

Are you an epistle of Christ?

2 Corinthians 3:1-3

Introduction

1. Context:
 - a. False apostles deceiving Corinthians. (Judaizing teachers)
 - i. Boasting according to the flesh – **2 Corinthians 11:18**
 - ii. Causing the Corinthians to doubt Paul's apostleship, and turning away from him, thus, the gospel.
 - iii. Implied – brought to the Corinthians letters of commendation they were proud of, and put a lot of stock in – **2 Corinthians 3:1**
 - b. Where are Paul's letters?
 - i. **(v. 1)** – He does not need letters from men like others (**cf. Galatians 1:1, 15-16**)
 - ii. **(v. 2)** – They function as his letter of recommendation.
 1. **"known and read by all men"** – others can objectively attest to their changed ways by the apostolic ministry.
 - iii. **(v. 3)** – Their changed lives according to Christ's word is evidence of Paul's apostleship.
 1. **"ministered by us"** – Paul isn't taking the credit, but nevertheless shows his appointment by Christ.
 - c. The point of Paul is that his apostleship is confirmed by the fruit borne by the Corinthians as a result of his labor among them in the gospel.
2. The very nature of how the Corinthian's lives resulting from the labors of Paul could prove he is indeed an apostle of Christ and spoke the words of truth relates to how the word of God should affect us today.
3. Are we individually **"clearly...an epistle of Christ?"**
- I. The Epistle of Christ
 - A. The Epistle Christ Wrote
 - a. Personally, Christ left us nothing written by Himself
 - i. NOTE: The apostolic words are His – **1 Corinthians 14:37**
 - ii. But His mission on earth was not accomplished by writing letters to give to men.
 - b. Christ is Himself the epistle – **John 1:1, 14**
 - i. "Many great men, especially great thinkers, have perpetuated their influence and have served their race by their writings. As poets, philosophers, or moralists, they have made a place for themselves in the mind of humanity. The greatest of all, the Divine Man, wrote nothing. It is greater to be than to write; and the Lord Jesus simply lived and worked, suffered, died, and conquered." (Pulpit Commentary, 2 Corinthians 3:1-3, "Epistles of Christ")

- ii. Christ SHOWED what devotion to God's will is – **John 9:4-5** (diligence, focus); **Hebrews 4:15** (holiness, righteousness); **John 8:29** (always does what pleases God.)
 - iii. Christ SHOWED what suffering for God's purpose looks like – **1 Peter 2:20-24** (for doing good, and committing judgment to God)
 - iv. Christ SHOWED what sacrifice looks like – **John 10:17-18; 15:13**
 - v. Christ SHOWED how to die, and the comfort afforded those obedient to God – **Luke 23:46**
 - vi. Christ SHOWED the victory He has, and offers – **Hebrews 2:14-15**
 - c. Christ did not merely speak truth, but embodied truth – **Colossians 2:9-10; John 14:6**
 - i. We are commanded to be the same – **John 13:15-17**
 - B. The Epistles Christ Writes
 - a. As demonstrated in the promise to the apostles – **John 14:19-24**
 - i. Promise of the HS to the apostles.
 - ii. Dwell in them through the word – Christ, the Word, would be active in them as they obeyed.
 - b. ***"clearly...you are an epistle of Christ"***
 - i. I.e. you are a product of Christ's word and work.
 - ii. **1 John 2:3-6** – manifested through following after His manner of life.
- II. Is the word of Christ written on your heart?
- A. The epistles Christ writes – **2 Corinthians 3:3** – written by the Spirit, on the heart.
 - a. ***"ministered by us"*** – apostles given the Spirit to reveal the word of Christ, for the purpose of it being written on the hearts of men.
 - B. Contrast – Tablets of Stone vs. Tablets of Flesh, the Heart
 - a. Old Covenant – **Exodus 34:1** (written on tables of stone) (Paul sets out to contrast the glory of the OC with the NC)
 - i. Was still to be written on the heart – **Deuteronomy 6:6; 11:18**
 - ii. Problem – many Jews did not take these words to heart – **Romans 2:25-29** (Jews outwardly)
 - b. New Covenant – **Jeremiah 31:31-34** – not like the Old.
 - i. **(v. 33)** – different than the Old?
 - 1. Not in the sense that the Old was never meant to be written on the heart.
 - 2. However, different in the sense that it was IMPOSSIBLE TO BE A PART OF SUCH COVENANT WITHOUT IT BEING WRITTEN ON THE HEART.
 - ii. **(v. 34)** – this in contrast to the physical Israelites.
 - 1. They were born into the covenant – **Genesis 17:9-14** – babies given the sign of the covenant in circumcision.
 - 2. Didn't know God, but would need to be taught – **Deuteronomy 6:6-7**

3. NEW – **“all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them”** – must know by learning and applying to be a part.
- iii. Corinthians – **2 Corinthians 3:3** – “ministered by us” – **1 Corinthians 12:13** – “baptized,” “drink into one Spirit” – taught the Spirit’s teaching and obeyed.
- C. The Word Must be Written on Our Hearts
 - a. **Mark 12:28-34** – the kingdom is characterized by those who serve God from a heart of love.
 - i. The commandments He gives are not taken as a burden but obeyed through loving service.
 - ii. They know the truth intimately because they love God who authored it and show that love by their heart’s obedience (cf. **Romans 6:17** – obeyed from the heart – continues.)
 - b. The word written on our heart is not indicative of simply coming to know the truth intellectually, nor even just simply doing what it says by rote.
 - c. The word written on our heart is descriptive of one who has willingly come under the influence of Christ’s will, and has taken it into himself by transformation – **Romans 12:1-2**
 - i. **2 Corinthians 10:5** – thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ.
 - ii. **Galatians 2:20** – Christ is in control by faith.
 - iii. God’s word is written on our hearts when our lives are no longer viewed as our own, but as that which belongs to God to bring glory to Him through Christ, and in this we rejoice to take part. (cf. **Ephesians 3:20-21**)
- III. Are you “known and read by all men?”
 - A. **2 Corinthians 3:2** – the Corinthians were an epistle known and read by all men.
 - B. If one truly fits the idea of having God’s word written on their hearts it will be evident.
 - a. **Mark 7:20-23** – the heart is the foundation of who we are.
 - i. Principle for identifying false prophets – **Matthew 7:15-20** – known by fruits.
 - b. Therefore, when God’s word is written on our hearts it will be evident.
 - C. The World Should be Able to Notice
 - a. Thessalonians – **1 Thessalonians 1:6-10** – examples, word sounded forth, not need to say anything, turned from idols to God.
 - b. Paul – **Galatians 1:22-24** – from persecutor to persecuted.
 - c. Sometimes negative – **John 15:18-19** (they know you are not of them); **1 Peter 4:4** (they think it strange you don’t run with them anymore)
 - i. However, this negative treatment speaks volumes.
 - ii. It aligns you with the One who suffered most for righteousness – Christ.
 - iii. We rejoice in such – **Philippians 3:10-11** – Paul’s desire.

- d. The world noticing is not to bring attention/glory to ourselves, but to God
 - **Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Peter 2:11-12**
 - i. This cannot happen if how we live reflects only part of the word.
 - ii. If we are an “epistle of Christ” we are living according to Christ’s word in all matters.

Conclusion

1. Disciples of Christ are known by their relationship to Christ through His word – **John 8:31**
2. His word is supposed to be our entire life such as will reflect the idea of being an epistle of His.