

## Ministers of a New Covenant – Men sent from God

*2 Cor 2:17-4.6*

Just over 10 years ago now that I asked my wife Cathy to marry me. 11<sup>th</sup> of July 1999. It was a Sunday. I went all out. Balloons. Presents. That sort of thing. Fortunately she said yes. I was so pleased.....because it meant I hadn't wasted the five bucks I'd spent on the ring the week before.

Now let me tell you about this ring. I got it at Crazy Clarks or somewhere. It had a gold coloured band, three little plastic diamonds, and if you held it at arms length in the right light, it even sparkled a bit!

And it took Cathy all of about a half a second to realize that this ring wasn't the REAL THING. You could tell.

And I think I made her wear it for about six weeks 'til it turned her finger green, then it was time to UPGRADE. Time to get the real thing, with a REAL gold band, and a REAL diamond.

When you compared the two, the difference was obvious. The REAL gold band didn't have bits flaking off it. The fake diamond sparkled a bit, but the real thing left it for dead.

When you see the REAL THING, there's no way you'd settle for the fake.

But believe it or not, that's exactly what WAS HAPPENING in Corinth.

When Paul FIRST went to the city of Corinth, he went there with the GENUINE gospel, the REAL THING. And it was so clear that it was the real thing. When they HEARD IT. the Corinthians turned away from the way they were living before, to follow Jesus.

But NOW a few years down the track....they're in danger of trading in the REAL THING... for a FAKE.

Paul's not there. And some others have rocked up at Corinth. And they've got something to say. But their message is DIFFERENT FROM PAULS. They say it's better. Paul they say....well look at him. He's inferior.

And from what Paul says by the standards of the world these people were pretty impressive. Seems they were skilled public speakers. They drew a crowd wherever they went. The sort of people you have to pay to listen to.

Their APPEARANCE was impressive. They DRESSED TO IMPRESS. And whatever it is they said. We don't know exactly. Whatever it WAS ....it drew the Corinthians AWAY...from the message about Jesus...at least the Jesus Paul's talking about. Maybe it was more exciting or glamorous, or even more spiritual

And the problem is.....that a DIFFERENT GOSPEL from the one that Paul preached....no matter how good it LOOKS. No matter how GREAT IT SOUNDS.....is a FAKE. And as the Corinthians consider trading PAUL IN

for the newer model. They're in danger of trading in the GENUINE message of the gospel ....for a fake.

Let me read you what Paul says to the Corinthians down towards the end of this letter...in chapter 11 verse 2. He's suggesting that they'll listen to anybody He says - *For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus OTHER than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different SPIRIT from the one you received, or a different GOSPEL from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.*

Seems they're not all that DISCERNING.

But the question is how are they supposed to pick the real thing from the fake. Same for us. How are YOU AND I supposed to pick the real thing from the fake. I mean its pretty easy to pick a PLASTIC ring from a GOLD ONE. But how do WE know when we're looking at a FAKE GOSPEL? How do WE KNOW that WE'RE not hearing about a **different** Jesus or a **different** spirit, or a **different** gospel?

and in a way it's probably harder for US than it was for THEM. In Brisbane... over 60 different Christian denominations. How do you know where you should go? Then there's the ones that come to you. ...via satellite. On TV usually about 5am. And the Christian bookstores. And the internet.

So how **DO** you know who to listen to? How do you tell the REAL GOSPEL from the FAKE?

Now when you hold the fake ring that I got Cathy next to the genuine article, its not very hard to pick the difference between the two.

And Paul is saying pretty much the same here. Its actually not that hard to tell the difference, there's some things you can look for. And what he goes on to do here is to point out some things you can look for. Sort of a guide for picking the REAL GOSPEL.

When we went to pick a diamond I got a crash course....

and he goes on to give us five ways to tell if you've got the real thing:-

### **Not for Profit**

Firstly, if you follow on in verse 17 in chapter 2, Paul says you can pick the GENUINE gospel preacher, because he's NOT IN IT FOR THE MONEY. Have a look what he says. This is his first distinction Verse 17, he says:-

*17 Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit.*

It's a question of MOTIVE isn't it. When someone's buying a PORSCHE with the money they made from their PRODUCT. You've got to wonder don't you!

So look for that. It's a good way to check. We're a NOT FOR PROFIT

organization Paul says. The gospel's not like some new fat busting diet that'll make you thin and at the same time make me fat. We're not in it for the money. And when Churches measure their success by the size of their bank balance. There's something not right.

But Paul says no, we didn't do that....like so many....we're not in it for the money. In fact Paul's boast again down in chapter 11 is that he was able to bring the gospel to the Corinthians WITHOUT COST - the genuine article came FREE OF CHARGE. Not that it is wrong to be paid for preaching the gospel - Paul says it's quite RIGHT to do that. But that in his case, taking nothing was evidence that he was sincere, evidence that his motives were pure.

### **Good References**

Here's the next point. And that is, that in a way, the RESULTS of true gospel preaching speak much louder than RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MEN.

Have a look at the start of chapter 3. It seems that since Paul first brought them the Gospel, they've started looking for qualifications.

*3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?*

When Paul went to Corinth what all he took with him was God's message about Jesus.

But now...and the sarcasm's dripping off the page here Paul's saying should I go and get some qualifications before I come back to see you?

Do I need to get someone to sponsor me?

Again they're starting to think the way the world thinks. More chance someone will listen to you if you've got some letters after your name. If you're called DOCTOR or something.

