

The Christian's Attitude Toward His Reputation



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

The Christian's Attitude Toward His Reputation

Why and how you should build a God-shaped reputation

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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Written by Eric Krieg

About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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make false conclusions on their own), maintaining a good reputation is your responsibility as a Christian. Yes, you do have some control over what the general picture is that folks have about you! And, you should be conscious of what you are leading other people to think about you. This has a big impact on whether your life will be used to glorify God or not.

The purpose of this lesson is to cause you to think about your reputation so that you will determine to be proactive in handling your reputation. Please recognize that a reputation is built throughout a lifetime – piece by piece. But, recognize that it can be destroyed or greatly damaged in a moment of carelessness. Whenever this happens, it can take years to rebuild (if it ever can be entirely rebuilt).

Reputation Is Important!

What is your attitude toward your reputation? That is, what is your mindset toward how other people think of you? Do you care about how other people think of you? Should you care about how other people think of you?

Everyone has a reputation of some kind. Reputation is the common opinion that is held about you by others. It is the mental picture/impression that is left with everyone you come into contact with.

Do you have a reputation that portrays Christ? Whenever people think of you, do they have the picture of someone who is dedicated to serving Jesus Christ, a man/woman of great faith, someone who is committed to boldly and lovingly teaching the gospel of Christ, someone who dares to be different from the world (i.e. dresses differently, thinks differently, talks differently, has different priorities, etc.)? Or, do others have an entirely different impression of you? Perhaps when they think of you, they see someone who is only partially interested in serving Jesus Christ, dresses very similar to the world, talks a lot like everybody else, isn't afraid of bending the truth a little, never talks about your faith, etc.

While you cannot entirely control everything that every person thinks about you (as some may

Why should you even care about your reputation (your image)? Before considering some points about building a good reputation, we should consider the fact that God wants you to have a reputation of living for Him, along with some examples we can learn from.

Reputation is powerful

“Who am I that my reputation really matters?” We are all very small and insignificant in the overall scope of life on earth. Why, then, should we believe that our reputations actually matter – to God or to anyone else?

First, recognize that your reputation is usually the first thing someone thinks about you. From the time that you first meet someone, that person begins to form some sort of mental picture/impression of you. As you first meet someone, your reputation may be based on “simple” things like the way you are dressed, your personal hygiene, how you talk, your demeanor (i.e. whether you are pleasant and happy, whether you're serious, whether you're angry, whether you're depressed, etc.). Sometimes you only have an opportunity to make first impressions. Perhaps you never have another opportunity to make another impression on a

person because you never see that person again or because that person does not want to be around you (because of the first impression that you left). But, when you have additional opportunities, your reputation will continue to be built around decisions that you make, about how you respond to difficult and challenging situations, about how you choose to conduct your life, about your habits, etc.

God says that all of this that is involved in your reputation is important – because of the inherent value and power of a good reputation. Consider Proverbs 20:11. “Even a child is known by his deeds, Whether what he does is pure and right.” Already we learn that a person is never too young to work on developing a good reputation. Think about children you know. Even they have reputations. How many of them would you like to have spend the day with you? Some have reputations of not listening to their parents and obeying instructions. Some have reputations of being spoiled. Some have reputations of being respectful and obedient. Some have reputations of being sincere and loving. Then, recognize that if this is true about little children, it is certainly true about people who have 20, 30, 50, or 70+ years of reputation!

Evaluate your reputation right now. Whenever people think of your name, what is the picture that (generally) is brought to mind? Proverbs 22:1 says, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold.” Similarly, Ecclesiastes 7:1 says, “A good name is better than precious ointment, And the day of death than the day of one’s birth.” Your name stands for everything you are. So, a good name (one that has a reputation of serving Jesus Christ faithfully) is better than every kind of treasure that you could possess on earth!

Listen to Jesus in Matthew 5:13-16: “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

What good are you to God? Certainly, He can use you to glorify Him! Even if you have not had a good reputation in the past, He can work to transform you and your reputation will also work to transform others for Jesus Christ. But, what if you profess to follow Christ – and do not make a good reputation with others? You are like salt that loses its flavor! What good is it? Jesus says that it might as well be thrown out. As a Christian, your reputation matters! If you have a reputation of living faithfully for Jesus Christ, it will be powerful in working to glorify God. In this passage, Jesus demonstrates how that other people can see your example and be so impacted by it that it leads them to also glorify God in their lives!

