

# 2 Corinthians 3:1-4 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

2 CORINTHIANS - PAUL'S MINISTRY IN THE LIGHT OF THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT  
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[Another Overview Chart](#) on right side

## Overview of Second Corinthians

2Co 1:1-7:16	2Co 8:1-9:15	2Co 10:1-12:21
Character of Paul	Collection for the Saints	Credentials of Paul
Testimonial & Didactic	Practical	Apologetic
Past: Misunderstanding & Explanation	Present: Practical Project	Future: Anxieties
Apostle's Conciliation, Ministry & Exhortations	Apostle's Solicitation for Judean Saints	Apostle's Vindication of Himself
Forgiveness, Reconciliation Gratitude	Confidence	Vindication
Ephesus to Macedonia: Change of Itinerary Explained	Macedonia: Preparation for Visit to Corinth	To Corinth: Certainty and Imminence of the Visit
2Co 1:1-7:16	2Co 8:1-9:15	2Co 10:1-12:21

[2Corinthians written ~ 56-57AD - see Chronological Table of Paul's Life and Ministry](#)

Adapted from [Jensen's Survey of the New Testament \(Highly Recommended Resource\)](#) & [Wilkinson's Talk Thru the Bible](#)

**2 Corinthians 3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? ([NASB: Lockman](#))**

**Greek** : [Archometha](#) (1PPMI) [palin](#) [heautous](#) [sunistanein?](#) (PAN) [e](#) [me](#) [chrezomen](#) (1PPAI) [os](#) [tines](#) [sustatikon](#) [epistolon](#) [pros](#) [humas](#) [e](#) [ex](#) [humon?](#)

**Amplified**: ARE WE starting to commend ourselves again? Or we do not, like some [false teachers], need written credentials or letters of recommendation to you or from you, [do we]? ([Lockman](#))

**ESV**: Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? ([ESV](#))

**KJV**: Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?

**NET**: Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? We don't need letters of recommendation to you or from you as some other people do, do we? ([NET Bible](#))

**NIV**: Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? ([NIV - IBS](#))

**NLT**: Are we beginning to praise ourselves again? Are we like others, who need to bring you letters of recommendation, or who ask you to write such letters on their behalf? Surely not! ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips**: Is this going to be more self-advertisement in your eyes? Do we need, as some apparently do, to exchange testimonials before we can be friends? ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Are we beginning again to be commending ourselves? Or, we do not need, as some, commendatory letters to you or commendatory letters from you, do we? ([Erdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

**Young's Literal:** Do we begin again to recommend ourselves, except we need, as some, letters of recommendation unto you, or from you?

- 1Co 3:10 4:15 10:33
- **Letters:** 1Co 16:3
- [2 Corinthians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

2 Corinthians 4:2 but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

2 Corinthians 10:2 I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against **some** (NOTE "**SOME**" USED IN SAME SENSE AS 2Cor 3:2), who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.

2 Corinthians 10:12 For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with **some** (NOTE "**SOME**" USED IN SAME SENSE AS 2Cor 3:2) of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.

**Preface** - Paul Brown makes the following statement (with which I agree) about the difficulty of this chapter and especially verses 13-18 (although I personally think v18 is straightforward) (Note: This quote is repeated at beginning of sections v12-14 and v15-17).

If we agree with F F Bruce that "of all the Pauline epistles, 2 Corinthians is probably the one which presents most problems to the interpreter", **we might also add that chapter three is probably the most difficult to interpret, with verses 12-18 presenting the greatest problems.** Van Unnik says about them, "The path to their right interpretation is beset with a great many difficulties and there is hardly a single point on which expositors agree."<sup>2</sup> In her recent, detailed study of this passage Linda Belleville says, "Almost every exegete who has studied 2 Cor 3:12-18 has struggled with its apparent lack of cohesion and its exegetical ambiguities",<sup>3</sup> and when AT Hanson comes to v 17 he says, "we now approach what could be called the Mount Everest of Pauline texts as far as difficulty is concerned."<sup>4</sup> This article does not aspire to scale Everests, but presents a modest excursion into the foothills and hopes to cast some light on Paul's use of the veil in these verses. ([Exegesis 16:Lifting the Veil - Paul Brown - Foundations 31](#))

### SHOW ME YOUR CREDENTIALS!

**Context:** Paul has just described those **peddling the Word of God** (2Co 2:17+). In contrast he stated he ministered **from sincerity** ([eilikrineia](#) meaning he was "sun tested" so to speak unlike these hucksters). The Lord's ministry through Paul was under attack by false teachers and false apostles who had come to Corinth. Beloved, there is a lesson for all of us who seek to preach and teach the pure milk of His Word in season and out of season -- attacks will surely come on men and women who undertake Word centered, Christ exalting, Spirit filled, God glorifying ministries! The *modus operandi* of Satan's *pseudo-saints* (cp 2Co 11:12, 13, 14 15) has not changed much since Paul's time - they told lies about him and sought to discredit his character and his competency as a minister so that they might usurp his authority in the church at Corinth. Paul was placed in a tenuous position for his own attempts to defend his ministry might be twisted by his enemies as an effort of self-commendation. This is the context for one of the great sections of this letter.

**Summary** of 2 Corinthians 3 (See also [Table summary](#)) - Defense against the charge of self-recommendation, which St. Paul does not need (2Co 3:1, 2, 3). His sufficiency comes from God (2Co 3:4, 5, 6), who has made him minister of a covenant far more glorious than that given to Moses (2Co 3:7, 8, 9, 10, 11). This ministry needs no veil upon the face (2Co 3:12, 13), such as to this day darkens the hearts of the Jews (2Co 3:14, 15), though it shall one day be removed (2Co 3:16, 17, 18). ([The Pulpit Commentary](#))

**Alfred Deissmann** has an interesting comment on the Corinthian epistles noting that "The two "Epistles to the Corinthians" that have come down to us also belong to the group of real letters. What is it that makes the second Epistle so extremely unintelligible to many people? Simply the fact that it is **out-and-out a letter, full of allusions which we for the most part no longer fully understand**. St. Paul wrote this letter with the full strength of his personality, putting into it all the varied emotions that succeeded and encountered one another in his impulsive soul—deep contrition and thankfulness towards God, the reformer's wrath, irony and

trenchant candor towards the vicious. The first "Epistle to the Corinthians" is calmer in tone because the situation of the letter is different, but this also is no pamphlet addressed to the Christian public, but a real letter to Corinth, in part an answer to a letter from the church there. ([Deissmann, A., & Strachan, L. R. M -- Light from the ancient East: the New Testament illustrated by recently discovered texts of the Graeco-Roman world - Online](#))

**McGee** - Paul has spoken of the triumph of the ministry. Now he deals with the accreditation of the ministry.

**Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?**

- Paul begins with **two questions**, both of which expect a negative reply. **Commend** means to place one with another and so to present as worthy of confidence. Paul asked the Corinthians if he needed some letter of commendation as if the Corinthians did not know who Paul was or what he did!

**A T Robertson** - NT examples of commending individuals by letters occur in Acts 15:25f.; Acts 18:27 (Apollos), 1 Cor. 16:10f. (Timothy); Ro 16:1 (Phoebe with the verb συνιστημι [sunistēmi]); Col. 4:10 (Mark); 2 Cor. 8:22f. (Titus and his companion).

**Guzik** - There was nothing wrong with a letter of commendation written on paper, but how much better to have a living letter of commendation! The Christians at Corinth, along with groups of Christians wherever Paul had worked, were Paul's "living letter" to validate his ministry.. The best analogy in today's world might be a certificate of ordination. Many people think that a certificate of ordination means that you have the credentials of ministry. While there is an important purpose in a public ordination to ministry, a piece of paper in itself never is a proper credential. The true credentials of the ministry are changed lives, living epistles. We might almost say, keep your paper to yourself and show us the changed lives from your ministry....It is significant that Paul does not say, "miracles are our epistle of commendation." Paul apparently did not believe his primary "letter of recommendation" was found in miraculous signs but found in miraculously changed lives. ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Matthew Poole** - Nothing so commends a minister as the proficiency of his people. ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**John Trapp** - The fruitfulness of the people is the preacher's testimonial." ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Utley** adds that "The early church adopted the procedure of letters of recommendation to assure the orthodoxy and trustworthiness of itinerant ministers (cf. Acts 18:27; Ro 16:1; 1 Cor. 16:3, 15–18; Phil. 2:29–30; 3 John 1:12).

**Henry Morris** - The false teachers had ingratiated themselves to the Christian church by showing recommendations from other churches and, no doubt, would request such letters from Corinth when they decided to leave. But Paul reminds them that he needed no such letters. The Corinthian believers themselves were his "epistles," for they were his own children in the faith. ([Defender's Study Bible](#))

**Murray Harris**: Since he had just spoken of the distinctive role of apostles (2Co 2:14–16) and of his divine commission and authority (2Co 2:17; note also 2Co 1:12 and 1Co 4:15, 16; 11:1; 14:18; 15:10), some might say, "Paul, once again you are indulging in your notorious habit of self-commendation." ([Expositor's Bible Commentary](#)).

