

Quality Christianity – II Corinthians 4:17-18

I. Introduction:

- A. Let's say that you've just been introduced to someone new, and the question of "*Christianity*" has come up.
1. You want to know whether this person is a **genuine** child of God or just a **name-only Christian**.
 2. **How** should we **test that person?** – Or for that matter, **how could that man test US?**
- B. We should probably start by asking – **in whom**, or **in what**, has that man placed **his faith for salvation?**
1. If he is trusting **Mary** or the **saints** to forgive him of his sins, then he isn't a Biblical Christian.
 2. The mother of Jesus needed a Saviour as much as Saul of Tarsus, and neither can save a third person.
 3. Then if he is trusting in his **church association** or his labor for **social justice**, then he isn't a true Christian
 4. To be **christened**, or even **immersed**, doesn't wash away sin and create a child of God.
 5. We could make a long list of good religious and moral acts which have nothing to do with delivering us from sin and bringing us into the presence of the holy God.
- C. Salvation is by the grace of God, evidence of which is repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
1. In **Christ** alone, "*we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*"
 2. "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should boast.*"
 3. The exhortation we share with the non-Christian is "*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ & thou shalt be saved*"
- D. Okay, we have established that our new acquaintance has been born-again; he is indeed a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus.
1. Usually we go from there determine **to what extent** we can **fellowship**.
 - a. I'm not saying that this is right, but just that this is what Baptists usually do.
 - b. What we should do is celebrate God's gracious salvation, but we usually dive into that person's doctrine.
 2. Does this brother believe as we do about the **return of Christ**, and what is his **definition** of a "*church*"?
 3. We want to know if he is a **Baptist** – and, of course, **what KIND of Baptist** is he?
 4. Does he believe in the **true sovereignty of God**, or does he cling to a humanistic form of sovereignty?
 5. And, of course, does he use **the same Bible version** as us?
 6. (I remind you of Bro. Fulton's message from last Sunday.
 - a. The basis and root of our fellowship with this man should rest in our mutual faith in Christ.
 - b. Only when we are considering yoking ourselves together in some fashion do these things matter.
 - c. Only when we begin to talk about potential church membership are these other things really important.)
- E. Now, let's say at this point, **the man turns the tables on you**, taking the initiative.
1. But he **doesn't** enquire about **YOUR doctrine**; whether you use **hymnals** or TV screens behind the pulpit.
 2. He doesn't ask about **ladies' head-coverings** or the **elements** your church uses in the Lord's Supper.
 3. Rather he asks about the **QUALITY** of your **Christianity**.
 4. He's not as interested in the breadth or width of your doctrine or your religious practice, but about their root and depth.
 5. And you know what? He has Biblical support for this line of questioning.
- F. Picture yourself **in the doctor's office** two weeks after your biopsy, awaiting the diagnosis and prognosis.
1. That you are a Christian, of course, is important, but how important is your statement of faith – your doctrine at this moment?
 - a. Does the accuracy of your understanding of the doctrine of the Devil or the ordinances sustain you?
 2. Or you are traveling through Oklahoma on a day which puts you in the path of a **category five tornado**.
 - a. Is your baptism and church membership the first thing you think of as you feel the air being sucked out of the car?

3. Or **your plane** has been **hijacked** by a trio of Muslim extremists, and you can see it being piloted toward a bright shiny skyscraper.
4. By what **criteria** do you, or your fellow passengers, or the man with the machine gun measure your faith?
5. Do you **panic**? Do you begin **screaming in terror** like the lost people around you?
6. Are you so in love with your earthly life that you are afraid to die?
7. What is the **QUALITY** and **depth** of your Christianity?

