

The Letter

Franklin Church of Christ
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September 9, 2007
PM Assembly

Introduction:

As an apostle of Jesus Christ who was as one untimely born (**I Corinthians 15:8**), Paul seemingly faced some criticism regarding whether or not he was truly an apostle. In **Galatians 1**, Paul goes out of his way to defend his apostleship. Attacks against his apostleship really left him in a no-win situation. If he did not respond, it would make the attacks appear true. If he did respond, it would make him appear arrogant. Thus, it put Paul in a precarious situation to defend his apostleship. One place of defense, **II Corinthians 3**, provides some great insight into Christianity.

Discussion:

I. Paul's letter.

- A. It was common in the first century for someone who was commissioned with some task to carry letters demonstrating the commission. This was the case even outside the church. Remember on the trip to Damascus, before Paul's conversion, he carried letters from the high priest demonstrating his authority to imprison Christians (**Acts 9:1-2**). It is evident that something similar was done in the church. When Apollos left Ephesus and went into Achaia, the Ephesians wrote letters to the Achaians encouraging them to accept Apollos (**Acts 18:27**). In **I Corinthians 16:3**, Paul declared he would send whomever the Corinthians chose with letters to Jerusalem carrying their gift to them. These letters were essentially the same thing we do when an employer asks for references to call on an application.
- B. Paul's question in **II Corinthians 3:1** is, "Do I need letters of commendation for you to listen to me?" His answer is, "No!" The mere fact that the Corinthian church existed was a letter of his sincerity and work in the Lord (**II Corinthians 3:2-3**). Every Christian in Corinth was a testimony to his apostleship. In fact, in **I Corinthians 9:2**, Paul claimed the Corinthians were his seal of apostleship. Paul didn't need letters of commendation. His work was evident to all. The simple point that they were his letter is good, but making this point springboards Paul into a discussion ripe with understanding and application for us about this letter.

II. Christ's letter.

- A. Though Paul referred to the Corinthians as his letter, he says in **II Corinthians 3:3** that they were a letter of Christ, written by the Spirit of God on tablets of human hearts. He then clearly points out that he, as a minister, is not adequate to produce Christians out of these people. His adequacy is from God. The point of all this is similar to Paul's statement in **I Corinthians 3:5-9**. He is a servant who worked where God gave opportunity, but it God gave the increase. It was Christ who saved the people. Thus, the lives they lived, while being a testimony to Paul's sincerity, were more so letters about who Christ is.
- B. This chapter speaks of two letters. The first letter was one which was engraved on stones, the Law of Moses, with specific reference to the 10 commandments (**Exodus 31:18; 34:1**). The second letter is us. Paul is actually alluding to **Jeremiah 31:31-34**, demonstrating its fulfillment in Christians. We, as Christ's "New Letter", are far superior to the "Old Letter", because we represent a ministry of life. The Old Law was a ministry of death. **Romans 7:7-11** demonstrates that the Law of Moses produced death, because, despite its guidance, it defined and produced awareness of sin in men, killing them spiritually. Paul again writes in **Galatians 3:10-11**, that justification cannot come through the Law, only a curse. Finally, **Hebrews 10:1-4** teaches even the sacrifices of the Old Covenant did not produce life. If they had, they would not need repeating. There was no life in the Old Law, no wonder Peter was stunned that the Jews would strive to make Gentiles submit to the requirements of the Law in **Acts 15:10**. No wonder Paul was amazed that the Galatians had turned to a hybrid of the Old and New Covenants (**Galatians 1:6; 5:2-4**).
- C. Unlike the Law of Moses, the letter of the Spirit and of Christ is a ministry of life. We must recognize that we have died to the Law of Moses and been made alive through Christ (**Romans 7:1-6**). **Romans 6:3-4** says when we were baptized we were raised from that watery grave to walk in newness of life. Through Christ, we have received the promise of the Spirit, redemption from the curse of Moses' law (**Galatians 3:13-14**). Why would anyone continue to submit to the

Old Law as authority when it cannot produce life and Jesus can and has through His sacrifice (**Hebrews 10:5-14**).

- D. All this being the case, in **II Corinthians 3**, Paul points out that we, as a letter of Christ, are much more glorious than that letter which was written by the finger of God on tablets of stone, because we are part of the ministry of the Spirit. Consider this for a moment, Paul describes the glory of that first letter in **II Corinthians 3:7**. That glory was so bright and amazing that Moses had to veil his glowing face so the sons of Israel could look upon him. Yet, we, every one of us Christians, are more glorious than that. But because of our hope and its unfading glory, we do not veil ourselves, we boldly proclaim our message from Christ (**II Corinthians 3:12-13**). Additionally, having accepted that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfillment of scripture, we have removed the veil from the word of God, seeing it in its full glory (**II Corinthians 3:15-16**).
- E. Finally, regarding the comparison, Paul demonstrates the law of Moses is not in effect, mirroring the statement of **Hebrews 8:13 (II Corinthians 3:10-11)**. It has faded away and become obsolete. Granted, we know we can learn from it (**Romans 15:4**). However, we are now part of a more glorious covenant and refuse to accept Moses' law as our guide, lest we be severed from Christ (**Galatians 5:4**).

III. Two questions of application this text brings to mind.

A. Am I a letter of Christ?

1. When people see me, do they see a letter of Christ? Do they see the working of the Spirit in my life as it has changed me and renewed me? **Romans 12:1-2** says we are to be different from the world. When people look at our lives, can they tell a difference? Or do they see that essentially we are the same, with the same goals, pleasures, entertainment, etc.
2. **Matthew 10:32-33** says we are to confess Jesus before men. This is more than just in word alone, but also in deed. Our lives must exude the life of Christ, doing nothing in word or deed to deny Jesus as our Savior and Lord.
3. What kind of letter am I?

B. Do I have a letter as Paul did?

1. Remember, this whole chapter began by Paul defending his service to God as being more than just peddling Gospel. Not only were the Corinthians a letter for Christ, but Paul first said they were his letters. The fact that the Corinthians were Christians at all and the work Paul had done with the Corinthians demonstrated his sincerity in serving Christ.
2. So, we ask, do I have a letter? To what can we turn and say, "See this, this is my recommendation. This demonstrates my sincerity in Christ." I understand we are not apostles, nor are we all evangelists who can travel and establish churches. But is there something that we have done, someone we have worked with, something that we do which demonstrates our sincerity. What can we point to and say, "I don't need a letter of commendation, this is my letter."
3. Who have we helped become a Christian? Who have we helped grow in Christ? Who have we encouraged? What work do we do?
4. Do I have a letter as Paul did?

Conclusion:

These last two questions must be on our minds constantly. But, neither can apply to us unless we are Christ's. Unless we have submitted to Him in baptism (**Galatians 3:26-29**). Why not become His now and be a living letter for Jesus.