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if every Christian had such a reputation that even those who are our enemies had nothing evil to say about us? For instance, Titus 2:6-8 says, “Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.”

Though this is specifically addressed to younger men, the same principle is generally applicable to everyone who is a Christian. If every person who is a Christian is careful in all of his/her conduct (making sure that the things that are done are approved of God), then even though some people will not like him/her, they will not have anything truly evil to say! For instance, many of the early Christians in New Testament times were not liked very well because they stood for the truth. However, their enemies only could say things like, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too” (Acts 17:6). Or, “Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands” (Acts 19:26).

Then, as you consider the powerful nature of your reputation, recognize that your reputation can quickly spread. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 1:8. “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that

we do not need to say anything.” I don’t know how the reputation of the Thessalonians was spread so far. Maybe it happened whenever people traveled to Thessalonica and met people from the church while they were there. Or, maybe it happened whenever people from the church in Thessalonica traveled to other places. It was probably a combination of these and the people who had met these Christians talking about them. Regardless, their reputation spread throughout the world. Fortunately, it was a reputation of faith and service toward God!

Your reputation will spread in the same way. People will approach you and form a picture about you. You will approach people and leave pictures in their minds. People will hear things associated with your name. People who know you will talk about you. What kind of reputation have you established? What kind of impression do you make on others? Will your reputation work to draw people to Jesus Christ or repel them away from Him?

Examples of some with good reputations

I suppose that you can immediately begin thinking of people you have met who have good reputations for serving Jesus Christ faithfully. What kind of impact has their reputations had on your own life? Have their reputations encouraged you to be faithful through difficult times? Have their reputations challenged you to do better in God’s service?

Certainly, we can search the Scriptures and find individuals with good reputations who had impacts on other people. For instance, consider Dorcas. The Scriptures say, “This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did” (Acts 9:36). And, whenever this woman died, people around her sent for Peter in hope that he would come and restore her to life. Whenever Peter came to them, “all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them” (Acts 9:39). Just think about the reputation of this godly woman. She was known for her charitable deeds and for being full of good works!

Consider Timothy. Whenever Paul came to Derbe and Lystra, he met a disciple named Timothy.

He was the son of a “Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek” (Acts 16:1). Then, listen to the testimony about Timothy’s reputation given in Acts 16:2: “He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.” Timothy had formed and maintained a good reputation for living a godly life among the Christians in Lystra and Iconium. In fact, his reputation was such that when Paul considered him, he “wanted” to have Timothy go with him on his preaching journey (Acts 16:3)!

Finally, consider Abel. There is not much that we know about Abel. He was, of course, a son of Adam and Eve. We also know that he was a shepherd. And, whenever it was time to bring an offering to God, we know that Abel’s offering was one that showed faith and reverence for God (see Genesis 4:1-5 and Hebrews 11:4). Then, after this, we read about Abel’s brother (Cain) killing Abel out of envy. Yet, although much of what this man did during his life has not been preserved for us, there is enough that he continues to have a good reputation for faithfulness to God that impacts people today. Hebrews 11:4 says, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

Examples of some with bad reputations

I suppose that you can also think of people you have met who have bad reputations. Whether they claim to be Christians or not, consider whether you would ever desire to follow their examples. What kind of impacts have they had on your life? Do their reputations work to pull you closer to Jesus Christ or pull you further away from Him?

Certainly, we can search the Scriptures and find individuals with bad reputations who had impacts on other people. For instance, consider Adam and Eve. Now, I don’t know how Adam and Eve lived when they were outside of the Garden of Eden. For the most part, the only things we know about their lives concern the events that transpired in the Garden of Eden. There we learn about how these individuals put their own selfish desires above serving God. And, we learn that their decision had an impact on humanity for as long as life on this earth

continues (read Genesis 3). We also learn that rather than taking personal responsibility for their actions, they both attempted to blame someone else for their error.