G. In this scripture, Paul gives us an example of the measurement of his faith – the quality of his Christianity.

II. But first it is necessary to grasp the background of II CORINTHIANS 4:17-18.

A. In **verse 1**, Paul says that his Saviour had given him an important ministry.

1. At the time of his salvation the Lord said to Ananias, *“he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.”*
 - a. And then the Lord added, *“I will shew him how great things he must SUFFER for my name’s sake.”*
 - b. Paul says, *“as I have received mercy and this ministry from the Lord – I faint not – I press forward.”*
2. In **verse 2** he admits that before his conversion he ministered dishonesty and craftiness – but no longer.
 - a. He is now doing his best to commend himself and his message to the consciences of all men.
 - b. **“BUT if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.**
 - c. *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.”*
3. He refused to preach or glorify himself in this God-given ministry.
4. *“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.”*

B. But Paul was a man of like passions with us. *“We have this treasure in (corruptible) earthen vessels.”*

1. But there is a blessing & purpose in this – *“that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”*
2. Paul knew what it was to be *“troubled on every side... perplexed... persecuted ... and cast down.”*
3. But he was not distressed, in despair, forsaken of God or destroyed.
4. He was *“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.*
 - a. *For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you.”*
 - b. Paul was willing to suffer the attacks of the world and the devil in order that the gospel might be heard by the lost and dying.
5. *“For all things are (endured) for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.*
6. *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man PERISH, yet the inward man is RENEWED day by day.”*
7. All of this was the **evidence** of genuine **quality Christianity**.

C. And then he gets to **the root** of it all.

1. He expresses **the source** – he describes **the boiler which powers** his life of Christian service.
2. Paul reminds us that his life was **filled** with far **more violence** than most of us will ever see.
3. And he possessed a **thorn in the flesh** which quite likely may have been **more painful** than yours.
4. He was living under a **death sentence** more profound than a prognosis of cancer.
5. And yet he could say *“Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*
6. Paul’s Christianity had **depth** to it. It was more than doctrine, service, visions and ecstatic experiences.
7. Paul’s Christianity was **measured in different ways** than most people’s.
8. I’m not saying that other people aren’t saved, but they aren’t quite the same either.

III. As I say, Paul's Christianity was measured differently than most.

- A. He used **different tools** and **scales** to measure **weight – time – value – sight** – and even **seasons**.
1. He looked at things around him with different glasses than the lost man – than even the average Christian.
 2. There was a **“sunshine”** in his soul which shed a **heavenly light** on the difficult **circumstances** of his life.
 3. We might sing **“Heavenly sunlight, heavenly sunlight, flooding my soul with glory divine,”** but with Paul those were not simply the lyrics on page 658 of the hymnal – they expressed his every day life.
- B. For example, Paul measured **WEIGHT** with the **scales of heaven** – he suffered only **LIGHT affliction.”**
1. Even with our digital earthly scales this is really confusing.
 2. He has just given us a partial list of his day-to-day problems – **“troubled on every side.... perplexed.... persecuted.... cast down... bearing about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ.”**
 3. Later in **chapter 11** he compares himself with other apostles, saying, **“Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.**
 - a. **Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;**
 - b. **In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.**
 - c. **Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.**
 - d. **Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?”**
 4. He says, If I must **needs** glory, I have plenty of things in all **“mine infirmities.”**
 5. Paul endured more than most men could take – maybe more than any of the other apostles.
 6. What he endured was enough to crush the average man; he had burdens no ordinary ox could carry.
 7. They were enough to kill the worldly man.
 8. But by the grace of God – and with Paul's perspective of Heaven – he could call it all – **“LIGHT affliction.”**
- C. Someone might say that Paul is just being **“stoic”** – this is nothing but a positive attitude – a stiff upper lip.
1. They might say that Paul is not really facing facts; he's not being realistic; he's living in never-never-land.
 2. No sane person would call all this **“LIGHT affliction.”**
 3. But notice carefully, Paul **doesn't say** that **these things were light** in and **of themselves**.
 4. What he says is that they are light and easy to bear when contrasted with something else.
 5. The Lord Jesus urged His disciples – **“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me... for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”**
 6. Very few Christians obey the Lord in this – looking at the yoke and thinking **“this isn't light.”**
 7. But Paul, with his quality Christianity could say, **“Our light affliction... worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,”**
- D. Paul had a weighing device in front of him – a pair of scales.
1. On one side of the scale, he placed all his pains and problems, and on other side he gently laid, what he calls **“a far more EXCEEDING and eternal weight of glory.”**
 2. And when he moved back his hand, the eternal weight of glory dropped so fast that the earthly pains and problems were almost flung right off the scale. They were almost **feather-like in weight**.
 3. In contrast were things **“far more exceeding.”** That speaks of **excess after excess**.
 4. Do you know what an **“hyperbole”** is? It is the use of **excessive exaggeration to make a point**.
 5. The Greek words of this verse for **“far more exceeding”** are **“kath' hyperbolon eis hyperbolon”**.
 6. In other words, to Paul, the blessings contained in God's promise of the future were a double hyperbole – they were excessively exaggerated when set beside the little things he was suffering in the world.
 7. That is the way the above average Christian looks at life. That is quality Christianity.

