

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

IN THIS WORLD, WE EXPERIENCE SUFFERINGS: BUT GLORY IS COMING

SECOND CORINTHIANS

† II CORINTHIANS

An overview of the Book of Second Corinthians, by Given O. Blakely

Lesson # 1 1

COMMENTARY ON: 3:1-3

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

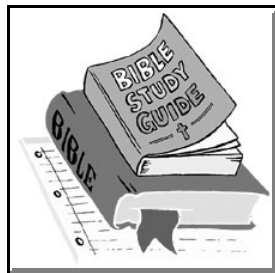
"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

EPISTLES OF CHRIST

The nature and glory of the New Covenant has been greatly obscured by the nominal church – "great Babylon" of Revelation 17 and 18. The modern representations of the New Covenant bears more resemblance to the Old Covenant, which the New has supplanted because of its superior glory. In this lesson, we will be introduced to the impact the New Covenant has upon the people it covers. It is characterized by life, and is very public in nature. Paul summarizes his Apostolic work by drawing attention to what the Lord Jesus has done through it. Being the Mediator of the New Covenant, the Lord Jesus brings the benefits of the covenant to the people. Further, this is a covenant of unparalleled blessing.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven"



Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Epistle of Second Corinthians

Lesson Number 11



TRANSLATION LEGEND: AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible, ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), ESV=English Standard Version (2001), KJV=King James Version (1611), MONTGOMERY=Montgomery's New Testament, NKJV=New King James Version (1982), NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=IPS Tanakj (1985), Webster=The Webster Bible 1833, YLT=Young's Literal Translation (1862), WEYMOUTH=Weymouth's New Testament, WILLIAMS = William's New Testament.

LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG=Friberg Lexicon, UBS=UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA=Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT=Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER=Thayer's Greek Lexicon

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

EPISTLES OF CHRIST

“^{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? ² Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: 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 fleshly tables of the heart.”^{KJV} (2 Corinthians 3:1-3)

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, those who have proved to be messengers of God were misunderstood by many. Viewed from another perspective, whenever a word has been spoken in the name of the Lord, there have been those who misinterpreted that word, ascribing ignoble motives to the messenger, and wresting his words to mean something that was not intended. Consistently, this was not owing to any ambiguity in either the messenger or the message borne by him. Rather, it was evidence of the mind-set of “the natural

man,” to whom “the things of the Spirit of God” are “foolishness.” God has revealed that the “natural man,” or “the man without the Spirit,”^{NIV} “cannot understand”^{NASB} the “things of the Spirit of God.” They can only be “spiritually discerned,” or “appraised.”^{NASB} For this reason, the things of God are communicated in words “which the Holy Spirit teaches,” “combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.”^{NASB} Thus it is written, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches

but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”^{NKJV} (1 Cor 2:14). No attempt was made to tailor them, so to speak, for those with no understanding – a practice that is quite common in our time.

“The natural man” is dominated by “the carnal mind,” which is the mind-set of

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those who are not regenerated, or are “without the Spirit.” The “carnal” mind is also characterized by certain unchangeable traits. It is written, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). Another version reads, “because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so”^{NASB} (Rom 8:7).

This is a very real situation that cannot be addressed by the wisdom of this world. No “natural man” can be trained to be spiritual. The “carnal mind” cannot be successfully tutored in the things of God. To put it another way, the natural man is not capable of making sense out of the Scriptures, which were given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They are, in fact, His words (2 Pet 1:21). The “carnal mind” cannot enjoy the Scriptures, seeing good and profitable things in them. To the “carnal mind,” the Scriptures are “as a fire,” and “like a hammer that breaketh in pieces” (Jer 23:29). Thus that mind is hostile, lashing out against the words spoken by the Spirit, finding fault with them, and attempting to show why they have no application to, or benefit for, him.

It may be countered that unregenerate men can gather much from books like the Proverbs, seeing the good reasoning of living profitable and practical lives. While there is a sense in which this is so, it must be remembered that “the

mind of the Spirit” is not set upon delineating life as defined by mere men. The Spirit “searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10). These are things that can be known by “no man,” and are therefore made known by the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:11). These represent the thrust of Scripture.

For this reason, the closer a person is to nature, the more foolish the things of God sound, and the more irrelevant the proclaimer of those things appears. The more “carnal,” or “fleshly,” the mind is, the more it objects to what the Lord says, and the more it disdains the messengers who declare it.

WHEN GODLY MESSENGERS ARE POLITELY TOLERATED

In certain societies, a cultural veneer is thrown over “the natural man” and “the carnal mind.” In such a society men are prone to say such things as, “That is just your opinion,” or “that is not how I see it,” or “our church does not believe that.” Men and women of God are, in such a case, tolerated as mere misfits – strange people who are radical and out of touch with the times.

Some people received Jesus in this way. “Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?” (Mat 13:54-56). In Athens Paul encountered this kind of reception in some who said, “We will hear thee again on this matter” (Acts 17:32). He encountered this mind-set in Felix, who trembled when Paul reasoned with him: “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee”

(Acts 24:25).

WHEN GODLY MESSENGERS ARE NOT TOLERATED

Where a cultural veneer is not found, the message is violently opposed, and the messengers may be imprisoned like Paul and Silas, stoned like Stephen, or even beheaded like John the Baptist.

It is not unusual to expect these kinds of things from the world – people like the silversmiths of Ephesus (Acts 19:24-29), and the philosophers of Athens (Acts 17:32). **But what about such responses from “the church?” – from among those who have been publically identified with Christ Jesus?** How is it to be viewed when an apostle’s calling and message are questioned by **these** people?

That is the kind of scenario that is before us. There were those in Corinth who had questioned both Paul’s apostleship and doctrine, and spoken derisively of him. Remember, this church was birthed by Paul himself, and he had spent “a year and six months teaching the Word of God amongst them” (Acts 18:11).

- ☛ “If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?” (1 Cor 9:2-5).
- ☛ “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor 14:37)
- ☛ “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some

person is to nature, the more foolish the things of God sound, and the more irrelevant the proclaimer of those things appears. The more “carnal,” or “fleshly,” the mind is, the more it objects to what the Lord says, and the more it disdains the messengers who declare it.

among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen" (1 Cor 15:12-13).

☛ "Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you" (2 Cor 13:3).

THE JEOPARDY OF OUR TIME AND PLACE

The jeopardy of our time and place

The preference for, what is purported to be, "praise and worship" instead of the preaching of the Word is evidence of a disdain for the preachers of the Word. Where a faithful messenger is found, the failure of members to support more than one gathering a Lord's day is confirmation of the dominancy of a carnal mind. The demand for traditional and lifeless church programs, and official but powerless church literature also evidences this spirit of toleration. However, that attitude is

is expended to find some tiny morsel of hope in the people – the very people who have no apparent appetite for the Word of God, by which life is sustained (Lk 4:4).

All the while, a weight of care comes upon the faithful messenger, for he knows this is not the kind of response the Gospel elicits. Spiritual life does not respond in an indifferent manner. The new creation has a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and lives "by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). It has been "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col 3:10). In the new birth, when God puts a "heart of flesh" in a person, He also removes the "stony heart" (Ezek 11:19; 36:26). The fruit of the Spirit will be seen (Gal 5:22-23), together with a progressive change "from glory unto glory" (2 Cor 3:18). **There is no justification for the absence of these evidences.** Wherever they are found, a profound sense of concern grips the heart of the faithful messenger.

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THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

The church at Corinth had access to the premier apostle, who had "labored more abundantly than they all" (1 Cor 15:10). Instead of welcoming him with open arms, and giving thanks to God for such a singular mercy, some of them questioned his authority and refused to believe his message. **Paul does not ignore their attitude, but firmly comes to grips with it in this passage. He will reason with the people after a godly manner, and will not stoop to carnal disputation.** There is godly wisdom in his approach – the kind of wisdom that, if received and heeded, will lead the Corinthians into a more godly frame of mind. This is a passage that brings us great benefit.

is that of general disinterest within the church itself. Solid preaching is not aggressively opposed, it is just not embraced. **Those who proclaim the message through which God makes manifest "the savor of His knowledge" are not in demand, and their message is generally ignored.** Occasionally there may be some general opposition, like questioning the right to be so straightforward. The people may even respond like those who heard Jeremiah: "Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words" (Jer 18:18).

also attended by an obstinate spirit that will not aggressively seek the things that are above (Col 3:1). **It will not permit the people to place their affection on things above, and not on things on the earth** (Col 3:2).

Environmental Effects

The effects of this kind of environment are significant. Those who are caught in this maelstrom wrestle with whether or not the people are sincere. Often they avoid being strong and straightforward in fear they might offend some well-meaning soul. Extensive effort

COMMEND OURSELVES?

^{3:1a} **Do we begin again to commend ourselves?"** Other versions read, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?"^{NASB} "Do we seem to be again attempting to put ourselves in the right?"^{BBE} "Are we beginning again to tell you how good we are?"^{NLT} and "Do we begin again to recommend ourselves."^{YLT}

The word "commend" means to make known one's own approval, to show or bring out that one is recommended. ^{FRIBERG} Other lexical definitions are, "to prove, demonstrate," or show "one's proper place,"^{UBS} and "to recommend one's self to another."^{LIDDELL-SCOTT} Robertson says this word means to praise oneself.^{WORD PICTURES}

It is apparent from this text that some in Corinth had considered Paul to have spoken too much about himself. To some of them he appeared as a braggart, vainly boasting of his achievements and experiences. **Here are some examples of his claims, demands, and manner of speaking.** When read, it will be

apparent to the tender of heart that Paul was not bragging or speaking unreasonably of himself.