**Alfred Plummer** says **are we beginning** "is a sort of echo of the supposed criticism; *He is beginning to belaud himself again.*' The πάλιν (**again**) plainly shows that St Paul is aware that this charge of self-praise had been made. He alludes to it again 2Co 4:5, 5:12, 6:4....whoever started it, it was accepted as true by some of the Corinthians. ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Are we beginning (757)** (**archomai** from **archo** = to be first) in the present tense, active voice means to be first and so to rule over or be the leader of. The passive voice in this verse signifies to make a beginning (used this way also in Mt 4:17; Mk 1:45; Lk 3:23, Jn 13:5; Acts 1:1)

In this section Paul is picking up on an earlier testimony he had given in this letter which apparently was being distorted by his opponents as an example of Paul's arrogant self-commendation...

But thanks be to God, Who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. 15 For we are a fragrance (sweet savor or smell) of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing 16 For (see adequacy in 2Co 3:5,6+) to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? 17 For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God. (2 Co 2:14-17+)

**Comment:** Notice how Paul begins in 2Co 2:14 - Not with himself but with thanks to God and Christ, emphasizing that he was but a vessel for God's ministry. The secular use of the verb "**leads us in triumph**" (**thriambeuo**) presented a powerful picture of a victorious general, home from the wars, leading a triumphal procession through the streets of Rome, preceded by the captives and spoils of war and

followed by the general riding in a chariot with a slave holding a jeweled crown over his head, all of this pomp and pageantry followed by the victorious army.

In 2Cor 2:15 note that the **fragrance** alludes to the **aroma** of the OT burnt offerings, which when offered in sincere repentance and faith, were described as a **soothing aroma** to God (Ge 8:21; Lev 1:9; cp Eph 5:2-note). This has its NT parallel in the offering of our surrendered lives to God (Ro 12:1-note), veritable "spiritual sacrifices" which are pleasing to God (cp Micah 6:8). **Beloved, do not let emissaries of the evil one discourage or distract you from God's calling on your life, for Spirit-filled, Word-centered, God-glorifying, Christ-exalting preaching, teaching and living out of God's truth is never in vain** (Isa 55:10,11, Ga 6:7-note Ga 6:8-note Ga 6:9-note Ga 6:10-note), **and will always bear fruit in the soul of the hearers, either fruit for eternal life** (Mt 7:17-note, Lk 8:15 Mt 13:23 Mk 4:20 Jn 15:5,8, 16 Ro 7:4-note) **or fruit for eternal destruction** (Mt 3:10 Lk 3:9 13:9 Mt 7:19-note Ro 7:5-note).

**Marvin Vincent** comments it is "As if (Paul is) anticipating the taunt so often repeated, that he had no commendatory letters, and therefore was forced to commend himself by self-laudation and by dishonest means. See 2Cor 4:2; 10:12. You will say, "You are beginning again the old strain of self-commendation as in the first epistle." See 1Cor. 9:15-21. ([2 Corinthians 3 Word Studies in the New Testament](#))

**To commend ourselves again...do we need...letters of commendation** - Paul is not saying he had been commending himself before, but that he has been accused of this act! **Letters of commendation** is analogous to someone today needing a letter of recommendation from their previous employer! Paul says "No". Clearly Paul anticipated a hostile attack from his opponents that his epistles were nothing but letters of self-commendation. In 2Co 3:2 Paul quickly counters any such distortion from the false teachers and false apostles.

**Paul** being a student of the Old Testament was very familiar with the wise advice to....

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth, a stranger, and not your own lips. (Pr 27:2)

**Charles Hodge** on **letters of commendation** - The apostle sets it forth as certain that his apostolic mission and authority were so authenticated, that he did not need, as certain people did, letters of commendation either to them or from them. These false teachers had no doubt gained access to Corinth on the strength of certain letters of recommendation. They were so little known and had so little character, that when they went elsewhere, they would need to be commended by the Corinthians. With Paul the case was different. ([2 Corinthians Commentary](#))

**James Denney** writes how much more serious it is to impugn the character of a minister than other professions "that a minister's character is the whole capital he has for carrying on his business, and that nothing can be more cruel and wicked than to cast suspicion on it without cause. In most other callings a man may go on, no matter what his character, provided his balance at the bank is on the right side (!); but an evangelist or a pastor who has lost his character has lost everything. It is humiliating to be subject to suspicion, painful to be silent under it, degrading to speak....From the serious tone the Apostle passes suddenly to the ironical. "Or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you?" The "some" of this verse are probably the same as "the many" of 2Corinthians 2:17. Persons had "come to Corinth in the character of Christian teachers, bringing with them recommendatory letters which secured their standing when they arrived. ([2 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

**Commend** (4921) (**sunistemi/sunistao** from **sún** = together with + **hístemi** = set, place, stand) means literally to put or place one with another, to put together. To set in the same place, this literal meaning being found in Luke 9:32+. To bring together. When one brings together a person with another person, it is a way of presenting or introducing them. This gives **sunistemi** the meaning of **commend**, which means to recommend as worthy of confidence (the implication being that others adopt a similar attitude) or to present to one's acquaintance for favorable notice.

**Sunistemi** is a keyword in 2 Corinthians - (9/16 NT uses) Lk. 9:32; Rom. 3:5; Ro 5:8; Ro 16:1; 2 Co. 3:1; 2 Co. 4:2; 2 Co. 5:12; 2 Co. 6:4; 2 Co. 7:11; 2 Co. 10:12; 2 Co. 10:18; 2 Co. 12:11; Gal. 2:18; Col. 1:17; 2 Pet. 3:5

In this same letter **Paul** repeatedly addresses the false claims raised by his detractors (Satan's ambassadors )...

We are not again **commending** (sunistemi) ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion (Greek word = Military term signifying a camping place which becomes a base for military operations = bridgehead for starting point an expedition or attack and thus an occasion or opportunity) to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. (2 Corinthians 5:12)

For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for

destroying you, I will not be put to shame ( 2 Corinthians 10:8)

For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of **those who commend themselves**; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. (2 Corinthians 10:12)

I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should **have been commended** by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. (2 Corinthians 12:11)

All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved. (2 Corinthians 12:19)

**Ourselves** - Henry Alford feels that although this is plural, Paul is speaking of himself. Alford writes "The plural seems to be used, as so often in this Epistle, -- see e.g. 2Co 7:3, 5 -- of Paul himself only." ([The New Testament for English Readers](#))

**Again** - This time phrase suggests that Paul had previously been accused of commending or praising himself.

**Pulpit Commentary** notes that "Such passages (as 1Co 2:16; 3:10; 4:11, 12, 13, 14; 9:15–23; 14:18, etc) might be called self-laudatory and egotistical, were it not that (as St. Paul here explains) they arose only from a sense of the grandeur of his office, of which he was the almost involuntary agent, used by God as it seemed best to him. Hence he says later on (2Co 7:18) that self-praise is no commendation, and that the true test of a man is God's commendation. ([The Pulpit Commentary](#))

**Diogenes**, the cynic philosopher, was once asked to give a letter of commendation for someone & he answered "That you are a man he will know at a glance; but whether you are a good or a bad man he will discover if he has the skill to distinguish between good and bad, and if he is without that skill he will not discover the facts even though I write to him thousands of times."

Here's a letter that was found on papyri "To Julius Domitius, military tribune of the legion, from Aurelius Archelaus, his beneficiaries (a soldier exempt from menial duties), greeting. I have already before this recommended to you Theon, my friend and now also, I ask you sir, to have him before your eyes as you would myself. For he is man such as to deserve to be loved by you, for he left his own people, his goods and his business & followed me, and through all things he has kept me safe. I therefore pray you that he may have the right to come & see you. He can tell you everything about our business...I have loved the man...I wish you, sir, great happiness & long life with your family and good health. Have this letter before your eyes and let it make you think that I am speaking to you. Farewell." (Brian Bell's "From Glory to Glory" [Sermon Notes](#))

**Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?** - Apparently the entrance of the false apostles (although he does not specifically name them) into the body of believers at Corinth was accompanied by presentation of written papyrus "letters of recommendation" from so called spiritual authorities (or possibly forgeries from genuine spiritual authorities). Aware that his words were likely to be misused by the false teachers at Corinth, he attempted to call attention to their need of authentication while at the same time chiding the Corinthians.

**Or...as some** (e me...os tines) - The Pulpit Commentary says that this introduction "would have a somewhat ironical force. **Theme** in the reading **e me** implies, "*Can you possibly think that we need,*" etc.? Generally, when a stranger came to some Church to which he was not personally known, he carried with him some credentials in the form of letters from accredited authorities. Paul treats it as absurd to suppose that he or Timothy should need such letters, either from the Corinthians or to them...It is not meant that there was anything discreditable in using such letters (for Apollos had used them, Acts 18:27), but the disgraceful thing was that St. Paul should be disparaged for not bringing them. ([The Pulpit Commentary](#))

**As some** - See similar uses of "**some**" (Paul's "usual vague description of opponents") in 1Co 4:18, 1Co 15:12, 34, 2Co 10:2, 12, Gal 1:7, Php 1:15, 1Ti 1:3, 6, 19 6:21

**Letters of commendation** were common in Paul's day, Dr Luke recording an example in Acts "And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace (Acts 18:27, cf Acts 15:25-27, 2Co 8:22-24, Paul commended Phoebe in Ro 16:1+, Col 4:10).