- E. Paul also had a **different kind of time piece** in his pocket or on his wrist.
1. *“Our light affliction, which is but for a **MOMENT**.”*
 2. You who are yet without the Saviour, have all your hopes and joys confined to a few short years or days.
 3. Young people often yearn to be 18 or 21 or for their next birthday, sometimes declaring *“they can’t wait.”*
 4. Minutes often drag by appearing to be hours in length; days seem like weeks, and months feel like years.
 5. But the man whose life is rooted in the **eternal** God and Saviour has a different perspective of time.
 6. He sees time like a slim piece of paper, folded into the large, padded envelope of eternity.
 7. For him months and weeks fly by, and years evaporate over night.
- F. **SATAN** often uses time as a weapon – it is a worldly weapon.
1. Here is a married couple, enjoying their 25th wedding anniversary with their 20 year old son – their only child.
 2. The next day their son is killed in a car accident, taking from them all the hopes they had in him.
 3. Then two years later the husband dies of a pulmonary embolism, & the wife is left with nothing & no one.
 4. After the funeral, she begins to move through day after day in agonizing loneliness – all 48 hour days.
 5. All she can think of are the two people she has lost; she has nothing left to make earthly life worth living.
 6. Each moment follows agonizingly slow moment.
 7. There is a **dictator** in her life; she is living under the **ceaseless tyranny of TIME**.
 8. Paul was not like that: *“Our light affliction, which is but for a moment”* – even though according to the calendar it extended for years.
- G. The believer who enjoys quality Christianity knows what to do with time.
1. When he uses his mind and imagination to look forward into the next ten years, it doesn’t look very pretty.
 - a. He sees a deteriorating body being burned up in a society that is deteriorating even more quickly.
 2. But when he uses his heart and faith, he looks beyond time into eternity.
 - a. He might even see a million years ahead disappearing into the horizon of eternity.
 - b. And the few hours of pain he has in this world are but a drop in the ocean of that eternity – a moment.
 3. James asks, *“What is your life?”* Then he answers – *It is even as a vapour,* a breath of polluted air.
 4. In an earthly way, we are here today, but gone tomorrow. Gone in a moment.
 5. But quality Christianity solves the problem of time.
 6. Christians are already seated *“in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6)*.
 7. Christians belong to eternity – they are free from the tyranny of time.
- H. Paul also had a **different means of SIGHT**.
1. We might add that he had a different way to measure **wealth** and **the stuff** at which people longingly stare.
 2. *“Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*
- I. Paul has a wonderful way with words.
1. It makes me wonder if, for his own pleasure, he ever wrote poetry.
 2. Throughout these few words he contrasts various things, in an almost poetic way.
 3. He speaks of **affliction**, but he sees **glory**.
 4. He refers to **light** afflictions, but then he speaks of **exceedingly heavy weights** of glory.
 5. He contrasts **moments** of earthly problems with an **eternity** of glory.
 6. And he differentiates between **looking at temporary** things but actually **seeing eternal, spiritual** things.
 7. *“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are **NOT** seen.”*
- J. Christians are different from their lost relatives in that their eternal spirits have been quickened – made alive.
1. It may not be theologically accurate, but we might say they are **saints confined within sinner’s bodies**.
 2. And as a result there is a constant struggle between the flesh and the spirit for control of that life.