- “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, **declaring unto you the testimony of God**” (1 Cor 2:1)
- “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but **in demonstration of the Spirit and of power**” (1 Cor 2:4).
- “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a **wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation**, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon” (1 Cor 3:10).
- “But with me **it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you**, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self” (1 Cor 4:3).
- “For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. **We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised**” (1 Cor 4:9-10).
- “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**” (1 Cor 4:15).
- “Wherefore I beseech you, **be ye followers of me**” (1 Cor 4:16).
- “But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, **and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power**” (1 Cor 4:19-20).
- “What will ye? **shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?**” (1 Cor 4:21).
- “For I verily, as absent in body, but

present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed” (1 Cor 5:3).

- “I wrote unto you in an epistle **not to company with fornicators**” (1 Cor 5:9).
- “But now I have written unto you **not to keep company**, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; **with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?**” (1 Cor 5:11-12).
- “For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that” (1 Cor 7:7).
- “But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And **so ordain I in all churches**” (1 Cor 7:17).
- “Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet **I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful**” (1 Cor 7:25).
- “Am I not an apostle? am I not free? **have I not seen Jesus Christ**

• “I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I **ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles**, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Cor 12:11-12).

WAS PAUL REALLY COMMENDING HIMSELF?

On the surface, it may, indeed, appear as though Paul was, so to speak, promoting himself – at least to the carnal mind. However, Paul’s motive was not to exalt himself. **His Apostleship had been held in question, and therefore the words that he declared were not being received as from the Lord.** Additionally, to question his Apostleship was a reproach to the Lord Jesus, who had made him an apostle, putting him into that ministry (1 Tim 1:12). It was also tantamount to speaking against God the Father who had “separated” Paul from his “mother’s womb, and called” him “by His grace” (Gal 1:15).

Therefore, Paul will show by spiritual reasoning how wrong it was to question the authenticity of his person, message, and ministry. Armed with spiritual weaponry, he will do battle.

It must be remembered that **error cannot stand up to solid spiritual reasoning.** Error is an intellectual and spiritual fabric that is

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our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?” (1 Cor 9:1).

- “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but **I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me**” (1 Cor 15:10).

woven together with rotten threads. It cannot stand a test of its strength, but tears apart when tested by “every word of God.” When truth comes against error, it finds the fatal flaws that are resident in it, and throws it down to the ground. **At some specific point, error is always at variance with the truth of God. It cannot blend with truth, or occupy the place reserved for the truth.** By nature error competes with God’s truth.

DO WE NEED EPISTLES OF COMMENDATION?

“^{1b} . . . or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?”

Paul now deals with what commends and validates his ministry. He does not speak of credentials, as some are prone to do. Once he referred to his earthly credentials, affirming he had abandoned them all. *“Though I might also*

Paul viewed the matter, and neither should we.

Paul now begins a thread of reasoning that deals more specifically with those who doubted his Apostleship.

DO WE NEED AS SOME OTHERS

“ . . . or need we, as some others . . . ” Other versions read, *“Or do we need, like some people,”*^{NIV} *“Surely we do not*

Having all of that expert Jewish background, would probably have qualified him to be a key leader in the Christian community – particularly the academic society. But that is not how Paul viewed the matter, and neither should we.

have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil 3:5-6). **In the ordinary religious arena, these were everything.** He came from the only nation in the world that was particularly cultured in the Person and ways of the Lord. He was not a convert to Judaism, but was born into it. He was strictly raised in *“the Jews religion,”* and was *“above many of”* his *“equals,”* being *“exceedingly zealous of the traditions of”* his Jewish *“fathers”* (Gal 1:13-14). He was no ordinary Jew – and *“salvation is of the Jews”* – but was a *“Hebrew of the Hebrews.”* He was a Pharisee, according to the *“strictest sect”* of the Hebrews (Acts 26:5).

Having all of that expert Jewish background, would probably have qualified him to be a key leader in the Christian community – particularly the academic society. **But that is not how**

need, as some do,”^{NRSV} *“or have we need, as some have,”*^{BBE} *“as though we need, like some others,”*^{NJB} and *“Some people need to bring.”*^{NLT}

All Kingdom laborers are not the same, nor do they all stand on equal footing. Some have been given more to see. Some have labored more extensively.

Some at Corinth had treated Paul as though he was, for lack of a better term, a common minister of the truth. They considered that he needed to subscribe to the requirements of those with lesser kingdom tenure, who were relatively unknown. It all may appear quite innocent, but it was not.

Consider the statements made concerning Paul – statements of truth.

- He did not come *“one whit”* behind the *“chiefest apostles”* (2 Cor 11:5; 12:11).
- He had wrought *“the signs of an apostle”* among the Corinthians *“in all patience, signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds”* (2 Cor 12:12).

- He *“labored more abundantly”* than the other apostles (1 Cor 15:9-10).
- Those who were *“pillars”* in the church at Jerusalem – including Peter, John, and James the Lord’s brother – added nothing to Paul’s message (Gal 2:6).
- The *“dispensation of the grace of God”* that was given to him was extraordinary, and was generally known among the brethren (Eph 3:2-6).
- He had been distinguished from others in the extraordinary number of visions and revelations given to him from above (2 Cor 12:1,7).
- He had labored publically among the Corinthians for over a year and six months (Acts 18:8-11).

Yet, in spite of the overwhelming evidence of the validity of both his person and message, some doubted who he was and what he said. Because this neutralized the effects of his preaching among the Corinthians, he now deals with the absurdity of their objections.

EPISTLES OF COMMENTATION OR LETTERS FROM YOU?

“ . . . epistles of commendation to you . . . ” Other versions read, *“letters of commendation,”* or *“letters of commendation from you?”*^{NASB} *“letters of recommendation,”*^{NRSV} *“letters of approval . . . from you.”*^{BBE} and *“commendatory letters from you,”*^{DARBY} and *“letters of recommendation from you.”*^{NAB}

This is a rhetorical question. The idea is, *“Do you brethren really believe I need someone to recommend me before I preach in, or write to, Corinth? Is it possible that some even think they should give me letters of recommendation before I can preach to others?”*

In early times, those whose integrity and faithfulness had not yet been publically established, were given letters of commendation. These came

from brethren who knew the persons well, and could vouch for their profitability in Christ Jesus. Some examples are provided below.

- *“But Barnabas took him, and brought him [Saul of Tarsus] to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27)*
- *“And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him [Apollos]: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace” (Acts 18:27).*
- *“And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality [offering they collected] unto Jerusalem” (1 Cor 16:3).*
- *“I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also” (Rom 16:1-2).*
- *“Whether any do inquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be inquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ” (2 Cor 8:23).*
- *“Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him” (Col 4:10).*

There were also warnings issued about key men who were unfaithful, opposed the truth, or taught false doctrine. These were spiritually dangerous men, yet they did not have that reputation among all. Thus the disciples were warned of them.

- *“Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly*

withstood our words” (2 Tim 4:15).

- *“Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim 1:20).*
- *“And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim 2:18).*
- *“I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth,*

everywhere for what he taught. **He faithfully proclaimed what was revealed to him, doing so with great power and effectiveness.**

There are Kingdom laborers who are well known for “*their work’s sake*” (1 Thess 5:13). There are some of whom it is said, “*the good works of some are manifest beforehand*” (1 Tim 5:25). Such are “*well known*” among the faithful (2 Cor 6:9).

Throughout history, there have been preachers and teachers who have distinguished themselves by their preaching and writing. Everyone knew what they taught, because they consistently declared what they had seen both in words and by the “*pen of a ready writer*” (Psa 45:1). We know how David thought because he put his thoughts into writing. There is no question about the

We know how David thought because he put his thoughts into writing. There is no question about the wisdom of Solomon: he wrote it down. Moses and the Prophets did the same. You can imagine the absurdity of asking Moses for a resume, or some references so you could

prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church” (3 John 1:9-10).

It should be obvious that Paul was not in the category of the unknown. His ministry was a public one. Early on, Barnabas took him to the Apostles themselves, confirming that Paul had seen the Lord (Acts 9:27). Some years later, his Apostleship was recognized by the other Apostles, and they sent him to the Gentiles with their blessing (Gal 2:9-10). He was well known for his letters, which even Peter acknowledged contained things “*hard to be understood,*” which tempted some to wrest them (2 Pet 3:16). He had traveled extensively, being known

wisdom of Solomon: he wrote it down. Moses and the Prophets did the same. **You can imagine the absurdity of asking Moses for a resume, or some references so you could check out if he was a good leader.**

It was even more absurd for some in Corinth to question the truth and validity of Paul’s message. He had faithfully declared verbally and in writing the truth he was given to see. Add to that the fact that he taught among them for eighteen months (Acts 18:11).

For some, their only recommendation is institution building. They are not noted for what they say, but for their apparent administrative skills. It is not generally known what they teach, or whether or not they are faithful

stewards. If that kind of person was being considered for the position of a teacher, the brethren ought to ask for letters of recommendation.

Faithful laborers must either be well known for their words and works, or have a good testimony from among those who know them best, like young Timothy, “*who was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium*” (Acts 16:2). If, however, a preacher or teacher comes with only the credentials of an academic institution, that is not enough. Good classroom decorum and attentiveness are not enough to recommend a person for the role of a preacher or teacher of the truth of God!

Necessary Knowledge

There are at least two things that

regard: “*But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Tim 3:12). These were matters that were generally known and reported concerning Paul.

Every person who speaks for God should make it his aim to be known for being acceptable before God in these areas.