**Need** ([5535](#)) (**chrezo** from **chreia** = need, necessity from **chreos** = debt) means to have need of, to want or to desire. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus exhorted His hearers not to worry about clothing, food, or drink, because their Father would provide that need. Chrēzō occurs only rarely in the Septuagint. In Jdg 11:7 this term describes the elders of Gilead being "in distress." They were "in need of" military allies to defend themselves against the Ammonites. **Chreizo** - 5x in the **NAS** - Mt 6:32 = (heavenly Father knows that you need); Lk 11:8 = (give him as much as he needs.) Lk 12:30 = (your Father knows that you need these things.) Ro 16:2 = (help her in whatever matter she may have **need** of you;) 2Co 3:1

**Letters** (1992) (**epistole** from **epi** = to + **stello** = send) is an epistle, used figuratively in this passage of the believers at Corinth.

**Epistole** - 23v - Acts 9:2; Acts 15:30; Acts 22:5; Acts 23:25; Acts 23:33; Ro 16:22; 1 Co. 5:9; 1 Co. 16:3; 2 Co. 3:1; 2 Co. 3:2; 2 Co. 3:3; 2 Co. 7:8; 2 Co. 10:9; 2 Co. 10:10; 2 Co. 10:11; Col. 4:16; 1 Th 5:27; 2 Th 2:2; 2 Th 2:15; 2 Th 3:14; 2 Th 3:17; 2 Pe 3:1; 2 Pe 3:16

**Commendation** (4956) (**sustatikos** from **sunistao**) (Only NT use of this word) is literally a placing together, and thus introducing in the sense of being commendatory. Here it refers to a letter of commendation, which Paul says he does not need because of the saints at Corinth, whose lives were transformed by Paul's teaching of the Word of Truth.

**J H Bernard** comments that Paul "has testimonies to his character and office far superior to any that could be written on papyrus. These can be pointed to if any object that his Apostolic office was self-assumed, and that he delivers the Gospel message in his own way and on his own authority (Gal. 1:12). ([The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**J Vernon McGee** rightly comments that "The proof of the effectiveness of any ministry is whether or not it has a recommendation from God. He is not giving out letters of recommendation; the proof lies in the epistles that are written in the fleshly tables of the heart. I read many letters from folk who have turned to Christ because of my radio ministry. Several years ago a wonderful family came up to me in Houston, Texas. If no one else turned to Christ through my radio program there, I still would consider it worthwhile. They listened to the radio program for three months before they made a decision for Christ, and then the entire family, a handsome family, all received Christ. They are some of the **epistles** I have down in Texas. I have such **epistles** in practically every state of these United States and on many foreign shores. They are my **letters of commendation**.

**THOUGHT:** Beloved, Dr McGee's testimony to the life changing power of the Word of God begs the question - Do I have human "epistles" that serve as my letters of commendation? What if we hired pastors and ministry workers not on their credentials, not on how eloquently they preach or teach, but on the basis of the "letters of commendation in the from of transformed lives? That might be interesting!

**Pulpit Commentary** notes that **letters of commendation** were "'introductory letters"—was familiar in later Greek. In days when there were few public hostels, and when it was both a duty and a necessity for small and persecuted communities like those of the Jews and Christians to practise hospitality (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2, etc.), it was customary both for synagogues and Churches to provide their friends and emissaries with authentic testimonials. Otherwise they might have been deceived by wandering impostors, as, in fact, the Christians were deceived by the vagabond quack [Peregrinus Proteus](#). We can easily see how the custom of using such letters might be abused by idle, restless, and intriguing persons, who have never found it very difficult to procure them. We find traces of their honest use by Phoebe, by Silas and Jude, by Apollos, by Mark, and by Zenas, in Ro 16:1; Acts 18:27; 15:25, Col. 4:10; Titus 3:13; and of their unfair use by certain Judaists, in Gal 1:7 and Gal 2:12. Nothing can more forcibly illustrate the necessity for Paul's protest against the idle vaunt of possessing such letters, than the fact that, more than a century afterwards, we find malignant innuendoes aimed at Paul in the [pseudo-Clementines](#), under the name of "the enemy" and "Simon Magus" and "a deceiver." He is there spoken of as using letters from the high priest (which, indeed, St. Paul had done as Saul of Tarsus, Acts 9:1, 2); and the Churches are warned never to receive any one who cannot bring credentials from James; so deep-rooted among the Judaists was the antagonism to the independent apostolate and daring originality of the apostle of the Gentiles! ([The Pulpit Commentary](#))

PAUL CONTRASTS THE TWO COVENANTS	
THE OLD COVENANT	THE NEW COVENANT
<p><b>Written with ink on tablets of stone</b> 2Cor 3:3+</p>	<p><b>Written with the Spirit on tablets of human hearts</b> 2Cor 3:3</p>
<p><b>Adequacy from Self</b> 2Cor 3:5+</p>	<p><b>Adequacy from God</b> 2Cor 3:5</p>
<p><b>The Letter (law) Kills</b> (3000 @ Sinai – Ex 32:28+) 2Cor 3:6+</p>	<p><b>The Spirit gives Life</b> (3000 @ Pentecost – Acts 2:41) 2Cor 3:6</p>

<b>Ministry of Death</b> <b>(glory...fading)</b> 2Cor 3:8+	<b>Ministry of the Spirit</b> <b>(more glory)</b> 2Cor 3:8
<b>Ministry of Condemnation</b> 2Cor 3:9+	<b>Ministry of Righteousness</b> 2Cor 3:9
<b>No glory</b> <b>(~glory of moon)</b> 2Cor 3:10+	<b>Glory that surpasses</b> <b>(~glory of sun)</b> 2Cor 3:10
<b>Fading Glory:</b> <b>Temporary</b> 2Cor 3:11+	<b>Remains in Glory:</b> <b>Permanent</b> 2Cor 3:11
<b>Reading of Old Covenant</b> <b>hearts veiled</b> 2Cor 3:14,15+	<b>Turn to the Lord</b> <b>Veil is removed in Christ</b> 2Cor 3:16+
<b>(By implication</b> <b>Bondage)</b>	<b>Where Spirit of the Lord is</b> <b>Liberty</b> 2Cor 3:17+
<b>Glory fading on Moses' face</b> <b>No Internal Transformation</b> 2Co 3:13+	<b>Glory going to glory on saints' faces</b> <b>Continual Internal transformation by the</b> <b>Spirit</b> 2Cor 3:18+

**2 Corinthians 3:2 You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men**([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** e epistole hemon humeis este, (2PPAI) eggegrammene (RPPFSN) en tais kardiais emon, ginoskopene (PPFSN) kai anaginoskopene (PPFSN) hupo panton anthropon;

**Amplified:** [No] you yourselves are our letter of recommendation (our credentials), written in your hearts, to be known (perceived, recognized) and read by everybody. ([Lockman](#))

**ESV:** You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. ([ESV](#))

**KJV:** Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

**NET:** You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone, ([NET Bible](#))

**NIV:** You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. ([NIV - IBS](#))

**NLT:** The only letter of recommendation we need is you yourselves. Your lives are a letter written in our hearts; everyone can read it and recognize our good work among you. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** You yourselves are our testimonial, written in our hearts and yet open for anyone to inspect and read. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** As for you, you are our letter which has been permanently engraved in our hearts, and which is being known and read by all men. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

**Young's Literal:** our letter ye are, having been written in our hearts, known and read by all men,

- **are:** 1Co 3:10 1Co 9:1,2
- **in:** 2Co 7:3 2Co 11:11 2Co 12:15 Php 1:7
- **known:** Ro 1:8 1Co 9:2 1Th 1:8
- [2 Corinthians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

2 Corinthians 7:3+ I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that **you are in our hearts** to die

together and to live together.

Philippians 1:7+ For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I **have you in my heart**, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.

Romans 1:8+ (ROMAN CHRISTIANS LIKE "LETTERS" ALSO) First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because **your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world**.

1 Thessalonians 1:7-8+ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the **word of the Lord has sounded forth from you**, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

## **PAUL LETTER WAS WRITTEN ON HEARTS NOT PAPYRUS!**

**You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men - You are** (present tense) indicates Paul considers the saints at Corinth to continually be their "letter of commendation", their "credentials" (Amplified), their "testimonial" (Phillips). Paul's commendation was in people, not on paper! It was written internally, not externally. The saints at Corinth had left an indelible mark on the hearts of Paul, Timothy and Silas when they had initially proclaimed the Gospel in Corinth, an impression that could not be "erased" from their heart (**written** = perfect tense = permanently engraved in our hearts).

**Broomall** - in contrast to those men in need of conceited self-appraisal "Paul's letter is (1) personalized—**our epistle**; (2) permanent—**written in our hearts**; (3) public—**known and read of all men** ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

Apparently the accusations of Paul's spurious apostleship had been present for some time for in his first epistle he defends his legitimacy with an argument similar to that in the present passage asking four pointed rhetorical [for effect] questions...

