

LIVING EPISTLES

2 Cor. 3

The Corinthian Church has been beset with false teachers, coming with long letters of recommendation.

No doubt some of them sent by a group of Jews who had come to undo Paul's work.

V. 1 - First, Paul makes an apology for seeming to commend himself.

There seemed to be vacillation on the part of the church relative to Paul's credentials. His Apostle ship had been challenged - now he asks whether it has come to the place where he has to present letters of recommendation. Some continued to blast his reputation, yet he was not desirous of vain glory.

He told them he neither needed nor desired any verbal commendation to them - nor testimonial letters from them as others - some false teachers.

His ministry among them had been honourable. He did not need an epistle or a letter written for his good. A letter may contain one man's thoughts of feeling about another.

This is a practical subject. Any of us who would be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ must expect buffetings from without and within. From foes, from Satan.

The question arises, when these testings come "Have I really got what it takes to stand them, or will I become a spiritual casualty?"

Paul will open up the theme what the Jew had and what the Christian had.

He will give contrast of the revelation of the O. T. and the N. T. - Note this theme in our chapter.

Paul is embarrassed at commending himself - why should the preacher have to give proof and justify every phase of his work. Can he not be received on his own merits?

V. 2 Second, Paul says, living epistles will be his commendation.

Reminds the Corinthian Christians that they are his only testimonial.

Epistles of Christ.

Read by all men. Only Bible some men read.

Truth, he was sent of God.

Written in their heart.

Nothing more delightful to ministers than evidence in the hearts and lives of those among whom they labour.

This is the record of Paul's faithful ministry. The Corinthian.

V. 3 - Third, Paul did not assume too much for himself.

Ascribes praise to God.

They were living epistles of Christ!

Paul was used as instrument - Christ was the author of all the good that was in them.

The epistle was not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God.

Nor, was it written on tables of stone as the law of God given to Moses, but on the heart.

The heart not of stone but of flesh!

Therefore the most precious Bible is not bound in leather, but in human skin. It is written by the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

I do not need a letter as some men do. The Jews were ~~by~~ letters to stir up trouble. They needed letters of recommendation.

Men still use letters of recommendation. Some want letters from men who do not know them. Especially to recommend a book.

Suspicious thing for a man to carry a pocket full of recommendations. I read of a preacher who carried around a scrap book, he had preserved every foolish thing that had ever been said in his favor by the newspapers. One preacher had 27 letters of recommendations. Like a leaning barn it has to be propped up due to weakness.

Paul said judge the fruit. Cases of actual change.

If a person joins the church remains as he was before, it proves nothing.

asked, Is it possible you have lost your faith in God? - His mother Glasgow a man who was dying cried out "lost, lost, lost" - but all have hope in heaven. but all have lost my life, living 25 yrs doing nothing for Christ.

But if Christianity makes better husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, and citizens, the whole wide world can read that letter.

V. 4 - The Revelation of God comes from the very depth of the soul.

Touches the hardness of the heart and melts it.

Every Christian is a living epistle of Christ and the world cannot help but ready your life.

V. 4-5 Paul gives the basis of his success.

It is not self-conceit on his part - it is through Christ toward God - God-ward.

He gives the Reason - He does not start with him, nor does it come out of him, His sufficiency is "out of God" - V. 5.

Dependence upon God brings forth a living epistle. The best are no more than what the grace of God makes them.

Paul has no originating power for such confidence. Renounced all self-confidence.

V. 6 - Fourth, Paul discusses the contrast between the Old Testament and the Christian ministry.

"God has qualified even me as a minister of the new covenant - the lesson from this verse and the word sufficient should sink down into every Preacher's heart - it is not because a man is 7 feet tall, Paul was a short man. It is not because a man is pretty, Paul was ugly. It is not because a man is sound in health, Paul was in ill health - poor eye sight. Our sufficiency is of God.

What is a good preacher? This refers to character. What is an able preacher? This refers to efficiency.

Made able, not by a letter of recommendation but of the spirit of God of

life. Able, through the life given power of the Spirit.

May be orthodox, yet not possess the life giving power of the spirit.

The Devil is orthodox - James 2:19. Thou believeth that there is one God; Thou doest well: the Devils also believe and tremble".

Satan is no atheist but sound orthodox.

We may be sound in the letter of orthodoxy and yet come short of having the Spirit that gives life. The epistle of Christ is written upon the heart.

The letter brought condemnation.

The letter killeth - I shall return to this in a moment.

Catch the trend - made able - ministers, servants.

N. T. words as over against O. T. - Not the letter, a thing written, a character of the alphabet, but of the Spirit, breath or wind - not a thing written by a scribe, but something breathed in by the Holy Spirit.

Emphasis upon the letter is purely intellectual reading as over against Spiritual understanding. Scribal methods.

V. 7 - More glorious than old covenant - it could not produce life - a mark of death. Letter kills.

Contrast between the O. T. and N. T. in the excellency of the Gospel above the law.

