

"The Living Letter of my Christian Life," Part 1 - 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 – September 4th, 2016

- Today's teaching will be part one of a series I've titled, "The Living Letter of my Christian Life."
- I decided to approach this chapter a little differently in the sense that I will pose questions we would all too well to ask ourselves.
- From our text today, we'll look at the first two questions concerning what the living letter of my Christian life would be read like.

1. Is it about my being in the Spirit or in the flesh? (Verses 1-3)

- v1 Paul asks if they're beginning to commend themselves again or if they need letters of recommendation to them or from them.
- v2 He then says they themselves are his letter of recommendation as it's written on their hearts known and read by everyone.
- v3 He tells them they're letter from Christ shows the results of his ministry, not with ink on tablets, but with the Spirit on hearts.

- What Paul is saying is the letter of our life isn't written with ink on tablets of stone but with the Spirit on tablets of human hearts.
- As such, our Christian lives become our recommendation if and when they're evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit as the result.
- I suppose you could say that Paul is inviting them to inspect the fruit of his life and ministry in order to know he's the real deal.

Matthew 7:16–20 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Galatians 5:16–25 — 16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

2. Is it about my confidence in Christ or in myself? (Verses 4-6)

- v4 Paul says that such confidence we have is through Christ before God.
- v5 He then says that we're not competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.
- v6 He tells them God has made them competent ministers of a new covenant, not the letter that kills, but the Spirit that gives life.

- What Paul says here is interesting for a number of reasons chief of which is he contrasts the law of God with the Spirit of God.
- Namely, that of the letter of the law of God, which brings about death, contrasted with the Spirit of God, which brings about life.
- The reason for this contrast is the penalty for breaking the law is death, whereas the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:22–23 — 22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:1-2 1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

- Another reason this is interesting is because I believe Paul, in this contrast, is referencing two specific accounts in Scripture.
- In so doing, he is both demonstrating and illustrating how that putting our confidence in the law will only bring death in the end.
- Conversely, placing our confidence, not in ourselves or our own righteousness but in Christ's righteousness brings about life.

- Let me explain, when Moses, whom Paul will refer to later in this chapter, brought down the Law of God three thousand died.

We know this from Exodus 32:27-28 - 27 And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" 28 So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day.

- Now this is where Paul's contrast gets interesting such that when the Spirit of God came down on Pentecost 3,000 were saved.

Acts 2:41 - Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

- It's for this reason that we can confidently and boldly come to the throne of grace. Simply put, Christ paid the death penalty.

Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- One last thought before we get to our prophecy update, we write letters to be sent out to the recipient for whom it's intended.
- As such, we will write something in that letter that we wish to communicate to the recipient, a message to them and for them.
- The question becomes, what would my letter say? If I don't like what it would say, it's not too late to start a new chapter.

I'll close with how one commentator summed it up, "What is an epistle of Christ? Well, think about it. A living epistle written by the work of the Holy Spirit would be someone whose life, "reads," in such a way that it glorifies God. In short, if I am a living epistle of Christ, my life will be an example of what happens when God has His way with someone – through His Son, Jesus Christ.