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. (1Co 9:1-2+)

**Comment:** In short, the very existence of the church at Corinth was indisputable evidence of Paul's apostolic authority and authenticity.

**Broomall** - Paul vehemently exposes those who need letters of self-commendation (cf. 5:12; 10:12, 18; 12:11). His mission and ministry did not need such conceited self-appraisal. ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**You are our letter** - Note that **epistole** (letter) is placed first for emphasis. While this description obviously refers to the saints in the church at Corinth, by way of application, every believer is in effect an "Epistle of Christ". The power of the Gospel is indisputably demonstrated by changed lives, especially the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22+, Gal 5:23+).

**THOUGHT** - You have heard the saying that you may be the only Bible someone ever reads! What message is your "version" of the Bible conveying to your family members, your neighbors, your co-workers, etc?

**Guzik** - Paul's letter of recommendation has an author, Jesus Christ. The Corinthian Christians were indeed Paul's letter of recommendation, yet he realized that he did not write that letter—Jesus did. Paul is not trying to say, "I made you the Christians you are," but he is saying, "God used me to make you the Christians you are." ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**A T Robertson** - Professing Christians are the Bible that men read and know.

**Bob Deffinbaugh** ...

Playing out the "letter" imagery, Paul goes on to say that these Corinthians are, themselves, a letter. They are the fruit of Paul's service and of the Holy Spirit's work in their hearts, turning their stony hearts of unbelief into hearts of flesh. They are not little "clones" of Paul, but rather they reflect Jesus Christ to a darkened and dying world. Paul says the same of the Thessalonian saints

knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (1Th 1:4-note, 1Th 1:5, 6, 7-note)

Why does Paul mention this word about commendation or accreditation? I believe it is because in Paul's day,

as in ours, many things which give one status in an unbelieving world do not offer status or authority in the church. The wisdom and persuasive methods of these false teachers impress some of the Corinthians. This should not be so. Today we have “letters” (a play on words), like “Ph.D.” and “Th.M.” which may impress some. Recently, the D.Min. (Doctor of Ministry) has been introduced in Christian institutions of higher learning. For a very challenging perspective of this recent phenomenon,<sup>21</sup> I suggest reading David Wells’ excellent chapter entitled, “**The D-Min-ization of the Ministry**” in the book, [No God but God-Breaking With the Idols of Our Age edited by Os Guinness, John Seel. Page 175-188. \(Review of "No God but God\)](#)

I am not saying there is something evil about biblical and theological education. I am deeply indebted to Dallas Theological Seminary for the tools it gave me to better study and proclaim the Bible. Nevertheless, my degree from the seminary does not accredit me or my ministry. There are those who have graduated from this and other fine schools who have denied the faith and taught error. Here and elsewhere, Paul tells us what commends a Christian’s integrity in ministry. A Christian’s ministry is commended first by the practice of servanthood, rather than by an authoritative or authoritarian leadership style. Paul reminds the Corinthians in 2Co 3:3 that he “cared for” them. The marginal note in the NASB informs us that literally the word is “served.” Those whom God has certified are servants, not “lords.” Second, true laborers of Christ are marked by the integrity of their message and their methods. They are not “peddlers” of the Word of God, but those who simply, boldly, and truthfully proclaim the truth of God’s Word in such a way that men turn to God and depend upon His Word, rather than upon those servants who proclaim it (see Acts 20:17-32). (*We need to be very careful here about abuses of the biblical term “discipling” and the secular term “mentoring.” The work of the Spirit in the lives of those to whom we minister is not evidenced by the fact that they look and act just like us, but that they look and act like Christ.*) Finally, true servants of God are evident when men are convicted and converted by the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and whose lives are so changed that the world cannot help but notice. **True servants of God may or may not have educational diplomas, but the fingerprints of God are all over them and their ministries.** ([The Sufficiency of God Through His Spirit](#))

**S Coley** agrees writing that...

The Bible is God’s book for the world, only it shuts it. But the world will read you. Masters, your servants read you; servants, your masters read you; so will parents children, etc. Do they read in you what they ought to read?

A Christian should be a Bible alive. Never mind though a man has not learned his letters; he will be able to read you fast enough. All men can read justice, mercy, and truth, or the opposite of them....

I remember, when I was a little boy at school, if I by any chance managed to make the smallest blot, as sure as I took the book up to my master, the first thing he looked at was the blot; and, as sure as I took it home, the first thing anybody looked at was the blot. My letters may have been made very gracefully, but nobody said a word about them; but everybody said something about the blot. Ah! I have known some people very good on the whole, but they have had sad blots — blots of temper, vanity, and worldliness. The sun himself is looked at more during the few minutes he has a black spot on his face than on all the days of the year besides. The world has an eagle glance for your spots, and if you have a spot on your character people will look more at it than at all the beautiful things that are there....

I was once in an assize court where a man was being tried for forgery. The individual whose writing, it was suspected, had been imitated, was dead, and so a large letter-book, full of what was known to be the writing of the deceased, was produced in court, to test the alleged forgery by it. If you are letters of Christ you will resemble His writing. The very name Christian implies that you profess to have Christ’s name written upon you. But it is no use to profess to be Christ’s epistle if you are not like Him. Suppose I picked up a letter which professed on the face of it to be a letter from Jesus Christ, but recommended this congregation to be worldly minded, to love gold, to be fretful and peevish, and to be guilty of evils peaking and slander. Of course I should know that it was no letter from Jesus Christ. I wonder whether all present who profess to be Christ’s epistles ever do that which Christ would not put His name to? Are you genuine letters? A friend of mine went to the bank to pay in some money. Amongst it there was a ten-pound note. The clerk looked at it carefully, and then stamped “Forged” right across it. What a sad thing it would be if any of you who profess to be epistles of Christ now should at the last be disowned of Him, and He should say, “You are none of Mine — forged!” ([S Coley - Epistles of Christ - Imperfect and Spurious - interesting - see bottom half of page](#))

**Vincent** has a lengthy comment on **you are our letter**...

The figure which follows is freely and somewhat loosely worked out, and presents different faces in rapid

succession. The figure itself is that of a commendatory letter representing the Corinthian Church: "**Ye are our letter.**" This figure is carried out in three directions:

1. As related to the apostles' own consciousness. The Corinthian Church is a letter written on the apostles' hearts. Their own consciousness testifies that that Church is the fruit of a divinely accredited, honest, and faithful ministry.

2. As related to the Corinthians themselves. The Church needs no letter to commend the apostles to it. It is its own commendation. As the visible fruit of the apostles' ministry they are a commendatory letter to themselves. If the question arises among them, "Were Paul and his colleagues duly commissioned?" — the answer is, "We ourselves are the proof of it."

3. As related to others outside of the Corinthian Church. The answer to the charge that the Corinthians have been taught by irregular and uncommissioned teachers is the same: "Behold the fruit of their labors in us. We are their commission."

At this point the figure again shifts; the letter being now conceived as written on the Corinthians' hearts, instead of on the hearts of the apostles: written by Christ through the apostles' ministry. This suggests the comparison with the law written on tables of stone, which are used as a figure of the heart, fleshy tables, thus introducing two incongruities, namely, an epistle written on stone, and writing with ink on stone tables. ([2 Corinthians 3 Word Studies in the New Testament](#))

**R Kent Hughes** cites a similar example of "Polycarp's second-century Epistle to the Philippians where he addresses the members of the church as those "among whom the blessed Paul laboured, who were his letters in the beginning." ([2 Corinthians : Power in weakness. Preaching the Word](#))

**James Denney** writes that "The conversion and new life of the Corinthians were Paul's certificate as an apostle. They were a certificate, he says, known and read by all men. Often there is a certain awkwardness in the presenting of credentials. It embarrasses a man when he has to put his hand into his heart pocket, and take out his character, and submit it for inspection. Paul was saved this embarrassment. There was a fine unsought publicity about his testimonials. Everybody knew what the Corinthians had been; everybody knew what they were; and the man to whom the change was due needed no other recommendation to a Christian society. Whoever looked at them saw plainly that they were an epistle of Christ; the mind of Christ could be read upon them, and it had been written by the intervention of Paul's hand. This is an interesting though a well-worn conception of the Christian character. Every life has a meaning, we say, every face is a record; but the text goes further. The life of the Christian is an epistle; it has not only a meaning, but an address; it is a message from Christ to the world. **(THOUGHT) Is Christ's message to men legible on our lives? When those who are without look at us, do they see the hand of Christ quite unmistakably? Does it ever occur to anybody that there is something in our life which is not of the world, but which is a message to the world from Christ? Did you ever, startled by the unusual brightness of a true Christian's life, ask as it were involuntarily, "Whose image and superscription is this?" and feel as you asked it that these features, these characters, could only have been traced by one hand, and that they proclaimed to all the grace and power of Jesus Christ?** Christ wishes so to write upon us that men may see what He does for man. He wishes to engrave His image on our nature, that all spectators may feel that it has a message for them, and may crave the same favor. A congregation which is not in its very existence and in all its works and ways a legible epistle, an unmistakable message from Christ to man, does not answer to this New Testament ideal. ([2 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

**Written in our hearts** (cp 2Co 7:3) - **Written** is in the perfect tense (also in divine passive) signifying the permanence of the inscription of the Corinthian believer's names on his heart. Paul was not about to forget them. Note that this great truth allowed him to speak of confidence in 2Cor 3:4 and his hope and boldness in speech in 2Cor 3:12. Paul's prior work among these saints (even with their "issues") had left an indelible impression on his heart. This speaks of the love Paul had in his heart for the Corinthians (2Co 11:11 2Co 12:15) which is amazing (and supernatural) considering all the problems they had caused him!

