

***“The Greatest Testimonial”***  
***2 Corinthians 3:1-3***

**Introduction:**

1. Please Head Back With Me In Your Bibles To:
  - 2 Corinthians:
    - Where We Have Been Learning About:
      - Paul’s Defense Of His Ministry:
        - To The Corinthian Church - Against Accusations Made By Some Who Had Infiltrated The Church:
          - And Was Trying To Influence The Church With Their Own Teachings!
  - In 2 Corinthians 2:17:
    - Paul Describes Them As:
      - Those Who - “Corrupt The Word Of God!”
        - This Means That There Were “Many” Who Were Trying To Peddle Their Own Brand Of Christianity!
          - They Were Using & Mis-Using God’s Word In Order To Get A Following & Even Profit From It!
      - **IE:** Even Today - We Know That There Is No Shortage Of Religious Peddlers Or Hucksters That Try To Enrich Themselves By Corrupting & Perverting The Word Of God!
2. But Then - Paul Adds In 2:17:
  - “For we are **not** as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ!”
    - Paul Made A Claim That:
      - He Was Not Like Those False Teachers:
        - Who “Handles The Word Of God Deceitfully!” (4:2)
    - Instead - Paul Claims That:
      - Everything He Said & Everything He Did Was Done:
        - Sincerely!
          - His Motives Were Sincere & Were Only For Their Spiritual Benefit – Not Just His Own!
        - Also - Submissively!
          - “As Of God!”
            - He Sought To Live & Teach As An Ambassador Of God! He Wanted To Be Faithful To The One Who Sent Him!
        - Also - Seriously!
          - “In The Sight Of God!”
            - He Knew That God Is Always Present, And So He Lived & Taught As One Who Would Give An Account!
      - This Is A Good Summary Of How Every Christian Should Live!
        - Sincerely, Submissively, Seriously!
          - But - In The Case Of Paul:
            - Its One Thing To **Claim** To Live This Way:
              - Its Another Thing To **Prove** It!
  - 3. And This Leads Us To Our The Next 3 Verses In 2 Corinthians 3:
    - 3:1-3 - Where Paul Adds:
      - “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? / Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: / Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart!”
    - Now - There Must Have Been Some In Corinth:
      - Who Were Starting To Question Paul’s Authority:
        - As An Apostle!
          - And So - Even Though Paul Could Make Some Pretty Great Claims About Himself & His Ministry:
            - They Were Sowing Seeds Of Doubt Within The Church!
      - They Wanted To “See” Paul’s Credentials!
        - Credentials - “Epistles Of Commendation!”

- Very Common Back Then - A Letter Of Introduction & Commendation!
  - Often Used In The Early Church, To Identify Missionaries & Evangelists & True Teachers!
  - Paul Even Wrote Them At Times!
- But - There Were Some In Corinth:
- Who Wanted More Proof That Paul Was All That He Said & Claimed That He Was!
  - **IE:** Reminds Me Of A Time When I Was A Teen - Visiting Some Family In Manasquan, New Jersey - Was Playing Hide & Seek With My Younger Cousins - Climbing Over A Fence - Heard The Deep Voice Of A Man To Come Over To Him - He Said He The Police - "Can I See Some ID?" - Stepped Into The Light - Saw His Badge! No Other Proof Necessary! They Were Doing A Drug Raid Right Next Door To My Aunt & Uncle's House! Get Inside - We Did!
4. Well - When The False Teachers In Corinth:
- Started Questioning Paul's Credentials:
    - He Asks The Question We Read In 3:1:
      - "Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?"
      - It Would Be One Thing:
        - If They Had Never Met Paul!
    - But It Was Paul:
      - Who Had First Preached The Gospel To Them!
      - And Then - He Stayed With Them:
        - For 18 Months - To Establish Them As A Young Church!
      - In 1 Corinthians 4:15 - Paul Told Them:
        - "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel!"
5. So - If Anyone Know Paul:
- And His Credentials:
    - They Did! And So He Asks:
      - "Do We Have To Go Back All The Way To The Beginning - *Again?*"
      - So - Instead Of Giving Them New "Epistles Of Commendation" - He Says:
    - 3:2 - "Ye Are Our Epistle!"
      - He Is Telling The Corinthians That:
        - They Don't Need To Look Any Further:
          - Than Themselves - For The "Letter Of Commendation" That They Are Looking For!
          - After All - They Already Knew Him - They Already Knew All About Him - Personally!
      - He Was An Open Book Before Them!
        - He Sought To Live Transparently, Truthfully, Tenderly - Seen In Chapters 1-2!
    - But Then Paul Adds In 3:3:
      - That They Were Even More - "The Epistle Of Christ!"
        - What A Tremendous Truth!
          - And It Is This Truth That I Want To Focus Our Attention On For The Rest Of Our Time Here This Morning!
6. When Paul Told The Corinthians That:
- "Ye Are Our Epistle!"
    - He Meant That - They Were The Greatest Testimonial:
      - Of Him & His Ministry!
        - **IE:** Have You Ever Bought Something Based On The Recommendation Or Testimonial Of Someone Else? It Can Even Be An Online "Review!" But What Is The Greatest Recommendation? The Testimonial Of A Friend! Wanting To Buy A Saw In The Near Future - Looked At Reviews / Videos / But Wanted To Ask Greg - Who Has The Exact Saw I Have Been Researching! His Testimonial Is Of More Value Than Any Other Review I've Read!
    - Paul Wanted The Corinthians To Know That:
      - They Were The Proof They Were Looking For!
        - They Were All The Evidence They Needed - When They Were Wanting To See His Credentials!
7. And What Could Be Said Of Paul To The Corinthian Church:
- Can Be Said Of Jesus:

- To Every Single One Of His People!
  - Every True Christian & Every True Church!
    - “Ye Are – The Epistle Of Christ!”
    - What Does This Mean?
- Christians Are The Greatest Testimonial Of Christ:
  - To The World! (2x)
    - And So - This Is How We Should Live!
    - But - What Do We Reveal About Christ?
    - Find 5 Things In These Verses!

\* First - Every Church & Every Christian Reveals:

**1. The Care Of The Lord!**

- To The World!
  - Even As Paul Stated In 3:2 - “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts!”
    - The Very Existence Of The Corinthian Church:
      - Was:
- The Proof Of His Care!
  - Not Just The Care & Love Of The Apostle Paul:
    - But The Care & Love Of The Lord Jesus!
    - Every Christian Is A Letter Of Christ’s Love!
      - Not Just For The World To Know:
        - But For You To Know!
  - Paul Wanted The Corinthians To See:
    - The Love Of Christ Reflected In Him!
      - And So - All They Needed To Do Was Remember:
        - His Time With Them!
        - His Treatment Of Them!
        - His Tenderness Toward Them!
  - Every Christian Is A Letter Of Christ’s Own Love:
    - For Them!
      - Just Think Of All That Jesus Christ Did For You! Born / Lived / Died / Rose Again / Ever Lives To Make Intercession For You!
      - Because He Loves You!
      - Also - See:
- The Power Of His Care!
  - Paul Adds In 3:2 - “Ye Are Our Epistle Written In Our Hearts!”
    - Paul Was Telling Them That The Greatest Proof Of His Ministry To Them:
      - Wasn’t *Their* Interest In *Him*, But In *His* Interest In *Them*!
  - If He Was Just After Their Money:
    - He Would Not Have Went To Them!
    - He Would Not Have Written To Them!
    - He Would Not Have Worked Among Them!
    - He Would Not Have Wondered About Them!
  - They Were On His Mind Constantly!
    - And In His Heart!
      - 7:3 - “Ye are in our hearts to die and live with you!”
  - How Much More Does Jesus Christ:
    - Have You On His Mind & In His Heart?
      - And Your Own Existence As A Christian, As A Child Of God, Is A Letter Of Christ’s Own Love To You!
- Do You See His Care & Love In Your Life Today?
  - Remember Romans 8:38-39 - “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, / Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!”

\* Second - Every Church & Every Christian Reveals:

**2. The Compassion Of The Lord!**

- In 3:2 - Paul Tells Us That We Are:

- “Known And Read Of All Men!”
  - The Letter Of Christ’s Love In Your Own Heart:
    - Is Something That Spreads Throughout The World!
    - And God Uses His People To Be The Greatest Testimonial Of His Grace!
- No Need For TV Or Radio Or Internet Ads!
  - This Is What Christians Are For!
  - And We See That:
- The Compassion Of The Lord:
  - Is Clear!
    - When The World Sees A Christian:
      - They Should See Christ!
      - “Known And Read!”
  - In Its Immediate Context:
    - Paul Seems To Be Telling The Corinthians:
      - That Everywhere He Went - He Talked About Them!
      - And How - If God Could Form A Church In Corinth, He Could Form A Church Anywhere!
  - The Same Thing Can Be Said Of Us!
    - If God Can Save You & Me:
      - He Can Save Anyone!
    - If God Can Change You & Me:
      - He Can Change Anyone!
  - His Compassion Is Clear!
    - And Your Life Can Be A Living Testimony:
      - Of God’s Grace & Compassion To The World!
- The Compassion Of The Lord:
  - Is Common!
    - Our Lives Can Be:
      - “Known And Read Of All Men!”
      - A Universal Statement!
  - Everywhere A Christian Is:
    - The Compassion Of Christ Himself:
      - Is Evident!
- Can The Compassion Of Christ:
  - Be Known & Read In Your Life Today?
    - When The World Sees You:
      - Do They See Christ?
      - After All:

\* Third - Every Church & Every Christian Reveals:

**3. *The Character Of The Lord!***

- 3:3 - “Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us!”
  - The Most Important Thing To Remember:
    - As A Christian:
      - Is That You Are Not A Representative Of Any Other Man Or Organization:
        - You Are “The Epistle Of Christ Himself!”
    - After All - He Alone Is:
  - The Creator:
    - Of This Letter In Your Life!
      - Jesus Christ Alone Saved You:
        - By Faith In Him!
    - Now - God Uses People In Our Lives:
      - To Bring Us To Himself!
        - Even As God Used Paul:
          - To Plant The Church There In Corinth!
    - 1 Corinthians 3:6 - “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase!”
      - And So - Since God Has Made You:
        - Into A “New Creation” In Christ - He Has A Special Message To Write To The World:

- Through You & Your New Life!

- And He Is Also:

- The Content:

- Of This Letter In Your Life!

- Philip Hughes - "The Character Imprinted On Them Is That Of Christ!"

- John Gill - Christ Is - "The Very Matter, Sum, Substance And Subject Of The Epistle!"

- In Other Words:

- Your Life Is A Letter!

- The Letter Of Christ To The World!

- Written By Him!

- Written About Him!

- Written For Him!

- What A Privilege!

- To Carry The Message Of Jesus Christ:

- Not Just With Us – As A Mail-Carrier!

- But In Us!

- Because Christians Are The Greatest Testimonial Of Christ:

- To The World!

- Can The Character Of Christ:

- Be Known & Read In Your Life Today?

- When The World Sees You:

- Do They See Christ?

\* Fourth - Every Church & Every Christian Reveals:

**4. *The Change Of The Lord!***

- 3:3 - "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart!"

- The Letter Of Your Life:

- As A Christian:

- Is Unlike Any Other Letter In This World!

- You Are A Living Letter:

- Of Christ!

- "Written Not With Ink, But With The Spirit Of The Living God!"

- You Are Not A Natural Letter:

- Written With "Ink!"

- No - You Are A Spiritual Letter - Written "With The Spirit Of The Living God!"

- What Does This Mean?

- The Change That God Has Wrought In Your Life:

- Is His Letter To The World:

- That He Can Save & Change Them!

- Remember The Transformation That Took Place Within The Corinthian Church?

- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, / Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. / And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God!"

- This Is True Of Every Christian & Every Church!

- You Are A Living Letter Of The Power & Purity Of Jesus Christ!

- And The Holy Spirit Continues To Write:

- His Living Words Into Your Life! Also:

- You Are A Lasting Letter:

- Of Christ!

- "Not In Tables Of Stone, But In Fleshy Tables Of The Heart!"

- **IE:** Now - When We Think Of Things That Will Last - We Think Of Stone - Why Sculptures & Engravings Are Made In Stone!

- Statues / Mt. Rushmore / Ten Commandments!

- But - There Is Something That Will Last Even Longer!
  - The Changed Heart:
    - Of A Christian!
      - Statues Of Stone Can Be Torn Down / The Faces Of The Presidents On Mt. Rushmore Can Be Blasted Away / Even The First Set Of The Ten Commandments Were Broken By Moses!
- But - When God Changes Your Heart:
  - From A Heart Of Stone:
    - To A Heart Of Flesh:
      - It Will Last Far Longer Than A Tablet Of Stone!
      - It Will Last Forever!
  - Ezekiel 11:18-20 - “ And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: / That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God!”
- And Now:
  - The Words & The Work Of Christ:
    - Is Not Something Outside Of You:
      - But Inside!
- And If This Great Change Has Taken Place In Your Life:
  - It Is Something That Cannot Be Hid!
    - Why Jesus Said - Matthew 5:14-16 - “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. / Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. / Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven!”
- Can This Change & Transformation:
  - Be Known & Read In Your Life Today?
    - When The World Sees You:
      - Do They See The Change That Only Christ Can Do?

**Conclusion:**

1. Christians Are To Be:
  - The Greatest Testimonial Of Christ:
    - To The World!
2. Remember Today:
  - That You Are:
    - As A Christian:
      - “The Epistle Of Christ!”
3. And God Uses You:
  - To Reveal Christ To The World!
    - His Care / His Compassion / His Character / His Change!
    - Let Us Live Our Lives:
      - As A Trophy:
        - And As A Testimony:
          - Of God’s Grace To The World!

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