• **Doctrine.** What does the person teach? What is his message? How does it correlate with the thrust of salvation and the emphasis of Scripture? Is it “*the apostles’*

There are at least two things that must be confirmed when evaluating a minister of the Word. These must be known by personal exposure to the person, or by the testimony of those who have personal knowledge of the man. The person must have a godly manner of life, and his doctrine must be sound.

must be confirmed when evaluating a minister of the Word. These must be known by personal exposure to the person, or by the testimony of those who have personal knowledge of the man. **The person must have a godly manner of life, and his doctrine must be sound.** Paul stated it this way to Titus: “*In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you*” (Titus 2:8).

Paul spoke of Timothy as being personally aware of Paul’s own life in this

doctrine” (Acts 2:42), or some sectarian emphasis?

• **Manner of life.** How does the person live? Are they godly, devoted to the Lord, and noted for pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14).

• **Purpose.** What is the objective of their life, their ministry, and their teaching and preaching? What is it that they are attempting to do, and how does it compare with what Jesus came to do? How does it compare with what the Apostles and prophets were doing?

• **Faith.** How persuaded is the individual of the truth of God (Rom 4:20-21). Is his faith solid, and is he continuing in the faith grounded and settled (Col 1:23)? Is he continuing in the faith (Acts 14:22), persuaded that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6)?

• **Longsuffering.** Is the person forbearing, willing to suffer for the name of the Lord. Does he forbear in love, refusing to be offended by every small offense, and seeking rather to forgive (Eph 4:2,32)?

• **Charity.** How loving is the person? Does he have a love for the brethren – the people of God (1 Pet 1:22). Does he speak the truth in love, desirous to bring people closer to the Lord through his words (Eph 4:15)?

• **Patience.** How persevering is the man? Does he continue forging forward even though obstacles are in his path? Is he patient in tribulation, being noted for making progress in the faith, even when it is with great difficulty – bringing forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:15; Col 1:11)?

• **Persecutions.** How does the man respond to opposition and persecution? Is he like Moses, who chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Heb 11:25)?

In all of these areas – and more – Paul’s manners and responses were well known among brethren. Even his enemies knew what he preached, and wrested his words. Paul now speaks as a tenured teacher and preacher of the Gospel of Christ – someone who was well known for what he both said and wrote. He needed no letters of commendation.

YOU ARE OUR EPISTLE

“*2 Ye are our epistle written | in our hearts, known and read of all | men.*”

In Christ, a New Kind of Writing has Taken Place, and it Is Being Read– by Given O. Blakely

The apostle now introduces **the real credentials of a valid minister – the fruit that his message has produced in those who embraced it.** That is the incontrovertible proof of the validity of a messenger and his message. **What kind of people does it produce, and what kind of message is sent forth by their lives?** A powerless gospel is not from God, for we are specifically told the Gospel of Christ *“is the power of God unto salvation”* (Rom 1:16). Genuine preaching and teaching is not a matter of mere words, speeches, catchy phrases, and religious buzz-words. *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power”* ^{NIV} (1 Cor 4:20).

YOU ARE OUR EPISTLES

“Ye are our epistle . . .” Other versions read, *“You are our letter,”* ^{NASB} *“You yourselves are our letter,”* ^{NIV} and *“But the only letter of recommendation we need is you yourselves!”* ^{NLT}

The phrase *“ye are our epistles”* parallels a statement made in First Corinthians: *“Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?”* ^{NIV} (1 Cor 9:1). With great power, Paul also says of the Corinthians, *“For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord”* ^{NKJV} (1 Cor 9:2). Paul had birthed them through the Gospel – the unwavering message he faithfully preached, and for which he was noted. Thus he said to 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”* (1 Cor 4:15).

The Corinthians themselves were proof that Paul was sent by Christ with a message from God. Those who had received his word and acted upon it confirmed that word was, in fact, the very truth of God *“which effectually worketh also in you that believe”* (1 Thess 2:13). He had not delivered a message of religious regimen to them: i.e. *“the rudiments of the world”* that outlined various routines, like *“Touch not; taste not; handle not”* (Col 2:21). He did not come among them with flowery speech and oratory, preaching the Gospel *“with wisdom of words”* (1 Cor 1:17). He employed *“words which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual”* (1 Cor 2:13). The result was that the people themselves

became an *“epistle”* – a letter that had been deliberately and powerfully written. The change in the disposition, character, words, and deeds of the Corinthians could only be attributed to a powerful and true message delivered by a faithful minister, *“even as the Lord gave to every man”* (1 Cor 3:5).

WRITTEN IN OUR HEARTS

“. . . written in our hearts . . .” Other versions read, *“written on our hearts,”* ^{NIV} *“written on your hearts,”* ^{RSV} *“whose writing is in our hearts,”* ^{BBE} and *“Your lives are a letter written in our hearts.”* ^{NLT}

Based on some manuscripts, a few

he cared for them as one cares for himself. This is an example of the fulfilling of the second commandment of the Law: *“thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”* (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39).

Heartless Religion

One of the marks of lifeless religion is the absence of heartfelt responses. When men do not believe *“with the heart”* (Rom 10:10), it impacts the entire fabric of their religion. Under such systems, hearts are not *“knit together in love”* (Col 2:2). Ministers of lifeless words do not have those to whom they speak in their hearts. This condition is what occasions sermons and teachings that are not edifying, and thus do not minister to

The apostle now introduces the real credentials of a valid minister – the fruit that his message has produced in those who embraced it. That is the incontrovertible proof of the validity of a messenger and his message.

versions read *“written on your hearts.”* ^{RSV} However, that view is not accepted by the vast majority of versions, which support the expression *“our hearts.”* ^{KJV/NKJV/ASV/NASB/NIV/NRSV/DARBY/DOUAY/ESV/NJB/NLT/YLT}

This phrase equates to one Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians: *“I have you in my heart”* (Phil 1:7). In a more general way, this is the *“love of the brethren”* – a certain knitting together of those who have been *“joined to the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:17). The Apostle uses a similar statement later in this letter: *“I have said before that you are in our hearts”* (2 Cor 7:3). His willingness to minister to them also confirms they had been written in his heart: *“And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved”* (2 Cor 12:15).

Paul was not a mere religious professional. He was not engaged in a career path, moving about men with an interest to furthering his own objectives. **He became closely affiliated with those to whom he ministered.** They were truly *“written”* in his heart, so that

the regenerated spirit.

A Reflection of Divine Care

Paul having the Corinthians written in his heart is a reflection of God’s own care for His people. **Divine care is expressed as people being engraved on the palms of God’s hands.** *“Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me”* (Isa 49:16). By this, the Lord means He has a profound love and concern for His people – the kind that moves Him to work in their behalf. A New Covenant expression that reflects this care is found in Romans 8:28: *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”* ^{NASB}

KNOWN AND READ OF ALL MEN

“. . . known and read of all men.” Other versions read, *“known and read by all men,”* ^{NKJV} *“known and read by everybody,”* ^{NIV} *“to be known and read by all,”* ^{NRSV} *“open to every man’s reading and knowledge,”* ^{BBE} *“that everyone can*

read and understand,"^{NJB} and "everyone can read it and recognize our good work among you."^{NLT}

What has taken place to those who are in Christ is, to some degree, perceptible to "all men." Fellow believers are thereby able to more fully identify what has happened to those who are born again. Those outside of Christ cannot put their finger on exactly what has taken place. However, both believer and unbeliever know that something has, in fact, transpired within the child of God. To some degree, both groups take due note of those changes, reading and knowing the saints.

preserved from corruption and spiritual putrefaction. Being "salt" has to do with effecting the environment about us.

"A city that is set on a hill," Jesus continued, "**CANNOT** be hid" (Matt 5:14). He does not say the city on a hill **should not** be hid, as though He was saying, "God set you on a hill, now see to it that you are seen!" All too often, that is how texts like this are presented. This was our Lord's explanation of the unquestionable affirmation, "**Ye ARE the light of the world.**" He did **NOT** say, "You are **to be** the light of the world" – a phrase that is quite common in our day. Paul said the Philippians **were** shining

6:11). We are really delivered "from the power of darkness," and translated "into the kingdom of" God's "dear Son" (Col 1:13). **A change in character occurs at this point. New values and objectives are realized.** Things once embraced are repudiated, and things once rejected are embraced. That is the nature of the new birth, or regeneration.

There is also a closeness among the people of God themselves that becomes evident to those who are alienated from God. Jesus said, "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*" (John 13:35). That means this love can actually be perceived – or, as our text states, we are "*known and read of all men.*"

Moral and spiritual power are realized when we are "*baptized into Christ*" and "*put on Christ*" (Gal 3:27). Due to the effective teaching of the grace of God, the redeemed are enabled to live a life described as "*denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, living "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ"* (Titus 2:13). **Anyone who imagines this can be done without being, to some degree, apparent to others is simply wrong.** A change that cannot be perceived is no change at all!

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul reminded them of the moral and spiritual alteration that had taken place within them. They had been moved from a state of condemnation to one of justification and acceptance. **Their natural condition demanded that this change take place.** Paul described it in these words, "*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*" (1 Cor 6:9-11). Do you imagine that kind of change could be hidden? Such

What has taken place to those who are in Christ is, to some degree, perceptible to "all men." Fellow believers are thereby able to more fully identify what has happened to those who are born again. Those outside of Christ cannot put their finger on exactly what has taken place. However, both believer and unbeliever know that something has, in fact, transpired within the child of God.