**J H Bernard** calls our attention to the fact that "The letter written on St. Paul's heart was not open to the world; but the letter written on the heart of the Corinthians by Christ through St. Paul's ministry was patent to the world's observation, as it was reflected in their Christian mode of life. Facts speak louder than words. ([The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Written** ([1449](#)) (**eggrapho** from **en** = in or on, + **grapho** = to write, engrave, inscribe) is used here in a figurative sense of being inscribed in Paul's heart. In classical Greek the term engraphō is used with the sense of "to be enrolled or registered." This explains what Jesus said in Luke 10:20+ to the 70 disciples. Used only 3x in NT - Lk. 10:20+ = "rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven"; 2 Co. 3:2; 2 Co. 3:3. Lxx = Ex 39:14, Da 12:1.

**THOUGHT** - Do you have "spiritual children" in the Lord who like the saints at Corinth who have been written

permanently on your heart and who serve as living testimony of the authenticity of your ministry?

**Adam Clarke** - I bear the most ardent love to you. I have no need to be put in remembrance of you by any epistles or other means; ye are written in my heart-I have the most affectionate remembrance of you...Ye are in our hearts, and Christ has written you there; but yourselves are the epistle of Christ; the change produced in your hearts and lives, and the salvation which you have received, are as truly the work of Christ as a letter dictated and written by a man in his work. ([2 Corinthians 3 Clarke Commentary](#))

**Heart (2588) (kardia)** does not refer to the physical organ but is always used figuratively in Scripture to refer to the seat and center of human life. The heart is the center of the personality, and it controls the intellect, emotions, and will. No outward obedience is of the slightest value unless the heart turns to God. The great Puritan writer **John Flavel** wrote that "THE heart of man is his worst part before it is regenerated, and the best afterward; it is the seat of principles, and the fountain of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it. The greatest difficulty in conversion, is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion, is to keep the heart with God. Here lies the very force and stress of religion; here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate of heaven a strait gate. (from Proverbs 4:23 Keeping The Heart which has been called "one of greatest Christian books of all time" - Recommended!)

**Vincent** has a quote from Plato "I am speaking of an intelligent writing which is graven in the soul of him who has learned, and can defend itself ("Phaedrus," 276). ([2 Corinthians 3 Word Studies in the New Testament](#))

## LIVING EPISTLES LIVING AS SALT AND LIGHT

**Known and read by all men** - There is a play in Greek (*ginosko*, *anaginosko*) and both are in the present passive, continually being **known and read by all men**. How the Corinthians lived their lives reflected on Paul's reputation but even more importantly on Christ's reputation.

In the present context **ginosko** speaks of the fact that "**all men**" had an experiential knowledge of the Corinthian believers. They were not hypocrites or imposters but were new creatures in Christ (2Co 5:17-note) living transformed lives, having proven themselves before "**all men**"

to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom (they) appear as **lights** in the world (Php 2:15-note)

These saints had proved themselves true to Jesus' call for His disciples to be "**salt**" and "**light**" in a godless, idol filled, sex saturated culture like that found in Corinth, Jesus in His "Sermon on the Mount" declaring...

You are the **salt** of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the **light** of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Mt 5:13-note, Mt 5:14, 15, 16-note)

**THOUGHT: D. L. Moody** said: "It is a great deal better to live a holy life than to talk about it. We are told to let our light shine, and if it does we won't need to tell anybody it does. The light will be its own witness. Lighthouses don't ring bells and fire cannons to call attention to their shining--they just shine!" Amen! Are you (am I) shining? (cp Saints' lives as Shining lights - Da 12:3+ , Acts 6:15+ of Stephen, Acts 13:47+, 2Co 3:18+, Ps 34:5±, Pr 4:18± Job 11:17)

**Known (1097) (ginosko)** conveys the basic meaning of taking in knowledge in regard to something or someone, knowledge that goes beyond the merely factual. By extension, the term frequently was used of a special relationship between the person who knows and the object of the knowledge. It was often used of the intimate relationship between husband and wife and between God and His people. **All uses of ginoko in the Corinthian letters** - 1 Co. 1:21; 1 Co. 2:8; 1 Co. 2:11; 1 Co. 2:14; 1 Co. 2:16; 1 Co. 3:20; 1 Co. 4:19; 1 Co. 8:2; 1 Co. 8:3; 1 Co. 13:9; 1 Co. 13:12; 1 Co. 14:7; 1 Co. 14:9; 2 Co. 2:4; 2 Co. 2:9; 2 Co. 3:2; 2 Co. 5:16; 2 Co. 5:21; 2 Co. 8:9; 2 Co. 13:6

**Read (314) (anaginosko)** from **aná** = emphatic, again + **ginosko** = know <> know again) literally to know again or to recognize again. It came to mean to distinguish between, to know accurately and then to read. In the NT **anaginosko** is only used with the meaning of to read, especially referring to **reading aloud** and to **public reading**. In Acts 8:28, 30, 32 we see the Ethiopian eunuch is reading in private (until encountered by

Phillip!) In the present context the use is clearly in a figurative sense of others "reading" the lives of the Corinthian saints as one would read a written letter.

**Know** (understood) and **read** are found in Acts 8 Luke describing when "Philip ran up and heard him (the Ethiopian eunuch) **reading (anaginosko)** Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you **understand (ginosko)** what you are reading?" (Ac 8:30+).

**THOUGHT** - The lives of the saints at Corinth were so real and transparent that they could be easily read. Their lives were not written in the difficult to understand language of "religiosity" or "Christianeze (Christian jargon)" but with real lives that could be really read, really understood and really believed! Are you convicted? I am! What would my neighbors say is the "gospel written by me (by my life lived out before their eyes)?"

**By all men** - Believers and unbelievers alike, among the former group serving to encourage faithful lives much as iron sharpens iron (Pr 27:17+), and among the latter group emitting an aroma of death (cf 2Co 2:15-16+ Jn 3:19-21+)

**R Kent Hughes** makes the point that living, breathing letters "are incontrovertible evidence of the power of the gospel and the fruit of ministry. Written letters may easily mislead, but living letters will reveal the truth. Living heart letters are also more intimate. As Philip Hughes says "This is a letter engraved in his heart, not flourished in his hand or carried in his luggage. It is something far more intimate than an external document of paper and ink, and at the same time far more permanent. It could not be forgotten, nor mislaid. And such letters are accessible to all people because they are "**known and read by all.**" The letters written with pen and ink will be read only by a limited number of people. But lives are read by all, even the illiterate. The church in Corinth was an open letter of Christ to the world, a declaration of his power and love for the whole world. ( [2 Corinthians : Power in weakness. Preaching the Word](#))

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**Illustration** - The world knows how British journalist Henry Stanley went to Africa to find the famed missionary, Dr. David Livingstone. Stanley's greeting, "**Dr. Livingstone, I presume?**" is world famous, but few know the rest of the story. After the two had been together for some time, Stanley saw what Livingstone endured and wrote, "I went to Africa as prejudiced as the biggest atheist in London. But there came for me a long time for reflection. I saw this solitary old man there and asked myself, 'How on earth does he stop here -- is he cracked, or what? What is it that inspires him so?' For months after we met I found myself wondering at the old man carrying out all that was said in the Bible -- '*Leave all things and follow Me.*' But little by little his sympathy for others became contagious; my sympathy was aroused; seeing his piety, his gentleness, his zeal, his earnestness, and how he went about his business, I was converted by him." (From [Rich Cathers](#))

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**Illustration** - Habitat for Humanity started officially in 1976 but unofficially when founder Millard Fuller went to Zaire with a church group to build not-for-profit houses in 1968. With a beginning undergirded with little except prayer and vision for what God could do, Habitat has grown into one of the nation's largest home builders. Fuller describes Habitat as an "*alive, dynamic, Christ-centered movement*" that welcomes Christians and non-Christians to participate in building houses for the poor. Fuller takes special delight when people listen to the message behind the sweat, nails and saws. Recently, he returned to the site of a Jimmy Carter Work Project in Charlotte, N.C. He spotted a five year-old boy playing in the yard of the house that Carter had helped build. After complimenting the boy on his beautiful home, he asked him who built it, expecting to hear the boy say, "Jimmy Carter." Instead, the boy said, "**Jesus built my house.**" -- The Columbus Dispatch, 6-20-92, p. 8H (From [Rich Cathers](#))

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**Your Life's Handwriting** -- Some people believe that our hand-writing reveals our character. Experts in the field of graphology watch for things like the slant of letters, the way they are formed, where the "t" is crossed, and how the "i" is dotted. Based on these distinctions, conclusions are drawn about one's personality. We are told that the style of our writing shows whether we are outgoing or withdrawn, individualistic or of a conforming nature.