Ministration of death - law discovered sin. Showed the wrath of God.

Gospel more glorious than law.

The law had some glory in it as witness the shining of Moses' face when he came down the mt. with the tables in his hand.

Exodus 34:30. His face shone.

Now, this was not a glory from within but from without - this glory lasted a short while and then was made in-operative or was done away.

V. 8 - Now, in contrast the Christian ministry is marked by the Spirit. It shall not be done away or become in-operative.

V. 9 - Comparison of the glory of Moses and old covenant - it passed away - faded, like the moon, dim light after the sun rises.

Gospel eclipses the glory of the legal dispensation - exceeds - exiles, "to throw beyond".

Little lamp light not regarded after the sun arises in his strength.

V. 11 - Not only did the glory of Moses face go away but the glory of the law. The Gospel remains to the end of the world.

Fifth, Paul said his ministry was without a veil.

V. 12 - As a preacher it was his duty to use plainness, or clearness of speech.

V. 13 - Not like Moses, put a veil over his face, or obscure, or darken those things which should be made plain. His ministry was a glorious reality to him. The O. T. was filled with types and shadows.

V. 14 - Christ has come, He was the one the law and Prophets pointed to.

Minds blinded - the veil over Moses' face symbol of their minds.

V. 15 - Blinded - means hardened - petrified.

Upon their hearts.

Remains until this day - Judaism after the coming of the Messiah and the publication of his Gospel.

V. 16 - Time coming when that veil shall be taken away - when that happens the body of that people shall turn to the Lord.

When a person is converted to God, the veil of ignorance is taken away.

Blindness of the mind, and hardness of the heart are cured.

When Israel comes into the presence of the Lord face to face with God her veil will be removed.

Gospel is plain - everyone can understand.

Sin is a veil obscures the glory of Christ.

V. 17 - They have liberty - access to God and freed of speech in prayer.

No longer need to struggle to be saved by keeping the laws of God - for these laws are written in our hearts, find free expression in the Spirit.

This is why Christ not need a veil, he is revealed to us.

Sixth, Paul says living epistles reflect God-likeness.

V. 18 - Israel saw the glory of God in a cloud,

Christians see the glory of the Lord as in a glass.

Peculiar privilege of Moses for God to converse with him face to face.

Christians see him with open face.

Beholding - contemplation, with open face. Produces God likeness.

As in a glass.

Weymouth - "All of us, as with unveiled faces, we mirror the glory of the Lord". Helps to understand.

If I look into a mirror, it will only reflect that which is seen. It receives something upon its surface and then reflects that out into the world around it.

Here is Paul's secret - I have a clear view of my Saviour, with open face.

I John 1:1-3 - That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you".

This claims Paul, is the one he has seen.

Who has seen him? Only giants like Paul?

"We all" - not merely Moses, Elijah, Paul - we all, poorest, weakest sinner, the Publican.

How are you taking your testings? Devil tempts you misunderstand some persons actions, words, or deeds. You, your home life is helplessly divided, things are confused. Your friends do not understand you, have you got what it takes?

Have you a clear view of Jesus - open faced? Veil removed - gazed upon your lovely Lord!

Mirror reflects only what it sees and what it receives.

We all - with unveiled faces mirror the glory of the Lord - you should see in the life of a man who has seen Christ, the glory of God. Jesus Christ is reproduced in and through him.

III. Husband and wife live together for many years and they are devoted to each other, finding the center of their affection in the living Lord. They pray, walk together - they become not only like each other but like him, iron within range of a magnet becomes magnetized.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face;
And things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.

The fate of the man who is unsaved - don't blame people for living the way they do. Gods of the present world has blinded their minds.

Do you think a university education will do it?

Do you think brilliance of intellect will do it?

Do you think a grasp of theology will do it?

II Cor. 4:6

If the light is not getting through in your home and life, it is because you are not looking at Him long enough.

Changed into the same image - living epistles - transformation - from Glory to Glory.

God-likeness of the Christian shine forth from within him. From Glory to Glory.

Renewed day by day by the Holy Spirit. We look at Christ as in a mirror, we see Christ mirrored in the face of His Saints.

The Godlikeness of the Christian shall shine forth from within him.

From Glory to Glory - renewed day by day by the Holy Spirit.

Pressures of circumstances - knocked down but never knocked out -
cast down but never in dispair - persecuted but never forsaken. Praise
God, you have found the answer - a clear view of Jesus, living epistles,
transformed into the same image, likeness of God in Christ.

Pastor settled in new field - visiting -
one afternoon Billy Business man came home - Greeted by wife - New Pastor
called - What did he say?

He asked me a most pointed question - What was that -
He asked me if Jesus dwelt in our home?

What did you answer him?

I did not make any answer - Why we are biggest givers in the ch.
could have but that would not ans. his question, Why not tell him we go
to church each Sun. A.M. - That not ans -

He asked - "Does Jesus dwell in your home?"

Together they examined their hearts & opened their hearts & invited
Jesus to take his rightful place.