

STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-4

YOU ARE A LETTER



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

DAVID MURRAY
OCTOBER 17, 2021 (PM)

INTRODUCTION

What's the best way to evangelize? **What's the most effective evangelism?** It's the Christ-like lives of Christians. We can learn apologetics (and we should). We can learn how to have conversations about Christianity (and we should). We can put together a great website, welcome team, and musical program (and we should). We can share sermons and podcasts, leave tracts and books with people (and we should). We can improve our education program (and we should). But the most effective evangelism, the most effective apologetics, the most effective marketing, the most effective organization, the most effective publishing and podcasting don't compare with the evangelistic impact of a Christ-like life. Nothing commends the Gospel like consistent Christian character, conduct, and conversation. That's Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 3:1-4.

BACKGROUND

Paul was being attacked and undermined by Judaizing false teachers in the church of Corinth. One of their tactics was to bring letters of recommendation from important religious figures in Jerusalem, references which would vouch for their religious status and credentials.

Paul's been defending his ministry, but knows that his enemies' next tactic will be to accuse him of self-promotion. "See, Paul's always boasting and blowing his own trumpet."

For these two reasons, Paul begins this chapter with two rhetorical questions, expecting the answer "No." **Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?** (1). No, I'm not commending myself or promoting myself, and, no, I don't need religious references from the religious elite as some others do (2:17). Rather, **you, yourselves are our letter of recommendation** (2).

Paul was saying, "You are my reference. Corinthians, you are the test, evidence, and confirmation of my ministry. If you want proof that I am truly sent from God, then look at God's work in your lives. I don't need to recommend myself and I don't need religious rulers to recommend me, because you yourselves are my best recommendation."



If Christians are a letter, who's the author?



1. CHRIST IS THE AUTHOR (3)

And you show that you are a letter from Christ (3)

Like you, I receive thousands of emails and texts a year and probably forget them all within an hour of reading and replying. But, I have a friend who writes me a letter every year or two. Yes, a handwritten letter. I think I can remember every one he's written because it leaves a deep impression on me that he took the time to buy luxury paper and fountain pen, sit down, write a letter, put it in an envelope, get a stamp, and post it. Unlike texts and emails which have little impact and leave little lasting effects, I carefully read and re-read his written letters, think about them, and treasure them. His unique handwriting also expresses his careful and caring character. The letter shows who he is.

Christians show by their lives that they are letters from Christ. Christ's character is seen in them and through them. Christ's name is at the top and bottom of this letter and his fingerprints are all over it. Just as a handwriting expert can tell who wrote something, readers of this letter can tell who wrote it.

OUR LIFE STORIES
REVEAL OUR AUTHOR



What does this author write with?



2. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE INK (3)

...written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God (3).

The durability of a letter depends on the quality of the ink. I have personal letters from 35 years ago and the writing is getting harder and harder to read. It's blurring, fading, and becoming indecipherable. Probably the result of using cheap pens filled with cheap ink.

But the letters Paul wants us to read are not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God. Christ's character has been etched on the souls of Christians by the power of the Holy Spirit, an ink that is actually living in the Christian, and therefore not only maintaining what's been written but deepening it and developing it further. Each year more lines are added, the character of the author becomes clearer and brighter. This is indelible ink, permanent marker. This makes these letters far superior to any in the Old Covenant which the Jewish false teachers were calling back to.

...delivered by us...(3).

What is it that's delivered? There are two possibilities. Either the letters are delivered by Paul or the ink is delivered by Paul. Either way, Paul is seeing himself not as the author of the letters or the source of the ink, but merely the postman of the letters or the pen through which the ink passes. He's only the author's messenger or the author's pen. He's not the author or the ink.

WHAT GOD WRITES
CANNOT BE ERASED



What does he write on?



3. OUR HEARTS ARE THE PAPER (3)

...written..not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (3)

The writing of the ten commandments on tables of stone by the finger of God was a divine work that proved Moses was God's minister. In the New Covenant, the same law is engraved on the heart (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:9; 36:26). This is an even greater miracle than writing the law on tablets of stone. Tablets of stone are neutral, whereas our hearts are resistant and rebellious, hard and brittle.

In regeneration, God tenderizes our hearts so that his law is imprinted on them. It's not a mere outward obedience but a deep, inner, change of heart. People are Paul's credentials, not paper.

GOD USES PEOPLE CREDENTIALS
NOT PAPER CREDENTIALS



Who are the readers?



4. OUR READERS ARE EVERYBODY (2)

...to be known and read by all.

There are private letters between individuals and there are public letters, or open letters which everyone is invited to read. Christians are public letters. We are constantly being read and understood whenever anyone sees us. They are reading a work authored by Jesus and wondering what the author is like as they do so. We want people to read us and we also want them to ask, "How can I become a letter of Jesus too?" Nothing gives us greater joy than this.

That's why Paul said that they were also written in his heart (2). They were like his private collection of love letters which he held close to his heart and treasured.

PEOPLE CAN READ US
LIKE A BOOK

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Christ is the only perfect letter. We worship him as the only one who did this perfectly. He could say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father. We love Jesus as God's perfect letter to us.

Christ uses imperfect letters. We can't wait until we've got every page, paragraph, sentence, word, and letter right. We are being read as soon as we say we are Christians.

We want to be an easy and enjoyable read. We want to show the character, conduct, and conversation of Christ in an attractive way as possible. Your life is the front-line of evangelism.

Who is writing your letter? Who is the author of your life? If it's not Christ, why not ask him to start writing it today.



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others' stories



SUMMARY



PRAYER: Letter-writer, write your story clearly in my heart so that everyone can read about Jesus in me and through me.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What have you found to be the most effective evangelism?
2. How will this sermon help you evangelize?
3. How does being a letter of recommendation for Christ change your life?
4. Who can you help read about Christ through your life?
5. What can make it difficult for people to read Christ's letter in you?
6. Who did God use as a letter of Christ in your own life? How?

First Byron Christian Reformed Church
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Phone: (616) 878-9768
www.firstbyroncrc.org

Pastor David Murray
www.HeadHeartHand.org
www.livingthebible.net