The effects of the new birth are apparent, or evident. That is why those who are in Christ can be "*known and read*" by men. This is not speaking of a psychological perception or intuition – that is, being able to pick up on what is the real character of a person. This is not speaking of the perception that a person is dishonest, trying to take advantage of people, or operating with some hidden and unacceptable objectives. **This is particularly referring to the awareness of what God has done in the individual.**

The Savior said, "*Ye ARE the salt of the earth*" (Matt 5:13). He did not say that is what His disciples OUGHT to be, but what they actually were. He also affirmed that if that salt lost its saltiness, it would be discarded, for it could not be made "*salty again.*"^{NASB} At that point, the individual is no longer "*the salt of the earth*" – the means whereby the world is

"*as lights in the world*" (Phil 2:15).

All of this postulates a very real change – very real life! **Being a "Christian" is not simply adopting a new way of living. It is not accepting a religious creed, or acquiescing to the tenets of a particular religion.** Being "saved" is not adding a religious dimension to our life. Those who are "*blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke*" **do**, indeed, "*shine as lights in the world*" (Phil 2:15). This is because they are, in fact, working out their "*own salvation with fear and trembling,*" and it is God who is working in them "*both to will and to do of His good pleasure*" (Phil 2:12-13).

In Christ Jesus, "*regeneration*" is genuinely realized (Tit 3:5). This is described by Jesus as being "*born again*" (John 3:3,7; 1 Pet 1:23). It is becoming "*dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Rom

people are, indeed, “*known and read of all men.*”

Our Day

Today, we are faced with a powerless church that is neither salt nor light. **The line has been so blurred between the professed church and the world, that there is no longer an obvious difference between the two.** Immorality of all kinds is found within the nominal church, as well as in the

world. Worldly appearances, manners, and preferences have been adopted by nominal Christendom, so that it is perceived as essentially the same as the world. For the most part, people do not see “Christians” as differing from the world in nature, or character. This kind of condition brings great reproach upon the Lord, just as David’s sin with Bathsheba gave “*occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*” (2 Sam 12:14). If that deed brought such reproach under an inferior

covenant with inferior promises, what will be said of such reproach under a “*better covenant, which was established upon better promises*” (Heb 8:6)?

The words of this text provide a means for sober reflection and evaluation. **They are spoken to “the new man”, and are intended to contribute to sound spiritual thought and expression. Good fruit will come from such things.**

THE EPISTLE OF CHRIST

“^{3a} **Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ . . .**”

Paul now shows that Divine workings always become evident. Just as men cannot set a city on a hill and it remain hidden, **so God cannot work in men through Christ without it becoming evident.** The understanding of the evidence may not be present, but the evidence itself can be seen. We have an example of this in the creation. As it is written, “*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard*” (Psa 19:1-3). **Although men may fail to discern the handiwork of God in nature, yet it remains before their very eyes.**

This principle is true on a still higher level in the redemptive workings of the Lord. This has particularly to do with the change that is wrought in those who are “*joined to the Lord*” (1 Cor 6:17), or have “*put on Christ*” (Gal 3:27). **There is a message being sent to the world in every person that has been born again.** Men may not have eyes to see it, but the message is there – just as surely as the Son of God stood among men, though some were blinded to His Person.

MANIFESTLY DECLARED

“*Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared . . .*” Other versions read, “*clearly you are,*”^{NKJV} “*being manifested that you are,*”^{NASB} “*You show that you are,*”^{NIV}

“*Being made manifest,*”^{ASV} “*shown to be,*”^{NAB} “*it is plain,*”^{NJB} “*Clearly, you are.*”^{NLT} and “*For all can see.*”^{WEYMOUTH}

Something that is “*manifestly declared*” has been **made apparent.** This expression comes from a single Greek word – φαυερούμενοι (fan-er-ou-men-oi). This is a causative word that affirms the Lord has made something known, or

Corinthians that could not possibly have been accomplished by the will or power of mere men. The Corinthians had been “*washed,*” “*sanctified,*” and “*justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*” (1 Cor 6:11). They had been “*enriched*” by Christ “*in all utterance and knowledge*” (1 Cor 1:5). They were collectively “*the temple of God*” (1 Cor 3:16), and were “*the body of Christ*

This is not a secret work, but one that becomes evident in the lives of those who are in Christ Jesus. The only way this display can be shut off is for the Lord Jesus to quit writing – and the only way for Him to quit writing is for the Holy Spirit to be quenched

caused it to be seen. It is something He has shown, or revealed. In particular, the Corinthians themselves were a message – a message that confirmed the validity of Paul’s apostleship and preaching.

THE EPISTLE OF CHRIST

“*. . . to be the epistle of Christ . . .*” Other versions read, “*a letter of Christ,*”^{NASB} “*a letter from Christ,*”^{NIV} and “*Christ’s epistle*”^{DARBY}

This evident working was the accomplishment of the Lord, not of man. **It was a message from Christ to the world.** It was undeniable evidence that a work had been done within the

and members in particular” (1 Cor 12:27).

An “*epistle of Christ*” speaks of something He has done. Jesus not only died for us “*while we were yet sinners*” (Rom 5:8), He takes up residency in those who “*receive Him*” (John 1:12; 14:21,23). The Lord Jesus not only is interceding for us at the right hand of God (Heb 7:25), He is within us as “*the hope of glory*” (Col 1:27). He lives within the child of God so that the life that is lived out is His own (Gal 2:20). Having been “*joined to the Lord,*” believers are now “*one spirit*” with Him (1 Cor 6:17).

This is not a secret work, but

He is not saying you can hide your light. Rather, He is affirming that if it does not shine, it will go out, just as surely salt can “lose its savor,” or “saltiness”

one that becomes evident in the lives of those who are in Christ Jesus. The only way this display can be shut off is for the Lord Jesus to quit writing – and the only way for Him to quit writing is for the Holy Spirit to be quenched (1 Thess 5:19), grieved (Eph 4:30), or resisted (Acts 7:51). **The writing of Jesus can only be stopped when “an evil heart of unbelief” enters in, constraining one to depart from the living God** (Heb 3:12). If this does not happen, the writing continues.

Wherever a soul actually rises from baptism to “walk in the newness of life” (Rom 6:4), the Lord Jesus is writing His epistle. Those who are ridding themselves of “all filthiness of flesh and

spirit” (2 Cor 7:1), are experiencing the writing. Wherever people are presenting their bodies a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1-2), the writing continues. The unquenched Spirit is a writing Spirit!

It is imperative that we note this writing is apparent. **Such a change is wrought in the individual that a message is sent through that life to the world.** This is a writing that is “manifestly declared” – i.e. it is apparent to “all men.” **A life that does not testify to the reality of Divine working is simply a life in which the writing of Jesus is not taking place.** While that may appear quite strong, it is an unavoidable conclusion. If the redeemed are “manifestly declared” to

be Christ’s epistles, then it is not possible for the writing to be concealed.

I have often heard men say that believers are hiding their light – obscuring its effectiveness. They base their view on Christ’s words in Matthew 5:15-16: “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.” It is important to see what Jesus is saying here. **He is not saying you can hide your light. Rather, He is affirming that if it does not shine, it will go out, just as surely salt can “lose its savor,” or “saltiness”** (Mark 9:50).

Those who imagine they can keep the light, remain salt, and retain the writing of Jesus within, while remaining unresponsive to it, are simply wrong. **If the light is not maintained, it will go out. If the salt is not properly maintained, it will lose its saltiness.** If the effect of the writing is suppressed, Jesus will cease to write, and men will cease to be His epistle. This is confirmed in the words that follow.

MINISTERED BY US

^{3b} . . . ministered by us . . . ”

Other versions read, “cared for by us,”^{NASB} “the result of our ministry,”^{NIV} “prepared by us,”^{NRSV} “delivered by us,”^{RSV} “the fruit of our work,”^{BBE} “administered by us,”^{NAB} “entrusted to our care,”^{NJB} “produced by my service,”^{WILLIAMS} and “transcribed by me.”^{MONTGOMERY}

Here is an example of men working together with God through Christ. As it is written, “For we are laborers together with God . . . ” (1 Cor 3:9), and “We then, as workers together with Him . . . ” (2 Cor 6:1). In the writing of Scripture, “amanuenses” were often used. These were men “employed to write from dictation or to copy a manuscript.”^{MIRRIAM-WEBSTER} Baruch, for example, was the one who wrote Jeremiah’s words in a book (Jer 36:32). During the reigns of David and Solomon, there were three prominent

scribes who recorded for them: Seraiah, Sheva, and Jehosaphat (2 Sam 8:17; 20:25; 1 Kgs 4:3). The epistle to the Romans was written by Tertius at the dictation of Paul (Rom 16:22).

Just as Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans using Tertius as his scribe (Rom 1:1; 16:22), **so the Corinthians were Jesus’ writing through the spiritual scribe Paul.** Elsewhere the apostle said of the Corinthians, “are not ye my work in the Lord” (1 Cor 9:1). He is the one who “planted” them (1 Cor 3:6). They were his “beloved sons” (1 Cor 4:14). As he said to 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” (1 Cor 4:15). Luke records the beginning of the Corinthian church, tracing it back to the

preaching of Paul: “And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:8-11).

God has appointed that men will be saved “through the foolishness of preaching” (1 Cor 1:21) – that is, through a message that the world considers “foolishness,” yet which is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 10:16). Thus, the Ethiopian eunuch, hopelessly confused by Isaiah’s description of the Messiah, had the text clarified to him by

the insightful preaching of Philip (Acts 8:31-39).

It has been revealed that *“every man”* that comes to Christ has been given a *“minister”* from God – someone through whom they believed. *“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man.”* (1 Cor 3:5). These *“ministers”* are *“sent”* by God (Rom 10:15). Several examples of this sending have been recorded for us.

