

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, July 31, 2011 – 6:00 PM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Christian Character - Romans 1:8-11

Introduction: Look at a person next to you. What do you see? The way they are dressed, their hair style, perhaps even get a whiff of the perfume or cologne they are wearing (or not wearing)!

You might even know something about them - where they work, their families, where they live. While those things say something about us, they don't tell the whole story. They don't say everything about us - especially the most important part. What you don't always see is a person's character.

There's an old proverb that says you can't judge a book by its cover. Indeed, you must judge a book by its content. And that's also how we must be careful to evaluate our own lives.

The real issue about life is not our external appearance but our internal character. We are who we are on the inside. Our character is who we are when no one is looking.

The Bible says a lot about Christian character. Tonight, we are going to examine some of the Christian characteristics of Paul. I hope we can see in him, some characteristics we possess, and perhaps others we'd want to possess. First, notice that Paul had:

1. A Thankful Attitude (8)

Paul's first personal words to these Christians in Rome were, *"I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all."* He was thankful that their faith was being reported all over the world. This should be true for all Christians. Now this was not just empty flattery. Paul was truly a thankful person...it was a part of his character. Indeed, he had learned to be thankful.

When you look at Paul's life, because of his commitment to Christ, he had suffered a great deal of persecution. He had been beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, and mocked. He could have developed a bitter and unthankful attitude. But instead, he had learned to be thankful. If you recall, once when he and Silas were locked up in a Philippian jail, they wound up leading a two-man midnight worship service! Only two kinds of people would do such a thing- fools or genuinely thankful people. And Paul was certainly no fool.

Paul had developed an attitude of thanksgiving. It was an essential element in everything he did - especially in his prayer life. In Phil. 4:6 (NASB) he wrote, *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."* So we see that even our prayers must be offered with thanksgiving in order to be effective. We need to always look for something to be thankful for. It can make all the difference.

Having a thankful attitude is a true characteristic of spiritual maturity. It is a true reflection of the nature of Christ. Without thankfulness, a Christian's character is not complete.

Notice too, that Paul had developed:

2. A Servant's Spirit (9a)

In vs. 9, He indicates that his ministry of preaching the Gospel was one in which he was committed to serve God with his whole heart. The focus of his service was to God. Even though the preaching of the Gospel was directed at the people, Paul's devotion was to God.

We can learn a lesson from this. Our service should never be just for people. We serve each other - Yes! But we do it for God. We serve God first so we can then serve others.

And notice too that Paul said He served God *"in my spirit."* In other words, he served Him with his inner being - with his whole heart. His service was not half-hearted. He never just went through the motions, or did something just because no one else would. He put his all into every act of service. This is the kind of service God is looking for.

I'm sure there's not a wife in this room that would accept a half-hearted devotion out of their husbands. Guys, being faithful 90% of the time won't cut it. Because we'd still be 10% short. God deserves our whole-hearted service too! It should be part of our Christian Character.

But notice another godly characteristic of Paul. He had:

3. A Prayerful Concern (9b-10a)

Paul said God was his witness “*as to how unceasingly I make mention of you (the Romans), always in my prayers making request...*” He was concerned about these Christians whom he had never met. That concern moved him to pray constantly for them.

Now this was not unusual for Paul. For him, prayer was not just a ritual, it was a way of life. Over and over in his writings he emphasized the importance of prayer. In 1 Thess. 5:17 he exhorts us to “*pray continually.*” In Eph. 6:18 he says, “*...pray at all times in the Spirit...be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.*” Paul was constantly reminding his readers of the importance of having a prayerful concern for people.

Never was this more vividly seen than several years ago when a missionary returned home on furlough and as he was speaking in a particular church that supported him, he related how he had been out visiting a village when he found himself suddenly surrounded by a gang of robbers. He reported how these men were widely known for their savage ways of not only robbing their victims, but torturing them to death in the process. He related that as the men were approaching him to kill him, he began to pray out loud. At that moment, he looked up and saw 12 men surrounding him with shields raised high, and weapons drawn. He said, he didn’t know where they came from, but he sure was glad they came, because the gang scampered off into the jungle.

He said that after the gang fled, the 12 men disappeared. They vanished - never to be seen nor heard from again. He didn’t even get the opportunity to thank them.

After the meeting, one of the men of the church approached the missionary, and asked him when this incident happened and what time of day. When he told him, the man could hardly contain himself. He said that during the night that particular night, he was awakened with that missionary burdened on his heart. He prayed for him, but the burden was so intense, he couldn’t sleep. So, he called the other 11 deacons together to meet him at the church to pray for this missionary. It was the exact hour of the attack of the gang. Folks, it’s important to have a prayerful concern. But notice that Paul had also developed:

4. A Submissive Will (10b)

Notice what he prayed for in the last part of vs. 10: “*now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.*” This is sort of like when we say, “*Lord’s willing and the creek don’t rise,*” but Paul’s attitude goes much deeper than that. When Paul spoke of God’s will he was not only concerned about knowing God’s will but more importantly, he was saying that he was willing to submit to God’s will.

Paul recognized that the Lord controlled his life. He understood that God had a will for everything in his life and he was content to follow it.

When he gave his heart to Christ, he literally surrendered his life to Him. He willingly submitted himself to Him. He wasn’t forced into it. He did it himself - from the heart. Otherwise, it wouldn’t truly be submission.

It would be like the little boy standing up in the highchair. His Mom told him to sit down, but he refused. She told him again, and again he said, “*I won’t!*” She told him a third time, but this time, she said, “*If you don’t sit down in that highchair right now, you’re getting a spanking.*” Well, finally, he began to sit down, but as he did, he said, “*I may be sittin’ on the outside, but I’m standin’ up on the inside.*” That’s not submission. Submission begins on the inside. Paul had a submissive will because it came from within.

Finally, we see from verse 11 that Paul had:

5. A Gracious Heart (11)

Paul shared something of his heart when he wrote, “*I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established.*” He not only wanted to come to them, he wanted to give them something.

He wasn’t selfish. He didn’t just want to see them so they could lavish him with praise. He wasn’t into slaps on the back and flattering words. No, he wanted to see them, not for his own sake, but for theirs. He wanted to impart to them some spiritual gift. He was interested in building others up, not himself. He had a gracious heart. He had a giving attitude.

So, we see that Paul’s life was truly remarkable. He had learned that life is more than getting, more than pleasure, more than the constant drive for what the world calls success. He learned that real success is found in being thankful, in serving others, in having a prayerful concern for others, in submitting to God’s will, and in having a gracious heart.

But if we’re to see Romans as God’s message to us, we need to ask ourselves, Where am I in this regard? Have I come to this place in my life? Have I allowed Christ to change me from the inside out? Have I developed a

thankful attitude, a servant's spirit, a prayerful concern, a submissive will, and a gracious heart in my quest to become more like Christ?

I hope you've been challenged by these characteristics tonight. I hope you have the desire to see them grow in your life. I hope you understand that they can only come from a living and growing relationship with Jesus. They can only come as a result of a surrender of your whole heart to Him. That's the real issue of life. That's what really matters.