

Character Spelled with A Capital “C”

 PHILIPPIANS 3:17

“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us” (Philippians 3:17).

Benjamin Franklin attributed his success as a public man, not to his talents or his power of speaking (for these were but moderate), but to his known integrity of character. “Hence it was,” he said, “that I had so much weight with my fellow-citizens. I was but a bad speaker, never eloquent, subject to much hesitation in my choices of words, hardly correct in my language; and yet I generally carried my point.”

It was said of Alexander I, czar of Russia, that his personal character was equivalent to a constitution.

The Scriptures commend the qualities of a godly character. One text on the necessity of possessing a godly character is Proverbs 22:1: “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.” The unspoken power of your character is one of the strongest arguments either for you or against you. There is no escaping this fact!

In this lesson we focus upon the character of Paul. His was a splendid character! (Philippians 3:17). As a brief study of Paul’s epistles is made, we can highlight valuable traits that combined to fashion a godly character. Paul’s character invites us to an exact imitation.

THE SPELLING OF PAUL’S CHARACTER

Using the word “character” as an acronym, the following traits can be seen in Paul’s character:

“C”—*clearly sincere*. Paul was transparent. People could look at Paul and know what he was like—no pretense, no politicking phrases, and no evasion of difficult issues. Paul’s sincerity was evident in his practice and speech (1 Thessalonians 2:4b-6; 2 Corinthians 6:4-10; Galatians 4:16). Whatever his opponents questioned about Paul, they never questioned his sincere manners!

“H”—*humble*. The wonderful trait of humility marks genuine conversion (Ephesians 4:17-19). Before his conversion, Paul was arrogant and self-willed. His ambitions were defined in terms of personal achievement and popular acclaim (Galatians 1:14; Acts 9:1, 2). But his arrogance yielded to genuine humility (1 Corinthians 9:26; 11:1). “Self” was put into its place, and achievements began to be measured by spiritual victories, not earthly gains. Pride was controlled in Paul’s life by a mature spiritual understanding (2 Corinthians 10:12; Galatians 6:3). Paul placed himself alongside God and realized just how insignificant mortals were. Paul had come to understand the strength that is the foundation of genuine humility (James 4:6).

“A”—*affectionate*. Affection was a logical consequence of humility. Paul was one who demonstrated the greatest tenderness and gentleness to others (1 Thessalonians 2:7-12; 2 Corinthians 6:11-13). The metaphor of the “nurse” or “father” communicates the most tender of all images. By this trait, we understand that in the godly character is an abundance of affection (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 13). Paul understood how important it was to possess this godly affection;

he strove to persuade others to possess it as well (Romans 12:10).

"R"—ready to sacrifice. Paul was willing to sacrifice personal rights so Christ's church would not be hindered (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). He was a peacemaker, willing to do whatever was necessary to insure peace and harmony (Matthew 5:9, 38-42). The godly saint will jealously guard the individual's freedom in Christianity, but will quickly sacrifice these freedoms to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This trait refuses to judge another in a critical manner. This trait strives to discover ways to deepen and strengthen the blessed fellowship of the brotherhood (Romans 14:15-19).

"A"—always faithful. If there was any certainty about Paul, it was his faithfulness (1 Corinthians 9:17; 2 Corinthians 5:9, 10). Whatever situations faced Paul, there was no debating the options on his part. His choice had been made. He was going to follow Christ regardless! A Christian with this godly character trait will take special pains to remain faithful to God. He knows that he is a steward and his singular goal must be to please God! It was general knowledge that Paul would strive to be faithful. This enhanced Paul's character and strengthened his reputation.

"C"—constantly optimistic. Optimism is an amazing trait of Paul! Though he struggled with adversity, and setbacks seemed to confront him at every turn in life, he remained a positive person. Paul's epistles are filled with optimistic tones. You cannot read Romans 8 without sensing the full optimism that Paul placed in God's care. Even in the confines of Rome's prison, Paul's optimism remained strong (Philippians 1:12-18, 25; 2 Timothy 4:8, 16, 17; etc.). When one was around Paul, the atmosphere of a contagious optimism was prevalent. This is a wonderful trait to have in your life!

"T"—truthful. If someone wanted to know something and he asked Paul, there would be no question as to the truthfulness of the answer (Acts 20:20, 27). Paul exhorted the Corinthians: "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). This charge included an imitation of the Lord's truthfulness (cf. Matthew 5:33-37). The character of a believer today must be supported with this firm resolve: "I cannot lie!" (Ephesians 5:9; Psalms 51:6).