- ☛ God sent forth John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Lord (Matt 11:10; Mk 1:2; John 1:6).
- ☛ Jesus sent forth the twelve (Matt 10:5; John 4:38).
- ☛ Jesus told His disciples to pray that God would send laborers into His harvest (Lk 10:2).
- ☛ Those who receive whom Jesus sends, receive Jesus Himself (John 13:20).
- ☛ The Lord sent Ananias to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:17).
- ☛ The Spirit sent Barnabas and Saul to a special work (Acts 13:2-4).
- ☛ Paul was sent to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; 26:17).
- ☛ The Lord sent Paul to Macedonia (Acts 16:9).

When Paul says, *“ministered by us,”* he is affirming that he was sent to them by the Head of the church, just as surely as Peter was sent to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48).

The “It Is Not Me” Syndrome

I have often heard men respond to those who thanked them for their ministry of the Word by saying, “Don’t thank me, thank God. He is the One who did it.” It all sounds humble enough, and the people probably mean well. However, is this an accurate statement of the case? Is not one of the very reasons for this epistle that the Corinthians were not appreciative of the messenger that God had sent them? Was Paul not a *“worker together with God,”* and had not Christ written upon their hearts through his

ministry?

The salvation of God brings people into the status of being co-partners with the Lord. He now works in us (Phil 2:13) and speaks through us (2 Cor 5:20). The great power of God, through which He is able to do *“exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think,”* *“worketh IN us”* (Eph 3:20). Paul said he was made a minister *“according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power”* (Eph 3:7). The *“exceeding greatness of His power”* is *“toward us-ward who believe”* (Eph 1:19). That great power is not merely to deliver us from the power of darkness, but to give

Nowhere are we told to submit to those who are mere religious administrators, and who only have the institutional title of a leader or elder. Such submission is reserved for those by whom we have believed, or who have fed and nourished the flock of God.

us utility in the Kingdom into which we have been *“translated”* (Col 1:13). **This utility is not realized by God overpowering us, or working through us while we remain in a state of spiritual ignorance.** While it may be conceded that such workings are possible, that is certainly not the objective of the *“great salvation”* in which we are participating.

The Lord has not summoned us into the arena of His *“eternal purpose”* to sit on the sidelines as spectators. **We have been called into the warfare.** We have been summoned into the Gospel initiative. We have been called into the *“fellowship”* of God’s Son – and He is working! The bane of modern religion is that it has left the masses idle – sitting, as it were, on the sidelines. This is not of God, and in no way is it acceptable.

Respect the Messenger

When Paul stood before his own people, declaring the Gospel of Christ, he said, *“Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of*

this salvation sent” (Acts 13:26). It was sent by the Lord, but delivered by Paul. When that word was rejected, it constituted a rejection of everlasting life. Thus Paul and Barnabas said, *“It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles”* (Acts 13:46).

The Thessalonians were admonished, *“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction”* ^{NASB} (1 Thess 5:12). The

Corinthians were admonished concerning Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, *“For they have refreshed my spirit and yours: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such”* (1 Cor 16:18). Hebrew believers were told concerning those who labored among them, *“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you”* (Heb 13:17).

Nowhere are we told to submit to those who are mere religious administrators, and who only have the institutional title of a leader or elder. Such submission is reserved for those by whom we have believed, or who have fed and nourished the flock of God. Such men were sent by God, and were ministers of Christ. The Lord used their words to awaken us, nurture us, and prepare us for the great and notable day of the Lord. **Using the truth ministered by faithful and insightful servants, the Lord makes us into letters that can be read and known by all men.**

You do well to ponder those who have been used by God to make you an “*epistle of Christ*,” thanking Him for them. The Corinthians had not done this, and thus stood in jeopardy. If it is true that Paul was the means through which Jesus inscribed upon their hearts, then to

receive Paul was actually to receive Christ. Jesus Himself said, “*He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me*” (Mat 10:40). And again, “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me; and he*

that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me” (John 13:20). The converse of this is also true. **To reject a messenger sent by Jesus, is to reject Jesus Himself.** These circumstances makes this text unusually relevant, for all of us have been given a minister from God.

REAL WRITING

“^{3c} . . . *written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God.*”

The Spirit now elaborates on the writing of Jesus. He will show something of the involvements of being an “*epistle of Christ*.” **We will be lifted out of the realm of speculation and philosophy in this matter.** The writing of reference is very real, and it has produced very real results.

WRITTEN NOT WITH INK

“ . . . *written not with ink . . .* ”

The phrase “*not with ink*,” means it is not of men. Men are not the ones who produce the results. It is true that Scripture itself is writing – writing “*with ink*.” However, it is the Spirit who produces the effective writing within men. The fact that the writing that produced moral and spiritual change is not in ink, means it was not accomplished by the wisdom of men or the wisdom of words. It was not the result of human rhetoric, superior eloquence, or the supposed ability of men to motivate and persuade. **In their best state, sound**

WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD

“ . . . *but with the Spirit of the living God . . .* ” Other versions read, “*but by the Spirit of the living God*,”^{NKJV} and “*but the Spirit of the living God*.”^{DARBY}

Although the believers are referred to as “*the epistle of Christ*,” here they are said to have been “*written with the Spirit of the living God*.” **The idea is that Jesus is the Author of the epistle, the Holy Spirit did the actual writing, and it was done through the ministry of the Apostle Paul.** Herein is a marvelous example of the cooperative manner of the Kingdom. The purpose belongs to God Himself. That purpose is being carried out by the Lord Jesus Christ. He sends forth the Spirit, who conforms the character of people to be in harmony with the Lord, doing so through the ministry of those who are laboring together with God. That is a most marvelous arrangement!

In their best state, sound and persuasive words have a place – but it is not the decisive place! What mensay must be something that can be used by the Lord, who traffics only in the truth.

Other versions read, “*recorded not with ink*,”^{BEBE} “*written, not in ink*,”^{NAB} and “*written not with pen and ink*.”^{NLT}

The writing now expounded is what makes us “*epistles of Christ*.” While this writing was “*ministered*” by Paul, it was not **written** by him. This might appear to be of small significance, but that is emphatically not the case.

The contrast is being made between letters of recommendation from men, and an authenticating message from the Lord. Letters written with pen and ink may not be plain. They may fade with age. They may be marred and become illegible. But it is not so with this writing.

and persuasive words have a place – but it is not the decisive place! What mensay must be something that can be used by the Lord, who traffics only in the truth.

Permit me to state this more plainly – and I speak as a writer and author. The Lord does not save people by “*best sellers*.” Moral and spiritual change is not accomplished by “*pen and ink*.” The best men can do is to provide some assistance in taking hold of the Word of God, stimulating faith and hope. But in the end, if a genuine change takes place, it is not because of men. It cannot be ultimately traced to “*pen and ink*.” The Lord is targeting a more permanent and abiding work than men can achieve.

The epistle, or message, that is being written by Jesus, through the Spirit, in concert with the ministry of His servants, is that of a changed life. What is here said to be writing, is elsewhere said to be conforming us to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). This is done by changing us from one stage of glory to another – a ministry that is actually accomplished by the Holy Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18). The message itself, that is known and read, is Jesus. That is, God is showing the life of His Son through those who have been joined to Him.

Details of the Writing

With great power, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is chronicled by the New Covenant speakers and writers. The texts

that follow are a vivid depiction of the writing to which this text refers: "written . . . with the Spirit of the living God."

- **LEADING.** "For as many as are **led by the Spirit of God**, they are the sons of God." (Rom 8:14)
- **WASHED, SANCTIFIED, AND JUSTIFIED.** "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.**" (1 Cor 6:11)
- **CHANGED.** "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as **by the Spirit of the Lord.**" (2 Cor 3:18)
- **SHEDDING ABROAD THE LOVE OF GOD.** "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts **by the Holy Spirit** which is given unto us." (Rom 5:5)
- **FREEDOM.** "For the law of **the Spirit of life** in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (Rom 8:2)
- **QUICKENING.** "But if **the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead** dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom 8:11).
- **MORTIFYING THE DEEDS OF THE BODY.** "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye **through the Spirit** do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom 8:13).
- **HELPING OUR INFIRMITIES.** "Likewise **the Spirit** also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but **the Spirit** itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of **the Spirit**, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." (Rom 8:27).

- **RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE, AND JOY.** "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy **in the Holy Spirit.**" (Rom 14:17)
- **ABOUNDING HOPE.** "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, **through the power of the Holy Spirit**" (Rom 15:13)
- **MADE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD.** "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles,

of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall **of the Spirit** reap life everlasting." (Gal 6:8)

- **ACCESS TO THE FATHER.** "For through Him we both have access **by one Spirit** unto the Father." (Eph 2:18)
- **STRENGTH IN THE INNER MAN.** "That He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might **by his Spirit** in the inner man." (Eph 3:16)

It is as though the human spirit was made a blank page in regeneration, with all of the old writing removed from it. Then, the Holy Spirit begins inscribing on that blank page, filling it up with a living message. It is a message from Christ – a message that is transmitted through moral and spiritual renewal.

ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified **by the Holy Spirit.**" (Rom 15:16)

- **WAITING IN HOPE.** "For we **through the Spirit** wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." (Gal 5:5)
- **STRIVING AGAINST THE FLESH.** "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and **the Spirit against the flesh:** and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led **of the Spirit**, ye are not under the law." (Gal 5:17-18)
- **FRUIT.** "But the fruit **of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Gal 5:22-23).
- **REAPING EVERLASTING LIFE.** "For he that soweth to his flesh shall

• **SEALED.** "And grieve not **the holy Spirit of God**, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." (Eph 4:30)

- **PRAYER.** "Praying always with all prayer and supplication **in the Spirit**, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." (Eph 6:18)
- **KEEPING WHAT HAS BEEN COMMITTED TO US.** "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep **by the Holy Spirit** which dwelleth in us." (2 Tim 1:14)
- **RENEWAL.** "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing **of the Holy Spirit.**" (Titus 3:5)
- **OBEYING THE TRUTH.** "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth **through the Spirit** unto

unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.” (1 Pet 1:22)

• **ABIDING IN CHRIST.** “But ye have **an Unction** from the Holy One, and ye know all things . . . But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as **the same Anointing** teacheth you of all

things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.” (1 John 2:20,27).

• **KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS.** “And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, **by the Spirit** which He hath given us.” (1 John 3:24).

All of these activities are involved in the “writing” being accomplished by the Holy Spirit. It is as though the human spirit was made a blank page in regeneration, with all of the old writing removed from it. Then, the Holy Spirit begins inscribing on that blank page, filling it up with a living message. It is a message from Christ – a message that is transmitted through moral and spiritual renewal. A marvelous work, indeed!

IN THE HEART, NOT STONE

“^{3d} . . . not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.”

First the Spirit tells us the means whereby the writing is being done: it is **not** being done by men – “not with ink., but the Spirit of the living God.” Now He tells us **where** the work is being done: the epistle is not being written in stone, but in “fleshly tables of the heart.”

NOT IN TABLES OF STONE

“ . . . not in tables of stone . . . ” Other versions read “not on tables of stone,”^{NKJV} “not on tablets of stone,”^{NASB} “not in stone,”^{BBE} “not on stone tables,”^{DARBY} and “It is carved not on stone,”^{NLT}

The obvious parallel is being made

him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, **tables of stone**, written with the finger of God” (Ex 31:18).

Moses descended the Mount, taking the tables of stone with him. “And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And **the tables were the work of God**, and the writing was **the writing of God**, graven upon the tables” (Ex 32:16).

As soon as Moses came within range of the people, he heard them shouting, engaged in drunken revelry, and dancing around a golden calf. It is written that

Even as hard as the lower millstone” (Job 41:24). God said of Israel to Ezekiel, “For they are **impudent children and stiffhearted**” (Ezek 2:4). And again, *But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted*” (Ezek 3:7). Zechariah said of them, “But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, **they made their hearts as an adamant stone**, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts” (Zech 7:11-12).

Hearts of stone refuse to listen to the Lord. They will not hearken to His Word or do His bidding. Because those with hearts of stone will not turn, it is said of them, they “hardened their neck, and would not hear” (Neh 9:29). Through Isaiah, God said of Israel, “Because I knew that **thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass**” (Isa 48:4). Jeremiah said of them, “O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but **they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return**” (Jer 5:3).

Is there someone naive enough to think that it is right for anyone wearing the name of Christ to have the same response to the living God as Israel of old?

with the Law, which was written on tables of stone. When He was about to give the Law to Moses, the Lord said, “Come up to Me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee **tables of stone**, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them” (Ex 24:12). Again it is written, “And He gave unto Moses, when He had made an end of communing with

“Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast **the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount**” (Ex 32:19).

The tables of stone reflected the hearts of the people. Their hearts were like that of the great “leviathan,” a serpent of the sea mentioned in the book of Job. “His heart is as hard as stone,

Is there anyone who imagines that God has provided for such a people in Christ Jesus? Is there someone naive enough to think that it is

right for anyone wearing the name of Christ to have the same response to the living God as Israel of old? I have heard a significant number of men preach as though this was the case. The wave of contemporary Christian music that is striking against the body of Christ like a putrid wave of the deep, often addresses God as though this was true.

God inscribed His law on tables of stone two times (Ex 31:18; 34:28). **He will not do it again.** The writing of the New Covenant is not according to the manner of the writing of the Old Covenant. Salvation provides for a different kind of writing.

What Does This Mean?

What is the significance of the Law being written on tables of stone? Why is Paul making this point? **The Old**

nearness to God, and thus it made no essential change in the people. They did not grow in the knowledge of Lord, but remained basically ignorant of Him. The Old Covenant was, out of necessity, one of habit. It was written in stone because there was no room for advancement or growth in it. Its primary work was to stop *“every mouth”* and make *“all the world”* consciously *“guilty before God”* (Rom 3:19).

A Different Kind of Covenant

The New Covenant is not this kind of covenant – it is *“not according to the covenant”* God made with Israel at Sinai (Heb 8:9). In Christ Jesus we are not given a new routine, or a set of procedures. **This is not a system where we culture good habits, and try hard to just do what is right, and avoid doing what is wrong.** That is the

expression *“bodily exercise”* does not refer to physical exercise, like running, weight-lifting, etc. It rather refers to *“bodily disciplines”* that are involved in religious routine. It can involve things like long periods of fasting, lying prostrate before the Lord, and other buffetings of the body to bring it under control. This is not to say exercise is not a good thing. Rather, it is to say that simply is not what the Lord is talking about here.

Paul does not say such activities – religious disciplines – are useless, but that their profit is only marginal. He elaborates on this subject more fully in his epistle to the Colossians. *“Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence”* (Col 2:20-23).

This approach to religion cannot lessen the tug of the flesh. It cannot produce a hatred for sin or a love for righteousness. It cannot make sin repulsive or godliness attractive. If such activities could make men holy, Israel would have been holy, for that was precisely the content of their religion. It related *“only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation”*^{NASB} (Heb 9:10).

The words “not in tables of stone” accentuate that this is not the kind of thing God is doing in Christ Jesus. This *“great salvation”* into which we have been called is not a summons to bodily procedures. Jesus did not come so we could have a new routine, a systematic way, or a new set of disciplines. He rather came that we *“might have life,”* and that we might have it *“more abundantly”* (John 10:10). This abundant life does not refer to having more possessions, *“for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth”* (Luke 12:15). Other versions read, *“a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his*

It is not that routines are of themselves sinful, and that is not the point of the text. Rather, it is that routines are rudimentary, and are not at the heart of the life that is in Christ Jesus. They pertain more to a state of spiritual infancy, when we are under “tutors and governors,” so to speak

Covenant was *“imposed”* upon a people who were in fundamental disagreement with it. It was not a covenant for the heart, but stood in fleshly routines and procedures – **things that could be done without the heart.** Thus it is written, *“Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood **only** in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation”* (Heb 9:10). It was a covenant that did not require faith, but depended upon the doing of those who were under it. As it is written, *“The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them’”*^{NIV} (Gal 3:12).

The Law did not promote

nature of the law that is written in tables of stone.

It is not that routines are of themselves sinful, and that is not the point of the text. Rather, it is that **routines are rudimentary, and are not at the heart of the life that is in Christ Jesus.** They pertain more to a state of spiritual infancy, when we are under *“tutors and governors,”* so to speak (Gal 4:2). However, this is not how God intends us to live – i.e. being told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it.

When dealing with this matter, Paul told Timothy, *“But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. **For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come”*** (1 Tim 4:8). **The**

possessions.”^{NIV} Therefore, those who promote a “health and wealth” gospel are only betraying their ignorance of the nature of the New Covenant. They have misrepresented the King of glory, and have awakened covetousness in the hearts of those who embrace their nonsense.

The Remarkable Religious Tendencies of Our Day

The remarkable religious tendencies of the Christian community of our day are most alarming. All manner of routines and “how-to” methods are being hawked among professed believers. It is difficult to find an apparently successful approach to building churches or fine-tuning life that is not based upon developing certain habits, or adhering to certain routines.

While seemingly strong arguments can be presented for this approach to spiritual life, they are all washed away by the Spirit’s reasoning in Colossians 2:20-23, as quoted under **“A Different Kind of Covenant.”**^{4th Paragraph} Given the most favorable view, this kind of approach can only apply to babes in Christ. Even then, it is not the kind of approach holy men of God took toward new disciples.

An Example

When certain Gentiles heard the Gospel and believed (Acts 15:7), and were given the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:8), their hearts being “purified by faith”(Acts 15:9), their conversion was reported among “the apostles and elders”(Acts 15:6). When they came together to “consider the matter,” they determined not to place the yoke of law upon these disciples – a yoke that was contained in routines and ordinances. Their decision was based on the conclusion that these newly converted Gentiles would be saved “through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,” not a some moral code. **They further concluded that a regimented approach of their new life would amount to tempting God** (Acts 15:10-11).

After hearing the testimony and reasoning concerning this issue, James, the brother of our Lord, received some insight into the matter. He was able to correlate the conversion of the Gentiles with the promises of Scripture (Acts 15:13-18, together with Amos 9:11-12, Isaiah 65:1, Joel 2:32, and Isaiah 46:10).

He then presented a solution. “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20).

Perceiving the soundness of James’s words, it pleased “the apostles and elders, with the whole church,” to send Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas, with letters to the new converts. The content of the letter is provided by Luke.

“To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’; to whom we gave no such commandment; it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

troubling and unsettling the souls of the disciples.

Thus, the brethren chose to only mention “necessary things,” **none of which involved a routine of form of outward regimentation.** Abstaining from things knowingly offered to idols, from blood, and from fornication were not mere goals the babes in Christ were to attempt to reach – for that is precisely what fleshly regimen is designed to do. **These were things to be avoided instantly, and altogether. They were not areas in which supposed advancement could be measured, and believers applauded for making certain improvement in these areas.** Such a thought is too obvious to further develop.