3. The Christian who possesses depth and quality has an advantage over the nominal Christian.
4. **Shallow Christians** are prone to see the world with physical eyes & not with spiritual eyes – through faith.
5. They see an **evil government** and an even more **evil society**, but they don't look at the **sovereign God**.
6. They see the **precursors of the Tribulation**, but they don't see the **translation of the saints** or the glorification of Christ.

K. Let's go back to the illustrations with which we began this morning.

1. What would Paul see when sitting in the doctor's office listening to the prognosis of his cancer?
 - a. Would he look at months of radiation and chemotherapy – after recovering from painful surgery?
 - b. Would he imagine the pain and other limitations?
 - c. Or would he see new opportunities to minister to doctors and nurses before soon joining his Saviour?
2. What would he see when facing down the barrel of a raging tornado?
3. How calm would he be as his hijacked airplane is racing at 500 mph toward the White House.
4. I think **HE** would have been as calm as a baby tucked into the arms of his loving Father.
5. He could look beyond all those things.

L. Everybody likes **Hebrews 11**; most Christians love listening to those stories of God's saints and their faith.

1. But we have to admit that those were **above average saints** who were enjoying **quality Christianity**.
2. They express an **ideal** which most of us fail to attain.
3. *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*
 - a. How easy is it to live in the light of things not seen?
 - b. *"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*
 - c. *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*
 - d. Here in **II Corinthians 4** Paul was illustrating that he was living in this way.
4. *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*
 - a. *By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:*
 - b. *For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."*
5. That is either a commentary on our text for this morning, or our text is a commentary on Abraham.
6. *"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."*
7. We could proceed through the rest of **Hebrews 11** if we wanted to further illustrate **II Corinthians 4**.

M. Paul used different measures for weight, time, value and sight.

1. I'll mention one more – his **calendar of the SEASONS** was different from most.
2. *"For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are ETERNAL."*
3. The saint who possesses quality Christianity can face the problems of life, because he knows that following the cold deadness of winter come spring and then summer – the Millennium followed by eternity with God.
4. We who have lived in Idaho for a few decades sometimes laugh at our new neighbors from California.
 - a. They move from the heat and sunshine to a place where the sky is overcast for months, everything turns brown and the temperatures drop. Some years they are shoveling snow twice a day for weeks.
 - b. Many of them quickly desire to return south.
5. Can I hear Paul exhorting those Californian Christians in **Colossians 3**?
6. *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*
 - a. *For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*
 - b. *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."*

N. One of the **attributes** of the God-head is **eternality**.

1. That is the Lord – Jehovah.
2. But remember Christian, “*your life is hid with Christ in God*” – eternally.
3. You may be in the midst of a bleak or stormy winter, but spring and summer are guaranteed.
4. Stop making yourself miserable by dwelling on the negatives of the season – lift up your head and look toward the horizon.
5. Not only is spring on its way with longer, warmer days, but even the winter has its God-given gifts.

IV. Conclusion:

- A. As Paul suggests, our stay in this world, even if it lasts a century, is short when compared to eternity.
 1. Our pains and problems are pin pricks compared to the glory which God will reveal in us.
 2. Whatever wealth or poverty we endure will be overshadowed by what is in store for us by God’s grace.
 3. So the point is, as Christians, we need to strive to enjoy the abundant life which the Lord gives to us today.

- B. This should be a part of our ministry, and it is one means to thank and glorify our Saviour.
 1. The lost world is not interested in Christian mediocrity.
 2. The prince of the power of the air has a thousand channels of entertainment to ease the pain he causes in other ways.
 3. But what the world needs is substance – not entertainment.
 4. It needs to see and hear the testimony of quality Christians.
 5. The lost need to see saints who can take ***II Corinthians 4:17 and 18*** and live them out to their fullest.

- C. If you are one of those without the Saviour this evening, I implore you to stop looking at the shallow shells of today’s average Christians and look to the Lord Himself.
 1. When you come to realize that the world has nothing to offer but fluff and spun sugar, remember Paul’s words here.
 2. And then throw yourself down at the foot of the Cross – humbly bow before the Saviour.
 3. Life is always worth the living if the end of it is in eternity with the Lord.