Consider Cain. Although Abel has a good reputation (even today), his brother Cain does not. While we do not know the exact nature of Cain's rebellion against God regarding his sacrifice, something about it failed to demonstrate faith and show reverence toward God (Genesis 4:1-5). Then, compounding sin upon sin, Cain killed Abel out of envy (Genesis 4:6-12). Elsewhere, the Scriptures even describe him as being "of the wicked one" (1 John 3:10-12).

Consider Sodom and Gomorrah. What first comes to mind whenever you think of these two Old Testament cities? It is likely the sin of homosexuality. These cities were notable for their great wickedness – especially pertaining to homosexuality (read Genesis 18-19). In fact, these cities were so wicked that there were not even ten righteous people in them – and God destroyed them for their wickedness by raining fire and brimstone from Heaven on them.

Examples of good reputations turned bad

Reputations are not made once for all time. Instead, there are plenty of examples of reputations being changed over time. Sometimes this includes reputations that go from good to bad. You can probably think about individuals who have destroyed their good reputations. Perhaps they had worked diligently to form a good reputation of godly living throughout their lives. But, in a moment of carelessness, they have destroyed much of what they had built.

Certainly, we can search the Scriptures and find individuals who once had good reputations, but ruined much of their reputations by making a careless decision. For instance, consider David. Early on in David's life, he was known for his faith (i.e. as he was the only Israelite willing to face Goliath in battle). The Scriptures even record that he was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). However, one evening, David walked on the roof of the king's house and saw a beautiful woman bathing. Rather

than looking away and bringing his thoughts under control, he lusted after her, had her brought to him, and committed adultery with her (2 Samuel 11). Then, after this woman became pregnant, he was then responsible for having the woman's husband killed in battle. Surely, David's reign was never the same after this. Thankfully the story does not stop there. Instead, David sought the forgiveness of God (Psalm 51). So, his reputation went from good to bad – and then worked to make it good again. Still, even his reputation has been tarnished.

Consider Solomon. Solomon became king after David. After Solomon had built the temple for God and been granted great wisdom and knowledge by God, Solomon had a reputation that spread even beyond his own kingdom (see 1 Kings 10). Particularly, he was known for his great wisdom (1 Kings 10:6). After all, this was the man so wise that he could author much of the book of Proverbs (a book full of wisdom from God). Yet, 1 Kings 11 describes how this man allowed his heart to be turned away from God whenever he took wives and concubines from foreign nations. The Scriptures never definitely record that he ever did return his heart to the Lord. So, despite years of careful and wise living (even teaching us about the value of a good name, see Proverbs 22:1 and Ecclesiastes 7:1), he ruined his reputation by carelessly turning away from God.

Examples of bad reputations turned good

In addition to good reputations that have turned bad, you should recognize that bad reputations can also turn good. You can probably think of individuals who you have known. At one time, perhaps you would not want to be around them because of their bad reputations. Then, the next time you see them, everything has changed. They talk about changing their lives so that they serve God and are trying to correct the mistakes they have made in the past. Though they recognize that they cannot completely undo all of their bad reputations, they are working as diligently as they can to repair them.

Certainly, we can search the Scriptures and find individuals who once had bad reputations, but worked to correct them. Consider the prodigal son. Although Luke 15:11-32 records a parable that Jesus

teaches, it represents what many people have experienced. This individual was a child of his father, then demanded his inheritance early, wasted his inheritance on all kinds of reckless things, and then came back to his father when he recognized the foolishness of how he had lived. Certainly, there are many people who have been children of God – only to waste all the blessings God has provided for them through Jesus Christ by sinning against Him and living for themselves. Yet, even though their reputations were destroyed by their reckless decisions in the past, they have turned back to the Lord and are seeking to make their wrongs right!

Consider Paul. Here is a man who had been responsible for killing and mistreating Christians – “in the name of God” (see Acts 8-9; Acts 26:9-11). Yet, after he was shown that he was actually sinning against God by doing these things, he was obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ and boldly taught the gospel of Christ to others. In Acts 9:26, after Paul had become a Christian, he attempted to join the church in Jerusalem. However, his reputation had preceded him. At this time, the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of him and were not convinced that he really was a disciple himself. It was not until Barnabas took him to the apostles and testified on his behalf how that he had seen the Lord and had been boldly preaching in Jesus’ name that he was counted among them (Acts 9:27-28). Then, the apostle Paul worked diligently to repair the wrongs that had been done by living for Christ faithfully and boldly proclaiming His message of salvation to others!