One can only imagine what the religious merchants of our day would have told those new Gentile converts. I can almost hear them marketing their instant devotional books, secrets to meditation and prayer, and how successful morality could be achieved by making yourself accountable to your peers. These merchandisers would have told them how to praise, win souls, and be salt and light. **But that is not what inspired men**

Newness of life does not come by means of human wisdom and successful routines. Even though some of these things seem at first to be very effective, they all have to do with those in a spiritually infant state. There comes a time when they are no longer effective in any sense, but must give way to the writing of the Spirit of God – who simply does not work through the routines invented by men.

Farewell^{NKJV} (Acts 15:23-29).

This is an application of the principle – “not with ink.” **Note, that being duly directed by the Holy Spirit, the apostles and elders carefully avoided a procedural religion.** That is what certain false teachers had been promoting among these new disciples. Those false teachers were not sanctioned by the brethren appointed by Christ. In fact, they were seen as

did, and it is not what we are to do!

Newness of life does not come by means of human wisdom and successful routines. Even though some of these things seem at first to be very effective, they all have to do with those in a spiritually infant state. **There comes a time when they are no longer effective in any sense, but must give way to the writing of the Spirit of God – who simply does not work**

through the routines invented by men.

I realize this is an unusually sensitive subject, and that many may very well be offended by what I have said. However, that offense is not caused by anything God has said on the subject, as your own spirit will confirm.

IN FLESHLY TABLES OF THE HEART

“ . . . but in fleshly tables of the heart.” Other versions read, “but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart,”^{NKJV} “but on tablets of human hearts,”^{NASB} “but in tables that are hearts of flesh,”^{ASV} and “but on human hearts.”^{NLT}

The means by which the Divine

compared with the tables of stone upon which the Law was written. **The Old Covenant involves an impersonal writing** – that is, a writing that did not impact the human character. **The New Covenant involves a personal writing** – one that changes the nature of those who are part of that covenant.

Jeremiah’s Prophecy

Jeremiah prophesied a time when this kind of writing would be accomplished. It was identified as the time of a “New Covenant.” It was “new” in the sense of being of another order. The Lord Himself said of this covenant, “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: **Not**

Ten Commandments, “*And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And He declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone*” (Deut 4:12-13).

Jeremiah confirms the New Covenant is not after this manner. **It is not the writing of an external code, a list of outward rules, or the enforcement of a moral regimen.** While there are, indeed, certain moral demands placed upon those who are in Christ Jesus, **these demands do not constitute the New Covenant itself.** Such commands as “flee fornication” (1 Cor 6:18), “perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord” (2 Cor 7:1), “lie not one to another” (Col 3:9), and “let your speech be always with grace” (Col 4:6), etc., are, in fact, Divine demands. It is not possible to ignore these words and remain in God’s favor. However, these are not the New Covenant, and they do not constitute the “writing” to which our text refers.

Jeremiah went on to prophesy of a new kind of writing that would take place within the framework of the New Covenant. “I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts” (Jer 31:33). This is involved in the circumcision of the heart, which Moses prophesied just prior to Israel’s entrance into Canaan. “*And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul,* ^{DEUT 6:5} *that thou mayest live*” (Deut 30:6). David also alluded to this writing, which was only introduced in his day: “*The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide*” (Psa 37:31). And again, “*I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart*” (Psa 40:8). Isaiah also spoke of this kind of writing when, as yet, it was not fully accomplished: “*Hearken unto Me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law*” (Isa 51:7).

Confirmed to Be the Covenant Presently Administered by Jesus
The covenant foretold by Jeremiah

The circumstance described in this text reveals why a “rules and regulations,” or “law” mentality, is completely out of synch with the life that is “hid with Christ in God.” An attempt to regulate “newness of life” by outward precepts and rules is like trying to “put new wine in old bottles” (Matt 9:17), or sewing “a new piece of cloth on an old garment”

writing is accomplished is the Holy Spirit: “with the Spirit of the living God.” The place of writing is within men, not upon paper or tables of stone. **Here we come to grips with the uniqueness of the New Covenant.** The circumstance described in this text reveals why a “rules and regulations,” or “law” mentality, is completely out of synch with the life that is “hid with Christ in God.” An attempt to regulate “newness of life” by outward precepts and rules is like trying to “put new wine in old bottles” (Matt 9:17), or sewing “a new piece of cloth on an old garment” (Mk 2:21).

The phrase “fleshly tables of the heart” equates to Ezekiel’s “heart of flesh” (Ezek 11:19; 36:26). Ezekiel emphasizes the KIND of heart that is given, as contrasted with a “stony heart,” as seen in the people with whom the Old Covenant was made. Our text emphasizes **WHAT IS WRITTEN** upon the heart, as

according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD” (Jer 31:32).

The covenant that differed from the New Covenant was, in fact, the covenant that was made at Mount Sinai. It was embodied in the Ten Commandments. It is said of the writing placed by God upon two tables of stone, “*And He wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments*” (Ex 34:28). A failure to do those commandments – all of them – constituted breaking the covenant. As it is written, “*And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant*” (Lev 26:15). Moses said of the

is, in fact, the New Covenant that is presently being administered by its Mediator, Jesus Christ. This is confirmed in the eighth and tenth chapter of Hebrews, where Christ's High Priesthood and Mediatorship are expounded. "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: **We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man . . . But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises . . . For finding fault with them, He saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people . . . And for this cause He is the Mediator of the New Testament . . . In that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (Heb 8:1-2,6, 8-10,13; 9:15). "Whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, **This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more**" (Heb 10:15-17).**

There can, then, be no question about the covenant promised by Jeremiah being the one presently mediated by Jesus Christ. It is the "better covenant" under which redemption is realized (Heb 9:15). It is the covenant, or "living way," by which we now come into the presence of God (Heb 10:19-20).

To Be Made with Israel and Judah

Jeremiah makes the point that this New Covenant would be made "with

the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (Jer 31:31). Hebrews 8:8 makes the same affirmation. Hebrews 10:16 says, "This is the covenant I will make with them." In the verse prior to this, the Spirit affirms that this witness is "to us." "But the Holy Spirit also **witnesses to us; for after He had said before**"^{NKJV} (Heb 10:15). How, then, can it be that this is the covenant that is being mediated by Jesus now – the covenant under which we obtain remission and access to God?

When Jesus walked among men, He clearly revealed that salvation was inextricably associated with the Jews: "the house of Israel and the house of Judah." His words were, "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). Paul said of the "Israelites," "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and **the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ**

but were made participants in the promise made with Israel. They were, in fact, grafted into the Jewish tree. "For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" (Rom 11:24).

Thus the covenant promised to the Jews is the very covenant in which we participate in Christ Jesus. We have been made "fellowcitizens," and are no more "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (Eph 2:12,19). We have been joined together with believing Jews (to whom the promises were made) to form "one new man" (Eph 2:15). **But we have brought no Gentile promise into this family.** All of the "promises" relating to this salvation were given to the Jews (Rom 9:4; 15:8; Gal 3:16; Heb 7:6; 11:13,17). The only possible exception is the promise of the Seed of the woman

In Christ, we have become partakers of the Jewish tree. That is, we are benefitting from the Messianic promises that were made exclusively to them.

came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom 9:5).

In Christ, we have become partakers of the Jewish tree. **That is, we are benefitting from the Messianic promises that were made exclusively to them.** Thus Paul writes, "And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them **partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee**" (Rom 11:17-18). Solemnly we are told that the covenant involving remission of sins (Jer 31:34) was actually made with Israel: "For this is My covenant **unto them, when I shall take away their sins**" (Rom 11:27). Gentile believers were not given a new promise,

bruising the serpent's head – **and that promise was made to Satan while the whole human race was listening** (Gen 3:14-15).

What Does It Mean to Have the Law Put into the Mind and Written Upon the Heart?

Now we come to the uniqueness of the New Covenant, and to the writing that occurs within it. The Covenant that is now in place, having been sanctified by the blood of Christ (Heb 10:29; 12:24; 13:20), and now being mediated by Him (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), **is one in which human nature, or character, is changed.** This is one of its distinguishing qualities that makes it a "better covenant."

Those in Christ Jesus are declared to be a "new creation," in whom "old

things are passed away,” and “all things are become new”^{NKJV} (2 Cor 5:17). They are “born again” (John 3:3,7; 1 Pet 1:23), being begotten “with the word of truth” (James 1:17). The life they now live is not their own, but is lived by faith, as compared to self-centeredness. Thus Paul confessed, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

Speaking of the singularity of life in Christ Jesus, the Scriptures speak of

opposed to being unable to understand (Eph 3:9).

- Their hearts have been circumcised, making them sensitive to the Lord (Deut 30:6; Rom 2:29; Phil 3:3).
- They are God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10).
- They possess a “new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24).
- The “new man” is “renewed in

The reason the Law “made nothing perfect” (Heb 7:19) was because **the matter of being made righteous depended solely upon those to whom the Law was addressed.** The Law had nothing whatsoever to do with faith, and did not require men to believe in, or trust, the Lord. Its requirement was made very clear: “And the law is not of faith: but, The man **that doeth them shall live in them**” (Gal 3:12; Lev 18:5). The Amplified Bible reads, “But the Law does not rest on faith [does not require faith, has nothing to do with faith], for it itself says, He who does them [the things prescribed by the Law] shall live by them [not by faith].”