"E"—enthusiastic. We all know of some brethren whose exuberance is quite visible. Their en-

thusiastic presence always brings rays of sunshine, a zest for life, and fervent activity to all around. Such was the impact of Paul (cf. Philippians 1:13; Acts 26:28, 29; Galatians 4:18). His character was enthusiastic because he realized the greatness of Christ's sacrifice and the marvelous nature of God's grace. Wherever Paul went, he carried this confident enthusiasm (cf. Acts 19:10). This enthusiasm threw open the doors of Christ's church to the Gentiles and called them to "Come in!" One has remarked, "The grand old missionary was whipped, stoned, starved, frozen, shipwrecked, half-drowned, and finally beheaded. But none of these adversities could clip his wings!"

"R"—rested in God's care. In spite of the trials that plagued his life, Paul possessed a marvelous inner peace which, according to his own words, "passes all understanding." Why did he remain content when all affected him in a negative way? How could he possess such an inner peace when he was pressed upon every side? The answer is simple: Paul rested in a comforting confidence that Almighty God would take care of him (cf. Philippians 4:6, 7; 2 Corinthians 5:1-8; Romans 8:37-39). Modern Christians would do well to instill this trait in their lives, for it will bring them a blessed contentment!

These nine traits "spell" the character of Paul. Each trait played a significant role in his life; each contributed to the impact of the good news of the risen Lord. The emphatic lesson found in a study of his character is that one's character will either help or hinder the cause of Christ. May all establish the kind of character that will emulate Paul's life and magnify God!

THE FOUNDATION OF PAUL'S CHARACTER

Since Christians must develop a character similar to Paul's, we must understand how Paul established his character and then do likewise.

One factor seems to be responsible for his character possessing such wonderful traits. This factor undergirded his faith and motivated his energetic service. What was this factor? A firm determination to obey God! (Philippians 3:12-14; 2 Corinthians 5:11). He was determined to do God's will in his life, and the nine character traits were natural consequences of his choice.

The application of this point is plain: If brethren today want a character that will magnify

God's love and enlarge the kingdom's borders, they must firmly resolve to obey God's will regardless of consequences!

THE CHALLENGE OF PAUL'S CHARACTER

The challenge is this: "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us" (Philippians 3:17). What will you do with this challenge? You are now aware of nine traits in Paul's life that should be in your life. Will you accept Paul's challenge and develop the kind of character that will strengthen God's church on earth?

This character development is not an instant event; it takes a long time and arduous efforts. Have you watched as an icicle formed? It froze, one drop at a time, until it was a foot or more long. If the water was clean, the icicle remained clear and sparkled brightly in the sunshine. If the water was slightly muddy, the icicle looked foul, and its beauty was spoiled. In the same manner, a person's character is formed. One thought or action adds to its influence. If each thought and action is pure and right, the soul will be lovely and sparkling with happiness. If it is impure, there will be wretchedness and ruin.

CONCLUSION

Paul taught principles rather than rules; he was as courageous as he was faithful, as indifferent to criticism as he was stubborn for righteousness. He is one of truth's dominant heroes, Christianity's noblest martyr, the New Testament's Moses, the pivotal portrait in the gallery of the soldiers of the cross.¹

Such a summary of his life was made possible only because of his character!

The emphasis upon one's character cannot be too strong. A character that has been developed to reflect the traits in Paul's life will have a powerful influence.

Christians must constantly realize that God has given specific commands regarding the development of character (cf. Leviticus 11:44a, 20:7; Colossians 1:22; Revelation 22:11b; etc.).

When believers dedicate themselves to full obedience to God's will, they will imitate Paul and possess a "character spelled with a capital 'C'!"

—John Kachelman

ENDNOTE

¹Frank S. Mead, *Who's Who in the Bible* (Harper & Row, 1934), 233.

Paul: The Person

"Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it: the tree is the real thing."

Abraham Lincoln

"It is clear that Saul was more than a caretaker of clothes in the whole operation of Stephen's death. He immediately becomes the main spearhead of a deliberate and intense hostility against the Christian church in Jerusalem."

Donald Guthrie,
The Apostles

"If there is any single factor that makes for success in living, it is the ability to draw dividends from defeat."

William M. Marston

"The most valuable knowledge we can have is how to deal with disappointments."

Albert Schweitzer

"A man of little stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows meeting, and nose somewhat hooked, full of grace; for sometimes he appeared like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel."

A second century description
of Paul in *The Acts of Paul*

"It is inexcusable that Christians should go to their own homes, and make no real sacrifice of leisure, or money, or comfort, or reputation, or affection. It is high time that on God's behalf and on man's, we should be found with Jesus on the mount of loneliness and prayer. The Father seeks servants who will glorify Him at any cost. The world is sick unto death. And how can we sit still?"

Dr. Alexander Smellie

"A definition of a Christian is this: a person who is supposed to love those he heartily dislikes."