Reputation is not the only important thing

We have been considering the importance of having a reputation of living faithfully for Jesus Christ. But, before we consider how to develop such a good reputation, you should take a moment to recognize that reputations are only part of what is important to God. Not only does God want you to have a good reputation, but He also wants that good reputation to accurately represent who you are! He does *not* want you to have a good reputation because you are a hypocrite who has deceived others.

For instance, many of the scribes and Pharisees had good reputations among the Jews. Many of them were held up on a pedestal and

believed to have really been faithful to the law of God. However, Jesus had frequent conflicts with them – because Jesus knew their hearts. He could see that although they put on a good show for people, it was all just an act. In reality, they were hypocrites.

For instance, consider Matthew 23:1-5. “Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.’”

Then, not only were these guilty of having better reputations among people than their character merited, but you can see the same thing in Revelation 3 with the church in Sardis. Jesus told them, “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (verse 1). They had evidently deceived others into thinking that they were a living and vibrant congregation of disciples who were focused on following Jesus Christ. However, Jesus knew their works and their hearts perfectly. Therefore, He could see that their reputations among men were not accurate.

So, as you focus on having a good reputation of godly living for the purpose of glorifying God, please recognize that you must be interested in this reputation being an honest representation of who you are. You should not be trying to fool or deceive anyone into thinking that you are someone you are not. For, even if you deceive everyone around you and develop a good reputation among people as being godly, you will not be successful in deceiving God!

How To Have A God-Shaped Reputation

It is important to have a God-shaped reputation – with both God and men. Hopefully this point has been proven well. But, how? Let’s consider some points from the Scriptures that will help you develop a reputation of God-shaped living.

You can build a God-shaped reputation!

Since you can build a reputation for yourself, you can choose to make that reputation one that is God-shaped. Having a God-shaped reputation simply refers to giving God control over everything that will contribute to your reputation. As a Christian, you must consider yourself to be an imitator of God. Ephesians 5:1 says, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.” Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 11:1 records Paul as saying, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”

But, for those who are old enough to have sinned against God, building a God-shaped reputation must begin by properly dealing with the past mistakes that have been made. Like the prodigal son, you have been given the opportunity to return to God and find forgiveness of your past. Then, after you comply with what God has required of you to be forgiven, you should quickly begin walking in newness of life for Jesus Christ. Although there are many people who may not immediately forget the mistakes that you have made in the past, your consistent example of conversion and repentance over time will build up a new reputation that will be a powerful force on those you come into contact with. Like Paul, you need to work to put the past that has been forgiven by God in the past and press forward.

Paul said, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal

for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

Then, as you press forward in building a reputation that is entirely God-shaped, you must recognize that this requires you to give God full control over your life – in every area. For instance, once Paul stopped fighting against God, He gave God full control. In Galatians 2:20, he said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

So, what about you? Are you willing to give yourself fully to Jesus Christ and be God-shaped in every area of your life? If so, He can use you to build a reputation that will work to glorify Him (Matthew 5:13-16)! Please consider some essential elements involved in a God-shaped reputation.

Have God-shaped faith

True faith in God and Jesus Christ is at the heart of what distinguishes Christians from all other people in the world. However, true faith is not a mere mental acknowledgment that God is real or that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Yes, these things are necessary. However, true faith in God and Jesus Christ is demonstrated through one’s actions (see Hebrews 11 and James 2:14-26). Therefore, everything about the Christian ought to demonstrate an unwavering trust in God. The Christian’s “motto” ought to be Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” Yes, the Christian should have the reputation of having God-shaped faith that trusts in God in any and every situation, demonstrating that he/she will always choose to believe and obey God!

Have God-shaped thoughts

God’s people should have thoughts that are different from the world. While the world is focused on selfish things, God’s people should have thoughts that are focused on living to please God (see Romans 8:5-8). While most people have thoughts that are focused on their own greed, their own sexual desires,

their own entertainment, etc., Christians should carefully be working to bring every thought under Jesus' control (2 Corinthians 10:3-6). In fact, God even tells us what we must use as criteria for our thoughts. Philippians 4:8 says, "whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things." Yes, the Christian should have the reputation of having God-shaped thoughts that will produce God-shaped actions (see Proverbs 4:23 and Proverbs 23:7)!