While some may question the reliability of this practice, it reminds me of what the apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:2. He told us that Christians are epistles "known and read by all men." The way we compose the letters of our conduct indicates the kind of persons we really are.

If we are trying to please the Lord Jesus Christ, the handwriting of our lives will reveal a love for others and a responsiveness to their needs. We will also express an individuality and a willingness to stand alone for righteousness' sake if duty demands it. Each day we will try to adjust our behavior to the will of our heavenly Father.

Allow the Savior to live through you by relying on His power. Then let the handwriting of your life tell others you belong to Him. — by Richard De Haan

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**The Christian's life is the world's Bible.**

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**A LIVING EPISTLE** - A missionary in India was so feeble mentally that 'he could not learn the language, After some years he asked to be recalled, frankly saying that he had not sufficient intellect for the work. A dozen missionaries, however, petitioned his Board not to grant his request, saying that his goodness gave him a wider influence among the heathen than any other missionary at the station. A convert, when asked, "What is it to be a Christian?" replied, "It is to be like Mr. \_\_\_\_\_," naming the good missionary. He was kept in India. He never preached a sermon (**Ed**: Maybe not with his lips, but he certainly did with his life!), but when he died hundreds of heathen, as well as many Christians, mourned him, and testified to his holy life and character. (S. S. Chronicle.)

Nothing so commends a minister  
as the proficiency of his people.  
Matthew Poole

The fruitfulness of the people  
is the preacher's testimonial.  
John Trapp

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**C H Spurgeon gave a message on 2Cor 3:1-3 entitled...**

### **Sacred Penmanship**

"SELF-PRAISE is no recommendation," and the "sounding of one's own trumpet" is not to be applauded. The apostle must show that he does not approve of such a method, and although he was in a position to boast of great attainments, yet he would not glory in himself. However, it fell to his lot to be charged with arrogance, and that which he most carefully avoided was brought against him as a crime. But are we not entitled as Christians to somewhat of boasting? We have surely a glory of which we need not be ashamed. As "children of God" we possess an inheritance concerning which we may well be proud. To us are committed the " oracles of God," and we still hold to the " faith once delivered to the saints." Ours is not a vain glorying, for it is of God. I would that every Christian were preaching so as to be heard by all around, not in the pulpit, but in the home, a sermon in which he made the cross of Christ his glory, and the blood of Christ his boast.

False teachers had entered into the Corinthian church, and they had found it necessary to have letters of recommendation, but Paul needed no such introduction. Truth and righteousness recommend themselves in the work they accomplish. "Good wine needs no bush," and those who are blessed beneath a faithful minister are his best letters of commendation. In sending forth the seventy our Lord did not give each a letter of introduction, but rather endowed each with power to do good, and their works and words were to stand them in stead thereof. Paul's converts were his epistles, as we call books the works of writers now, and these were put down as the apostle's seals to his ministry. Our translation admits of another rendering, namely, "Ye are our epistles written in your hearts," and this would imply that Paul had been enabled to pencil something in the hearts of others which could be read by all men; and it is with this idea I shall deal in speaking about sacred penmanship.

#### **I. Observe THE REQUISITES FOR WRITING.**

Figures (of speech) are often used to set forth the Christian life, and none, I think, does so more clearly than that beneath our notice, "**Ye are our epistles.**" We are likened to **trees**, for we need planting, nurturing, watering, and pruning before we can bear fruit; stones, for there has been the quarrying, setting, polishing, and building wrought upon us; **lights**, where trimming and sustaining is so much required to render us clear and bright; and now **epistles**, written so that all men may read us. The accessories must be provided, however, for a letter to be written, and let us briefly notice these, — **pen, ink, and paper.**

#### **1) In the third verse we have the pen**

"Forasmuch as ye are declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us." Here is the instrument in the hand of God. The Church was divided, for one said, "I am of Paul;" another, "I am of Cephas." But these good men were only ministers by whom they had believed, — the pens whereby God, through His Spirit, had written upon the fleshy tables of their hearts. Among these instruments there must ever be a variety. The rough and rude can, however, be made to write well. Paul, though he was not eloquent of speech, but somewhat blunt, had power to get hold of men's hearts; and he wrote upon them with dark, indelible lines, great truths. But God has another pen. Apollos could speak with eloquence of diction, and finely pencil the Scripture, so that the Jews were mightily convinced that Jesus was the Christ. John was another such instrument. Soft in love, sketching in poetry the wonderful revelations he had of "the better land," he would win hearts for Jesus. Or yet again, see how Peter suits the bold, round-hand, writing which God would have inscribed upon the hard tables of Jewish minds. He stands forth to declare the whole counsel of God before the Sanhedrim, the murderers of Christ, without fear. Luke, his friend, however, is the pen that the Spirit uses to write the small-hand of detail. Thus is it the Master uses varied tools to inscribe His own will upon men's hearts. O Lord, point us, if need be, with cutting, so that we may be pens in Thy hand to write upon others' hearts.

## 2) Then there must be the ink.

The sacred fluid is the Spirit of God. "Written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." The mysterious influence that flows through us is not of earthly manufacture. It is the pure Spirit of the living God; it never mars or discolors, but adds glory to the heart upon which it flows. Words penned by this agency shall not die, for the marks of grace are indelible, it being the Spirit of the living God. It is truly an invisible ink, but when held to the fire of divine love shall become apparent, and it can never fade; a non-corrosive fluid, and yet it eats its way into men's hearts. What we want is a greater measure of this sacred writing power. Pray that the Father may send the Spirit upon you more abundantly.

## 3) The next requisite is the paper.

It is not written upon stone, but "in fleshy tables of the heart." The law may be penciled by God's finger upon stones, but His love must be written upon the tender heart. As Matthew Henry quaintly says: "Not upon the fleshly, but fleshy tables." That heart that God gives best receives God's writing. A soft heart best absorbs the ink; a living tablet best retains impressions. How is it with your heart, dear hearer? Has God ever written His name there? Lay bare the page, and let the Lord even now transcribe words of love and mercy upon it. Are you willing that it should be so? Then shall you know His willingness, for He says: "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh."

**Lord, write first in us,  
and then make us as the "pen of the ready writer"  
to make our mark on others.**

## II. Now I want you to consider, secondly, the readers of the writing.

"Known and read of all men!" The writing is real, no fiction, for the author is Christ. We are the autograph letters of our Lord, and bear His signature. The writing is clear, for we are "manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ." The handwriting is legible, not shaky with doubt; no forgery through unfaithfulness, but the whole plainly penned in all the up-and-down strokes. Now this document is a public one. Believers are the library for the world; they are a Christian literature. Each saint is a volume to expound the grace of God. "Known and read of all men."

We may consider the readers of this writing to be of three classes, — the intelligent, interested, and inquisitive.

**1) The intelligent** - Many are real students of Christian character, desirous of gaining knowledge for their own good in spiritual attainments. If you see a person take down a book in a library, you soon judge whether he has been accustomed to study by the way in which he handles the volume; and so there are those who carefully review every syllable of a Christian's life, and read each line for their own edification. How anxious should we be to help such students by our example, living near unto the great Exemplar.

**2). Then there are the interested readers** — our friends who like to see if we make progress in divine things. The "first series" of Christian experiences are interesting, and are studied with deep anxiety by those who love young converts. The pastor reads to find out if such are increasing in the knowledge of God, growing in grace, getting stronger in love, and taking a deeper and firmer hold of the doctrines of Christ. The parent reads the heart of the child, anxiously seeking to see how far Christ's character is spelled out in the child's life. The teacher reads the scholar's, the friend the acquaintance's, the master the servant's, and the servant the master's too. Let us seek to please such as take a loving interest in us, remembering that the Lord Himself is one of these readers; so may we strive to adorn His doctrine in all things.

