety of responses. However, I suspect that underlying the responses to the latter question would be the longing for the possibility of change. Therefore, surely the Bible's message that transformation is possible is one that people want to hear, one they might find surprisingly freeing?

So, is it unfair to discriminate against individuals who have the character trait of 'unreliability'? Is it OK to suggest that those with the 'unreliability gene' should attempt to change and become more reliable? It's something to discuss with you're friends this weekend. In the meantime, we should be secure in the knowledge that although reliability briefly came under fire this week, God will continue to be 100% reliable (Psalm 89).

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