Have God-shaped priorities

God's people have different priorities than the world has. While most people in this world are focused on obtaining wealth and riches, enjoying physical pleasures, etc., God's people are focused on things that truly matter. God's people should be known for choosing God over worldly things because they recognize that earthly things perish, but the soul lives on. God's people, therefore, "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). They set their minds on "things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). Yes, the Christian should have the reputation of having God-shaped priorities that look very different from the world's priorities!

Have God-shaped character

God's people have different character than the world has. The world is accustomed to seeing people who are angry, bitter, selfish, envious, lewd, unkind, etc. But, God's people are constantly working to refine their character into one that is approved of God. Therefore, God's people have characters that are filled with "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Yes, the Christian should have the reputation of having character that has been God-shaped according to the teachings of the Scriptures!

Use God-shaped words

God's people use very different words than the world uses. The world uses profanity and

euphemistic expressions, tells dirty jokes, engages in suggestive humor, gossips, tears people down, takes God's name in vain, etc. However, God's people have given their words over to God's control. The Christian does not allow any "corrupt word" to proceed from his/her mouth. Rather, he/she is focused only on speaking words that edify and give grace (Ephesians 4:29). Yes, the Christian should have the reputation of speaking words that are flavored with the grace of God!

Have God-shaped habits

God's people engage in very different habits than the world engages in. The world has developed many different habits that only serve selfish purposes. Some habits involve pornography, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, greed, laziness, etc. However, God's people have given full control over to God. They recognize that their bodies are not their own. Instead, they have the responsibility of serving and glorifying God in their bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Yes, the Christian should put away all manners of sinful habits and carefully develop habits that can be used to glorify God!

Have God-shaped relationships

God's people have very different relationships than the world has. The world struggles to find meaning and order in their relationships. However, God's people are able to properly identify God's purposes for their relationships and then order them in a God-approved way. For instance, God's people should have much better marriages than the world has because they recognize God's purpose for this relationship and follow God's instructions for this relationship (such as are given in Ephesians 5:22-33). Yes, the Christian should have relationships that are entirely God-shaped – and this will set them apart from a majority of people in this world!

Have God-shaped attitudes

God's people have very different attitudes than the world has. The world has the wrong attitude about many things. In fact, the world's mindset is lacking on *most* things. This is because the world does not look to God's truth to shape their attitudes.

Yet, God’s people look to God in all things, seeking for His truth that He has revealed in the pages of His word. They hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). Therefore, they will be filled with the right ways of God and their attitudes will be what God wants them to be. Yes, the Christian should have God-shaped attitudes toward everything – toward clothing, toward entertainment, toward death, toward worshiping God, toward sin, etc.!

A transformed reputation – not conformed

As you give God full control over every area of your life, your reputation will be transformed into one that is God-shaped and that will glorify God – not one that looks like the world! Romans 12:1-2 says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Conclusion

Has this lesson described your attitude toward your reputation? Do you recognize that your reputation really is important and that you should care what other people think about you? Are you doing everything that you can do to build a reputation that will work to glorify God? Please, search your life very carefully – examining every area of your life by the word of God (which serves as a mirror, see James 1:22-25). Then, put God’s word into action in your life. In doing so, you will build a God-shaped reputation!

Study Questions

What is a reputation?

1. Reputation Is Important!

What is the power of a good reputation?

List some examples of people who had good reputations.

List some examples of people who had bad reputations.

List some example of people who had good reputations that turned bad.

List some examples of people who had bad reputations that turned good.

Are reputations the only important thing?

2. How To Have A God-Shaped Reputation

Can you build a God-shaped reputation? How?

What does it mean to have God-shaped faith?

What does it mean to have God-shaped thoughts?

What does it mean to have God-shaped priorities?

What does it mean to have God-shaped character?

What does it mean to have God-shaped words?

What does it mean to have God-shaped habits?

What does it mean to have God-shaped relationships?

What does it mean to have God-shaped attitudes?

Does your reputation need to be transformed or conformed?