

Keeping Perspective

Consistent Character 3

In our discussion of consistent, Christian character, we have determined that there is a difference between true faith and dead religion. We have made a distinction between obedience for the purpose of obtaining salvation and obedience as a result of salvation - by faith.

We have determined that salvation is not by works of righteousness that we have done, but by His mercy. But we have also seen from scripture that God has created us to do good works. Indeed, to develop, through growth in our relationship with Him, character traits that please Him.

In our most recent meeting together, we emphasized salvation: by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And with the understanding that this is the only starting place for any individual's consideration of Christian character, we can move on today - stepping back - to gain some perspective.

We were dead in trespasses and sins, but have now been made alive in Christ, and our desire is to serve Him with great integrity and effectiveness. To build our character in the process. How should we approach this endeavor?

Let's begin by understanding the context of the passage we will approach today in 2 Corinthians. Our text is in chapter 4, but let's start in chapter 3.

Paul the Apostle was a minister to the Corinthian church. He begins this portion of his second letter to them, confirming the validity of his ministry, by their very salvation.

In 2 Corinthians 3, starting in verse 2:

2 Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

4 ¶ And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward:

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

The ministry he had among them was evident, by who they were in Christ and how they had been changed. It was a result of Christ's work in them, not Paul's work, but God's work.

There were many teaching falsely at this time, presenting false credentials for their ministries. Paul's credentials were the changed lives that were a result of God working through him.

With this in mind we move forward to chapter 4 and verse 1:

1 ¶ Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

To “faint not” means to not lose heart.

Despite the challenges they faced, despite the problems (and there were many) among their disciples, they would press forward, having received mercy. (Both at salvation and for this ministry as well.)

2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

To renounce is “to forbid” for one’s self. Paul had forbidden for himself ministering in any deceitful way - or even obscuring the message of the gospel in any way.

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

If anything were added or taken away to somehow obscure the gospel or to change it, it would be an aid to the enemy. As the gospel would be hidden from the lost.

He (Satan) is working to blind them - to shield their eyes from the light of the gospel that would deliver them. That would translate them from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, to release them from the chains of sin and bring them to life!

It is in this context of ministry for the Lord that we begin to see the perspective that ought to be the foundation of our pursuit of Christian character.

We must realize, as Paul realized, and made the Corinthians aware, that it was not about him!

When we observe and make note of character in the life of another believer, we see Christ’s work in them. His glory reflected through their lives.

5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This is a preaching that is not about one’s self or by the power of one’s self. It is a preaching that comes from one who has taken up the proper position (of a servant) in heart and attitude and action.

The reason this is the case is because the light has successfully shined unto them. The enemy’s plan has been thwarted in their lives and the true light of the gospel has reached them. Therefore like a city set on a hill they must shine!

Paul reminded us it was not about him in the first chapter of Galatians:

11 ¶ But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.
12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

How can a gospel that is not of man be then spread only by the power of man? The light came from beyond man, therefore it is only reflected by us - and only by the mercy of God.

And so in verse 7 of 2 Corinthians 4, we see who we are:

7 ¶ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

We are the containers for this treasure - the reflectors of this light and can be classified perfectly as mere earthen vessels.

We are weak, totally vulnerable, our life is fleeting, we are prone to sin and still dwelling in bodies of flesh. The excellency must be - it must be - of Him.

This word "excellency" brought back to mind our definition paragraphs for character:

"Character is defined as strength of moral fiber. A.W. Tozer described character as "the excellence of moral beings." As the excellence of gold is its purity and the excellence of art is its beauty, so the excellence of man is his character. Persons of character are noted for their honesty, ethics, and charity. Descriptions such as "man of principle" and "woman of integrity" are assertions of character. A lack of character is moral deficiency, and persons lacking character tend to behave dishonestly, unethically, and uncharitably.

A person's character is the sum of his or her disposition, thoughts, intentions, desires, and actions. It is good to remember that character is gauged by general tendencies, not on the basis of a few isolated actions. We must look at the whole life."

This excellence must be of Him and not of us, as we endeavor in the understanding that we are but earthen vessels, containing His treasure.