**3). The last class I have called the inquisitive** They only peruse to find fault. They look at the Christian character through smoky magnifying-glasses, and sometimes they turn the volume upside down, and then complain that it is all a big mistake, and they cannot make it out. They pick out that which the follower of Jesus knows full well to be a flaw himself, and then ask the question, "Is this like a Christian?" Beware, dear reader! Be careful, for men's eyes are always ready to detect a failing. Ours must be so correct an epistle that fault-finders shall find it difficult to gratify their morbid taste. The schoolmaster says to his boys, "Be sure you dot your i's and cross your t's;" and we, too, must be mindful of little things. If the Spirit of God has written upon our hearts, let us exhibit that epistle in our lives, so that we may be known and read of all men to the glory of our God. Amen. ([The life and labors of Charles H Spurgeon](#))

**2 Corinthians 3:3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (NASB: Lockman)**

**Greek:** phaneroumenoi (PPPMPN) hoti este (2PPAI) epistole Christou diakonetheisa (APPFSN) uph' hemon,

eggegrammene (RPPFSN) ou melani alla pneumatii theou zontos, (PAPMSG) ouk en plaxin lithiniais all' en plaxin kardiais sarkiniais

**Amplified:** You show and make obvious that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, not written with ink but with [the] Spirit of [the] living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. [Ex 24:12; 31:18; 32:15, 16; Jer 31:33.] ([Lockman](#))

**ESV:** And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. ([ESV](#))

**KJV:** 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 fleshy tables of the heart.

**NET:** revealing that you are a letter of Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of human hearts. ([NET Bible](#))

**NIV:** You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. ([NIV - IBS](#))

**NLT:** Clearly, you are a letter from Christ showing the result of our ministry among you. This "letter" is written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** You are an open letter about Christ which we ourselves have written, not with pen and ink but with the Spirit of the living God. Our message has been engraved not in stone, but in living men and women. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** You are those who are openly shown to be a letter which exhibits Christ, this letter having been ministered [written] by us, not having been written with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets that are human hearts. ([Erdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

**Young's Literal:** manifested that ye are a letter of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in the tablets of stone, but in fleshy tablets of the heart,

- **Letter:** Ex 31:18 Rev 2:1,8,12,18 3:1,7,14,22
- **cared for:** 1Co 8:5-10
- **Living:** 2Co 6:16 Jos 3:10 1Sa 17:26 Ps 42:2 84:2 Jer 10:10 Da 6:26 Mt 16:16 1Th 1:9 Heb 9:14
- **not:** Ex 24:12 34:1
- **but:** Ps 40:8 Jer 31:33 Eze 11:19 36:25-27 Heb 8:10 10:16
- [2 Corinthians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## OPEN LETTERS OF CHRIST

An [amanuensis](#) is a person employed to write or type what another dictates or to copy what has been written by another. The Corinthian saints were Christ's [amanuensis](#). As Ray Stedman quips it was as if Paul was saying "As for me, I'm nothing but the postman; I just delivered the letter. God did the work." The Savior was the ultimate Author of this living epistle.

**Being manifested that you are a letter of Christ** - The lives of the saints at Corinth were clearly and continually (**present tense**) visible "open letters" that gave obvious testimony to all men of their radical new life in Christ (2Co 5:17+). Living, breathing, walking, speaking letters were the best letter of commendation any preacher or teacher could present. The clear implication is that these saints were living authentic, transparent lives, out "in the open" for all to see. This statement is quite a testimony to the transforming power of grace in their lives in view of the fact that Paul had previously described a veritable plethora of problems in these saints in First Corinthians.

**A T Robertson on a letter of Christ** - He turns the metaphor round and round. They are Christ's letter to men as well as Paul's (2Co 3:2).

**Utley** - Believers are meant to clearly reveal Christ by their motives, words, and actions. How we live reflects on His reputation!

In the words of Jesus they did not "light a lamp (their new lives in Christ), and put it under the peck-measure (a "bushel basket"), but on the lampstand and it gives light to all who are in the house. (Mt 5:15+)

Even the pagan philosopher **Plato** wrote that a "good teacher does not write his message in ink that will fade; he writes it upon

men."

**Pulpit Commentary** - The fame and centrality of Corinth gave peculiar prominence to the fact of their conversion....The Corinthians are the epistle; it is written on the hearts of St. Paul and his companions; Christ was its Composer; they were its amanuenses and its conveyers ([The pulpit commentary](#))

**Ray Stedman** quips that Paul was in essence saying "As for me, I'm nothing but the postman; I just delivered the letter. God did the work." Paul wants these Corinthians to understand that the changes that had occurred in their lives, the freedom they were experiencing, the deliverance from evil habits such as immorality, adultery, homosexuality, drunkenness, thievery -- "such were some of you" (1Cor 6:11a+) he said -- **all happened because Christ had changed them. When I read the New Testament I am always impressed at the absolute lack of word in the book of Acts and in the letters of Paul concerning the church and its ministry. Those early Christians did not go around, as we do today, talking about what the church can do for you, or about the value of becoming a member of a church. We talk about that all the time in our day, but they did not even mention it because they understood that the church does not do anything for anybody. It is Christ who changes lives.** It is Jesus who heals a hurting heart, or touches a lonely spirit, or restores someone burdened with a terrible sense of guilt for all the wretchedness and evil of his past. It is the Lord Who forgives and changes, and this great apostle states that very strongly. He wants them to understand that Christ has written this letter, not him, but they are the **witnesses**, their changed lives are all the **testimony**, all the **recommendation** he needs that what he is doing is authentic Christianity. **If we applied that test to our churches across this country today, I wonder how many would have a recommendation in the eyes of the community around?** (ED: WOE!)([Have you got What it Takes? 2 Corinthians 3:1-11](#)) d)

## "SANDWICH BOARDS" FOR THE SAVIOR

What are your thoughts when I say,  
"you may be the only letter from Christ that some people ever read?"  
--Brian Bell

**Brian Bell** - Every Christian is an advertisement for Christianity. We judge a store by the quality of goods it sells; We judge a craftsman on his quality of work; We judge a Church by the kind of Christians it produces; and therefore the world judges Christ by His Followers!. Dick Sheppard said, "**The greatest handicap the church has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians.**" When we step out into our world everyday we are "open letters", "advertisements" for Christ and His church. We are "Sandwich boards for the Savior"!...What are your thoughts when I say, "you may be the only letter from Christ that some people ever read?" ([2Corinthians 3 Sermon Notes](#)) (Bolding added)

**Being manifested** (disclosed, revealed) ([5319](#))(**phaneroo** from **phanerós** = manifest, visible, conspicuous in turn from **phaino** = give light; become visible in turn from **phos** = light) is literally "to bring to light" and primarily means "to make visible" or to cause to become visible. The basic meaning of **phaneroo** is to make known, to clearly reveal, to manifest (see Vine's elaboration of "to be manifest" below), to cause to be seen or to make clear or known. **Thayer** says **phaneroo** means "to make manifest or visible or known what has been hidden or unknown, to manifest, whether by words, or deeds, or in any other way. **Vine** summarizes **phaneroo** "in the active voice, "to manifest"; in the passive voice, "to be manifested"...To be manifested, in the Scriptural sense of the word, is more than to "appear." A person may "appear" in a false guise or without a disclosure of what he truly is; **to be manifested** is to be revealed in one's true character; this is especially the meaning of **phaneroo**, see, e.g., John 3:21; 1Co 4:5; 2Cor. 5:10, 11; Ep 5:13. ([Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary](#)) (Bolding added)

## MISSIVES OF MESSIAH

**Missive** is a written letter.

**Letter of Christ** - Not a letter of Paul or Timothy but of **Christ** (cp He 12:2+ "**Author and Perfecter**"), for they were but servants ("deacons" - see below) of Christ, "Who manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place." (2Co 2:14+). Note that the Spirit of Christ works *in* us before and in order that He might work *through* us.

Paul uses the picture of a literal letter as a **metaphor** a figure of speech "in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action (the changed lives of the saints at Corinth) that it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance" (See terms of comparison simile metaphor).

**Rob Salvato** asks what is "Our strategy for evangelism as a church? It is **You**. You as individuals and families influencing your

sphere of influence by living for Jesus. Your light is going to shine – period – The question is what is it going to reflect! You will either be drawing people to Christ or pushing them away from Christ by the way you live, by how you conduct yourself. ([Sermon Notes](#))

**Henry Alford** commenting on **letter of Christ** writes that "He is the Recommender of us, the Head of the church and sender of us His ministers. ([New Testament for English Readers](#))

**Ray Stedman** rightly remarks that what Paul was saying was that ""*everybody can see that Christ has done something to you*" **That is the only effective witness the church has in the world today --- the change that Christ has made** so that the people you work with, rub shoulders with, the tradesmen you do business with, the people you talk to in the normal course of carrying out your daily affairs ought to see that change. That is the point. There ought to be such visible evidence of God at work in you that people will say, "What is this? What's going on? I know your name is Bill, or Jane, or Mary, but somehow I get the feeling I'm talking to Jesus." That is what these early Christians exemplified. ([Have you got What it Takes? 2Corinthians 3:1-11](#))

**R Kent Hughes** remarks that "A letter of recommendation must always come from a third party, and the ultimate third-party recommender is Christ, the Messiah himself. By claiming Messiah as the author, Paul was able to claim higher authority for his credentials than his enemies could claim for theirs. ([2 Corinthians : Power in weakness. Preaching the Word](#))

**Marvin Vincent** explains **a letter of Christ cared for by us..**"An epistle written by Christ through our ministry; that is, you, as the converted subjects of our ministry, are an epistle of Christ. Others explain: an epistle of which Christ forms the contents, thus making the apostles the writers. ([2 Corinthians 3 Word Studies in the New Testament](#))

**Cared for by us - Calvin** remarks that Paul "says that it was ministered by himself, likening himself, as it were to the ink and the pen. In other words, he makes Christ the Author and himself the instrument in order that his detractors may understand that they have Christ Himself to deal with if they go on speaking maliciously against His apostle. ([2 Corinthians](#))

