

**sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."**

- 3) It is the Lord who gives liberty (v.17).
- 4) The Gospel of the NT is a message of liberty. It sets a sinner free from the bondage of sin. The message of liberty in Christ is the message desperately needed by people all around us.
- 5) Have you shared the Gospel message of liberty with anyone this week?

**Conclusion:** As we have examined the character of *Paul's ministry, message, and method*, we have also noted several truths that can give us eternal hope. The Corinthian believers' lives had been changed by placing their faith in Christ. They were not trusting in the OT law that kills, condemns, and pronounces death on every sinner who is not sinlessly perfect. They were trusting the NT Gospel through faith in Christ. Paul preached this confidently because it gives liberty to those who are in bondage to sin.

If you are trying to be good enough to please God, you will never succeed. God offers you liberty from that bondage through faith in Christ's death and resurrection. I urge you to receive that today. If you are not sure how, I would be honoured to sit down with my Bible and explain it to you.

If you have received it, will you ask God to give you the courage to share it with at least one person this week?

**Song:** Let Jesus Come Into Your Heart - 244

# Examine the Character

19 May 2024 AM - Text: 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 - Topic: Character

**Introduction:** So far in our study of 2 Corinthians, we looked at God's Comfort, Christian Teammates, Biblical Love, and Conquering Discouragement. In the third chapter, the Apostle Paul describes the character of his ministry, message, and method.

Character may be defined as "A characteristic property that defines the apparent individual nature of something."<sup>WordWeb</sup> Paul's ministry was not like those of his day who peddled the Word of God for profit.

**Transition:** Today I want us to examine the character of Paul's ministry, message, and method. As we look at these, I will highlight several truths that give us eternal hope.

## 1. The Character of Paul's Ministry (v.1-5) Read.

### a. Changed lives testified of Paul's ministry.

- 1) Some had accused Paul of corrupting God's Word to make a profit from it (2:17). Paul reminded his readers that he needed no reference letter to defend himself. His preaching ministry was written in their hearts for all to read (v.2).
- 2) The Spirit of the living God had written His Word in their hearts (v.3). God had transformed their lives through the Gospel of Christ which Paul had preached. Corinth was a wicked city. Immorality, filth, and crime were rampant. The Corinthian believers had been saved out of that life. When God changes a person's heart, that person's life will change. (2 Corinthians 5:17) **"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."**
- 3) Our root problem is not our outward faults, sinful habits, sharp tongue, mean spirit, or lustful thoughts. Our root problem is our sinful heart. (Jeremiah 17:9) **"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"** Jesus said, (Matthew 15:19) **"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:"**
- 4) The difference between religion and the biblical Gospel is

that religion seeks to change a person from the outside in with rules and regulations, but the biblical Gospel changes a person from the inside out. Once God cleans the heart, outward changes naturally follow.

**b. Paul's dependence on God testified of his ministry.**

- 1) Paul took no credit for the changed lives in Corinth. He knew that he was not sufficient to change anyone.
- 2) He wisely credited God with the sufficiency.
- 3) In the same way, I cannot change your life. Our church cannot change your life. Only God can reach into the depths of your heart and change you from the inside out. If he has not yet changed your heart through faith in Jesus Christ's atonement and given you a new life and eternal hope, I urge you to repent of your sin and trust Christ today.

*We have looked at the character of Paul's ministry, now let's look at ...*

**2. The Character of Paul's Message (v.6-11)** Read.

**a. It represented a New Testament of hope.**

- 1) Paul said, "God has made us able ministers." God gave them the sufficiency needed to share the Gospel.
- 2) The message Paul preached was of the New Testament. Our Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament.
  - a) The OT contains the letter or written record of God's Laws. The NT contains the spirit or true intention of God's heart.
  - b) The OT letter kills (it said, Do or Die), but the NT spirit (perhaps speaking of the Holy Spirit) gives life. (Romans 3:20) "**Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.**" (cf., Heb 8:13)

**b. It replaced the Old Testament of doom.**

- 1) In verse 7, the OT is called the ministration (i.e., ministry) of death. The law condemned sin, but it offered no hope for the sinner. It was *glorious* because it reveals the holy expectations of God. When Moses received it from God, his face glowed (Exodus 34:29). However, the NT

ministration (ministry) of the spirit (v.8) is *more glorious*. Its Gospel transforms repentant sinners and gives them eternal hope.

- 2) The OT law, though glorious, had a ministration (ministry) of condemnation (v.9). It said, "**Do or die!**" However, the NT is more glorious because it is a ministration (ministry) of righteousness. Faith in Christ transforms lives and makes sinners righteous before God.
- 3) The OT, which is now done away, was glorious in that it was God's holy expectations, but the NT, which remains eternally, is much more glorious in that it offers repentant sinners Christ's own righteousness.

**3. The Character of Paul's Method (v.12-18)** Read.

**a. He used great plainness of speech.**

- 1) Paul refers to his message as "**such hope**" (v.12).
- 2) With such hope, Paul spoke with **great plainness** or literally with much confidence or boldness.
- 3) The OT law received from God by Moses was veiled. They could see the rules, but they could not see the means to obeying the rules. Their minds were blinded.
- 4) Paul revealed that the OT veil was done away in Christ. It ceased to exist. The Gospel now allows us to see clearly that only repentance and faith in Christ can cleanse our sin and transform our lives.

**b. He confidently preached the message of liberty.**

- 1) The Jews and many religions today seek to keep God's law. That is a life of bondage because no one can keep God's law perfectly, and the law offers no hope.
- 2) When a person turns from the Law to the Lord, the Lord removes the veil from his eyes so that he can see that his only hope is in Jesus Christ (v.16). As we witness to unbelievers that just cannot see their need of Christ, we must strive to open their eyes and pray earnestly to that end. This was the commission which God gave to the Apostle Paul. (Acts 26:18) "**To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of**