Paul says there in Chapter 3...verse 2 , no, the reality of MY MINISTRY and MY MESSAGE isn't verified by a letter written with ink...qualification from MEN. Our qualification comes from God. And the proof is CHANGED LIVES. In fact Paul says YOU YOURSELVES are our proof.

*You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the **Spirit of the living God**, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

Paul didn't come to them with references on paper. If they think back, he came with the GOSPEL THAT CHANGED THEIR LIVES. The REAL GOSPEL MESSAGE leads to REAL CHANGED LIVES.

**So look at the results. Look at the lives of the people they teach.** They should be **changed**. It should be **obvious**.

So watch for profiteers, and look for RESULTS, what else?

If you pick it up with me in verse six. He's pointing out something else to look for. Have a look and see if you can spot it

*3:6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

### **Spirit and Life vs letter and condemnation**

the **true** message, the **genuine** article... comes from the SPIRIT and gives life, rather than THE LAW which brings only condemnation and death. That's a good test to use on what you're hearing.

And it seems some of Paul's opponents were Jews who not only turned up with qualifications, but with a whole heap of laws to follow. Yes you've got to have faith but you've also got to be CIRCUMCISED. You've got to make sure you KEEP THE SABBATH RULES. And this law and that law.

And all these rules LOOK like they're valuable. They LOOK religious.

But they're dangerous because they appeal to our sense of self justification.

You end up saying that you're righteous because of what YOU DID instead of what JESUS DID FOR YOU.

And Paul says DON'T DO IT. You don't have to obey laws....the law kills.

Again it's not the letter on paper...not the external law that brings life. It's the HOLY SPIRIT.

Of course he's not saying that we're lawless, he's talking about MOTIVE.

Don't obey God because of something written down on paper out of guilt. Obey him from the heart.

And he's right isn't he. You SEE IT HAPPEN among Christians here. So be careful about people who load you down with a whole heap of rules that merely point out sin, but don't do anything about the consequences of it.: "for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom".

### **Glory later**

Well, what about the glory Paul talks about from v9. As I said earlier the Corinthians have been listening to people who are outwardly impressive. But Paul doesn't fit that description. Paul doesn't POWER DRESS. He's a blue collar worker. A labourer – makes tents for a living. Not very impressive to look at, maybe a bit grubby - and by the end of the day, he'd probably be on the NOSE as well. In fact, he says he is not even very eloquent.

How can GOD'S MESSENGER look like that?

I mean Moses looked REALLY IMPRESSIVE. When he was God's messenger. See When Moses received the law from God on Mount Sinai. Being in god's presence caused his face to glow, and it was so obvious that he was the man. Outwardly it was very impressive. And then there was all the thunder and the lightning and the smoke.

Why doesn't Paul look like that? Surely someone sent by God should have some glory. You can hear them saying come on Paul, you say you're sent by God, **where's your glory? Where's your sparkle?**

But Paul says the GLORY in the GOSPEL is an inward one. See while Moses looked impressive for a while, it didn't last, and slowly but surely the radiance faded, and he had to put the veil over his face so they wouldn't see the glory fading. THE GLORY PAUL HAS is far better. Because it lasts.

Have a look at verse 10.

*10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts.*

The people who followed Moses didn't reflect God's glory, in fact their minds were made dull. Their hearts were veiled, “

*even to this day, and the veil is **only** removed in **Christ**”.*

So, the things that seem to glorify us outwardly are temporary and fading, while the inward change is something that is ever increasing. Which is what he goes on to say:

*18 And we, who with unveiled face all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into his likeness with **ever-increasing** glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

So when you're checking for the genuine gospel, be careful about looking for something that looks impressive OUTWARDLY...and remember that the SPARKLE NOW isn't NEARLY as important as the SPARKLE later on.

**No secret or shameful ways, distortion of truth**

So here's the last test. Number 5 - Chapter 4 verse 2. Watch out for secret and shameful ways, deception and distortion of the word of God. And instead look for people who preach the truth plainly, so that it can be understood by everyone(4:2.)

No deception, no distortion of the truth, plain, clear message. And he even spells out what the plain, clear, message should be. from Verse 5. (and this is the big one)

*4:5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake*

**So if JESUS is not central to the preaching you are hearing, you're dealing with at a fake**

If all the person can talk about is ANGELS. Or HEALING. Or SPIRITUAL WARFARE. Or TALKING IN TONGUES. Or a whole bunch of MORALISTIC RULES FOR LIVING. Then they're preaching a DIFFERENT GOSPEL.

But Paul says....we'll do anything so that JESUS is front and centre. You can see it there, they're hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down. They carry around the death of Jesus in their body. They're LIVING ADVERTISEMENTS of the CROSS. Why? -- its so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed. Paul says,

*"11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body."*

Which is VERY different from the sort of pretend SUPER APOSTLES who are promoting themselves and their own glory.

So there it is. Paul's crash course for ministers from God. How to pick the genuine article from the fake.

See, unlike a really good diamond, outwardly the true gospel and its ministers may not necessarily be all that impressive, Paul goes on in chapter 4 to say that outwardly they look like clay jars. The everyday crockery...not the crystal up in the display cabinet. Not the Royal Doulton. He says - look for sincere people. Who preach about the Lord Jesus, and who model the servanthood of Christ. Because when there are all sorts of other good looking options out there, it can be difficult not to be sucked in. It can be tempting to look for some of that glory now.

Paul says that the glory of the true gospel is a surpassing glory. So don't settle for the fake. Cathy wouldn't settle for the fake. Neither should we. Make sure you've got the real thing.