The Complicating Factor

The complicating factor is found in the fact that sin had so defiled humanity, that there remained no capacity to precisely and consistently do what God had commanded to be done. Transgression introduced a state of alienation in which humanity was at variance with God – “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18). There was now hostility between God and man, so that, in his natural condition, man “is not subject to the law of God, **neither indeed can be**” (Rom 8:7). In that condition, the Law of God, although good and holy, actually became “the strength of sin” (1 Cor 15:56). **That is, rather than directing men out of sin, it caused the alienated and hostile human spirit to assert itself against God.** Thus, “by the commandment,” sin became “*exceedingly sinful*” (Rom 7:13). That is, “the commandment” discovered the antagonism and enmity against God that all along existed in fallen humanity.

There is no religious system, moral code, or external regimen that can correct this condition. This ought to be abundantly evident to every person – yet it is not. Throughout the Christian community a prevailing ignorance of this circumstance is evident. The fact that part of the New Covenant, or New Testament, is God writing His law upon the heart and putting it into the mind, is rarely declared or expounded. It is almost as though someone had taken Jehudi’s penknife and neatly removed it from the Scriptures (Jer 36:234) – even though it is precisely stated no less than three times (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10; 10:16).

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“newness of life” (Rom 6:4), “newness of spirit” (Rom 7:6), “a new creature” (Gal 6:15), and “the new man” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). This addresses a change in man’s basic nature, or character. In Christ Jesus, God is not training us to act in a new way. **We are not being directed into a way of life that requires us to do things that are in sharp disagreement with our primary or essential disposition.** Godliness is not fundamentally the subordination of godless tendencies, but the expression of “newness of life.” While the subduing of the flesh and the expression of the renewed spirit are both involved, **the superior part of the redeemed is “the new man,” not the “old man.”** Now, in Christ Jesus, we can triumph over the inordinate inclinations of our flesh, even “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4). What marvelous things have occurred to those who are in Jesus!

- They have been given “eyes to see” and “ears to hear” (Deut 29:4). That is, they perceive the truth of God, as

knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10).

The “law” that is written upon our heart and put into our mind by God, and through the Holy Spirit, is, in fact, the same Law that was written on tables of stone. There was nothing wrong with that Law. It is said of it, “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). And again, “we know that the Law is spiritual” (Rom 7:14). The weakness of the Law was not found in itself, but in those to whom it was addressed. As it is written, “For what the law could not do, in that **it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh**” (Rom 8:3). The necessity for a New Covenant is ultimately traced to the failure of men to keep the First Covenant. “For **finding fault with them, He saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah**” (Heb 8:8).

If men are to be acceptable to God, they must be changed – changed from within. Their inclinations and preferences must be altered. That alteration cannot come through any form of human discipline, as 1,500 years of the administration of Divine Law confirmed. At the conclusion of the governance of the First Covenant – that Law being a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4) – some Divine conclusions were expressed.

- ☛ **NONE RIGHTEOUS.** *“There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Rom 3:10-12).
- ☛ **NO ONE MADE PERFECT.** *“For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God”* (Heb 7:19).
- ☛ **NO MAN JUSTIFIED BY LAW.** *“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith”* (Gal 3:11).
- ☛ **A SECOND COVENANT REQUIRED.** *“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second”* (Heb 8:7).

This is why Jesus affirmed, *“Ye must be born again”* (John 3:7). It is the reason for His assertion, *“the flesh profiteth nothing”* (John 6:63). It is why Paul asserted, *“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Rom 3:20).

THE EFFECT OF THE SPIRIT'S WRITING

There are undeniable effects realized when the Spirit writes upon the fleshly tables of the heart. Now, those in Christ are **no longer** commanded to love God, as the Law commanded: *“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might”* (Deut 6:5). They are **not** required to circumcise their own

hearts: *“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked”* (Deut 10:16). They are **not** demanded to make themselves a new heart and a new spirit: *“Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”* (Ezek 18:31). These were all requirements under the Law – requirements that men did NOT, and COULD not, fulfill!

This is not to say these requirements have been abandoned – God forbid! Rather, they have been fulfilled in another way. Instead of men accomplishing these things in their own strength, they are realized by God writing His law upon their hearts and putting it into their mind. Now it is said of those who are in Christ Jesus, *“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”* (Phil 3:3). Now it is poignantly stated, *“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts”* (Gal

The result of this magnificent writing can be summarized in a few succinct statements concerning those who are justified – the ones upon whose heart the Holy Spirit is writing.

- ☛ They are brought to think like Christ (1 Cor 2:16).
- ☛ They agree with the Law, and are not hostile against it (Rom 7:16).
- ☛ They groan within themselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of their body (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:4).
- ☛ They have no confidence in the flesh (Phil 3:3).
- ☛ They are free from sin, and have become servants to God (Rom 6:22).
- ☛ They are not in the flesh but in the Spirit (Rom 8:9).
- ☛ They are no longer what they were, but have been washed, sanctified, and

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5:24). What has happened? **The Holy Spirit has written upon the fleshly tables of our hearts the things that could not be put there by keeping a law – any law.**

This writing is another view of being *“conformed to the image”* of God’s *“Son”* (Rom 3:29). It is another way of saying we *“are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit”* AMPLIFIED (2 Cor 3:18).

- justified (1 Cor 6:11).
- ☛ They have been made to sit with Christ in the heavenly places, where all spiritual blessings are located (Eph 1:3; 2:6).
- ☛ They have peace with God (Rom 5:1).
- ☛ They are reconciled to God (Col 1:21).
- ☛ Their hearts have been purified (Acts 15:9).
- ☛ We have been put into Christ by God

Himself (1 Cor 1:30).

Which of these could have been accomplished by us? What moral law or external statute is there through which any of these could have been achieved? How can any of these be worked inside the believer by means of some outside stimuli? It only requires an "honest and good heart" to acknowledge these are all the Lord's doing!

This is clearly the result of the writing of the Holy Spirit – a **gloriously effective writing that is done within**, upon "*fleshly tables of the heart.*" This is a writing that is not instant, or once for all time but is ongoing while we remain in "*this present evil world*" (Gal 1:4). The call to not quench the Spirit is a summons to cease to interfere with His writing!

It is this writing that constitutes

us "*the epistle of Christ*" – His letter to the world. Where such epistles are not found, the doctrine is not being "*adorned*" (Tit 2:10), and preaching becomes powerless. **The lack of these qualities among those professing faith causes truth to fail, and fall in the street** (Isa 59:14,15). It should not require a lot of thought to see the seriousness of such a condition. Nor indeed, should there be a solitary soul among us that is content with such a state.

CONCLUSION

This magnificent text confirms to our hearts that the Gospel is, in fact, "*the power of God unto salvation*" (Rom 1:16). While the experience of that salvation has a beginning, at a particular point in time, it is by no means confined to that point. **Men must not confuse beginning the race with its completion, or imagine that the commencement and consummation of salvation take place simultaneously.**

which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain" (1 Cor 15:1-2). The Gospel sets the tone for the totality of spiritual life. That is why we must hear it continually. **There is no point in the life of faith where God introduces a new message, a new emphasis, or a new doctrinal direction.** An approach to living by faith is never introduced by God that differs from the essential

and atonement and nearly without number. The blood of Christ, intercession of Christ, and present ministry of Christ are woven throughout the Apostolic writings. **These things are always central points of reference, and are never seen as tangential, or in any sense secondary.** They represent keys to a proper understanding, and the means of power whereby men are brought to live acceptably before the God who was in Christ, reconciling them.

There is no point in the life of faith where God introduces a new message, a new emphasis, or a new doctrinal direction. An approach to living by faith is never introduced by God that differs from the essential message and implications of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Apostles made this clear by their repeated references to Christ's death, resurrection, and enthronement in glory, together with the undeniable implication of this realities.

While these may appear to be very apparent conclusions, it is clear to me that, for the most part, the understanding of them is not at all obvious in the professed church. The Gospel has somehow been placed into the background of contemporary theology, and the issues of life in this world have been given undue attention and emphasis. The result is that the Divine writing has, in many people, ceased to be accomplished. Thus the message of King Jesus to a fallen world has been largely been stifled.

The Gospel remains God's "*power unto salvation*" throughout the entire process of salvation. This, of course, is the very point being made in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. "*Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by*

message and implications of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. **The Apostles made this clear by their repeated references to Christ's death, resurrection, and enthronement in glory, together with the undeniable implication of this realities.** References to justification, sanctification, reconciliation,

Throughout the years, I have received the distinct impression that the Gospel is perceived as only having to do with beginning spiritual life. Though wholly erroneous, that view is subconsciously entertained by vast numbers of professing believers. **The failure of people to grow up into Christ after due time has been allotted for that purpose** (Heb 5:12), **confirms that this idea has been embraced.** It also betrays a condition in which the Holy Spirit has been grieved

and quenched – a state in which the **Divine writing has come to a grinding halt.** It simply is not possible for the Spirit of God to write upon the fleshly tables of the heart without a moral and spiritual change taking place. God cannot work within us “both to will and

do of His own good pleasure” without a change taking place in our lives. Jesus does not take up residency within us without manifesting Himself to us, and therefore producing modification in our lives (John 14:21,23). Christ “in you” will produce positive and observable results.

Where genuine change has been wrought in people, that change validates the person through whom the message of truth came. That person was one of the “ministers by whom” men “believed, even as the Lord gave to every man” (1 Cor 3:5).

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 10/15/2004. In this session, we continue our current series of lessons on the Epistle of Second Corinthians. The twelfth lesson will cover verses four through six of the third chapter: “ABLE MINISTERS.” Effective ministers of the Word of God are not trained by men. Their ability comes from God, and is designed to accomplish the purpose of God. That purpose centers in Christ, and is implemented within the New Covenant, which was ratified by Christ’s blood. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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