**Guzik** adds a note on **cared for by us** describing a supernatural **pen, ink and paper** - Paul's letter of recommendation was written with a "pen" and the "pen" was Paul himself. He "wrote into" the lives of the people he served. Paul's letter of recommendation was written with "ink," and the "ink" was the Holy Spirit. Paul's letter of recommendation was written on "paper" or tablets, and the "paper" was the hearts of the Corinthian Christians. The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the New Covenant, when **the law of God would be written in our hearts** (Jeremiah 31:33), and said God would grant **hearts of flesh** to replace hearts of stone (Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26). ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Cared for** (1247)(**diakoneo** derivation uncertain - cp **diakonis** = in the dust laboring or running through the dust or possibly **diako** = to run on errands; see also study of related noun - **diakonia**) means to minister by way of rendering service in any form or to take care of by rendering humble service. The root word **diakonos** refers to one who serves as a waiter upon tables performing menial duties (see Matt 8:15; 20:28; 27:55; Mark 1:31; 10:45; 15:41; Luke 4:39; 10:40; 12:37; 17:8; 22:26, 27; John 12:2). **Diakoneo** conveys the basic idea of personal service, and depending on the context can mean specifically to serve, to wait on, to see after or to care for someone's needs by performing a service (conveying the sense that help is provided to the one being served - see Mt 4:11, 25:44, Mark 1:13). A good picture of the meaning of **diakoneo** is seen when Peter's mother-in-law was healed by Jesus "*and she immediately got up and waited (diakoneo) on them.*" (Lk 4:39) What Peter's mother was doing physically (albeit still a "spiritual" act), Paul was doing most likely primarily spiritually by proclaiming the Word of God to the saints and in so doing "caring" for the needs of their souls.

The group of words related to **diakoneo** (diakonia, diakonos) word group differs the other Greek word group, **douleuo** (doulos) which also means to serve, in that the former word group connotes "service" on behalf of someone while the latter speaks of "service" as a slave under or subordinate to someone (as a bondservant or bondservant to the "lord" or "master"). As Richards says "In Greek thought, both types of service were shameful. The duty of the Greek person was to himself, to achieve his potential for excellence. To be forced to subject his will or surrender his time and efforts for the sake of others was intensely distasteful, even humiliating. But Jesus came to serve, not to be served. In giving Himself for others, Jesus set the pattern for a transformed value system. In Christ, serving is the highway to greatness. In Christ we achieve our full potential by giving, not by grasping. ([Expository Dictionary of Bible Words](#)) (**Ed:** Or as John Blanchard says "Christian service has been dignified by Deity."

**THOUGHT** - Perhaps you think your work for the Lord is of no eternal consequence, but as **Vance Havner** rightly reminds us "There are no trivial assignments in the work of the Lord." Every believer is an "open letter" from Christ, because their changed life will show God's work within their heart.

**Written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God - Not with ink** (**melan** source of our English word **melanin**, the pigment that gives skin its color) refers to any black concretion, which could be ink but could also be something like charcoal, either of which

could be used to write on stone. **Not with** visible, perishable materials but with the invisible, spiritual hand of God's Spirit. **Living God** is a striking contrast with lifeless ink or dead, cold slabs of stone

**Broomall** -The genuineness of the Corinthians as **an epistle of Christ** (ASV) is authenticated (1) by their ministry—**ministered by us**; (2) by their supernatural origin—**with the Spirit of the living God**; (3) by their internal testimony—**in fleshy tables of the heart** (cf. Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:39; Ezek 11:19; 36:26). ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Bernard** feels that this description of "the mystical imprint of the Divine Spirit" on their hearts "this leads him to think of the ancient "writing" of the Law by the "finger of God" on the Twelve Tables, and to contrast it with this epistle of Christ on tables that are not of stone but are "hearts of flesh" ([E \(The Expositor's Greek Testament\)](#))

**Joseph Beet** on the Spirit of the Living God - The Holy Spirit dwelling in the hearts of the Christians at Corinth through the agency of Paul and Timothy was an abiding divine testimony to them, to their converts, and to others that they were sent by God. To the converts, the presence of the Spirit was known directly by the new cry Abba, Father, put into their hearts and lips, and by victory over sin given to them day by day; and to others, by "the fruit of the Spirit" in their holy lives. Cp. Ro 8:13-note, Ro 8:14, 15-note, Ro 8:16-note; Ga 5:22-note, Gal 5:23-note. ([2 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

**James Denney** writes that "Paul claims no part here but that of Christ's instrument. The Lord, so to speak, dictated the letter, and he wrote it. The contents of it were prescribed by Christ, and through the Apostle's ministry became visible and legible in the Corinthians. More important is it to notice with what the writing was done: "not with ink," says St. Paul, "but with the Spirit of the living God." At first sight this contrast seems formal and fantastic; nobody, we think, could ever dream of making either of these things do the work of the other, so that it seems perfectly gratuitous in Paul to say, "not with ink, but with the Spirit." Yet ink is sometimes made to bear a great deal of responsibility. The characters of the tines ("**some**") in 2Co 3:1. were only written in ink; they had nothing, Paul implies, to recommend them but these documents in black and white. That was hardly sufficient to guarantee their authority, or their competence as ministers in the Christian dispensation. **But do not Churches yet accept their ministers with the same inadequate testimonials? A distinguished career at the University, or in the Divinity Schools, proves that a man can write with ink, under favorable circumstances; it does not prove more than that; it does not prove that he will be spiritually effective, and everything else is irrelevant.** I do not say this to disparage the professional training of ministers; on the contrary, the standard of training ought to be higher than it is in all the Churches: I only wish to insist that nothing which can be represented in ink, no learning, no literary gifts, no critical acquaintance with the Scriptures even, can write upon human nature the Epistle of Christ. To do that needs "the Spirit of the living God." We feel, the moment we come upon those words, that the Apostle is anticipating; he has in view already the contrast he is going to develop between the old covenant and the new covenant, and the irresistible inward power by which the new is characterized. Others might boast of qualifications to preach which could be certified in due documentary form, but he carried in him wherever he went a power which was its own witness, and which overruled and dispensed with every other. **Let all of us who teach or preach concentrate our interest here. It is in "the Spirit of the living God," not in any requirements of our own, still less in any recommendations of others, that our serviceableness as ministers of Christ lies. We cannot write His epistle without it.** We cannot see, let us be as diligent and indefatigable in our work as we please, the image of Christ gradually come out in those to whom we minister. Parents, teachers, preachers, this is the one thing needful for us all. "Tarry," said Jesus to the first evangelists, "tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" it is of no use to begin without that... Paul's ministry wrote the Epistle of Christ upon the Corinthians, or, if we prefer it, wrought such a change in their hearts that they became an epistle of Christ, an epistle to which he appealed in proof of his apostolic calling. In expressing himself as he does about this, he is again anticipating the coming contrast of Law and Gospel. ([2 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

**Written** ([1449](#)) (**eggrapho** from **en** = in or on, + **grapho** = to write, engrave, inscribe) is used again in a figurative sense. Paul's use of the **perfect tense** pictures the permanence of the Spirit's "autograph" on their hearts and indirectly speaks of the **assurance** and eternal security of their salvation in Christ (see other articles on **assurance**). When I teach I use erasable markers which means what I write on the white board is not permanent. It's as if God used a "Permanent Marker", His Spirit writing irrevocably on our hearts! Praise the Lord that His writing is permanent and our names can never be erased from the Lamb's book of life!

**Spirit** ([4151](#))(**pneuma** from **pneo** = to blow, to breathe) in context (cp use 2Co 3:17) refers in this context to the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, Who had caused them to be born again (Jn 3:5-8+)

**Living God** - This great description of the Eternal God appears 28x in Scripture - Dt 5:26; Josh 3:10; 1 Sam 17:26, 36; 2 Kgs 19:4, 16; Ps 42:2; 84:2; Isa 37:4, 17; Jer 10:10; 23:36; Dan 6:20, 26; Hos 1:10; Matt 16:16; 26:63; Acts 14:15; Ro 9:26; 2 Cor 3:3; 6:16; 1Ti 3:15; 4:10; Heb 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22; Rev 7:2

**Beet** adds that **Living God** "suggests the activity of God, ever blessing, protecting, or punishing. After placing in contrast to the letters written with ink brought by his opponents the gift of the Holy Spirit, Paul places this gift in further contrast to the stone tablets received by Moses on Mount Sinai. And very suitably. For these tablets of stone, preserved during long ages, were an abiding and visible and famous witness of the divine authority of Moses and of the Covenant of which he was minister. No human hand, but the

Hand which made Sinai and the world, traced those venerable characters. But they were written only on lifeless stone, on material apparently the most lasting yet doomed to perish. But the divine writing of which Paul had been the pen was on living human hearts, destined to retain and show forth in endless life the handwriting of God. ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts**- A description of the "Ten Commandments" representative of the Old Covenant of the Law. Paul begins to contrast the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The **Old Covenant** was clearly external and provided no internal power to live out the commandments. You could hold the **tablets of stone** in your hands your entire life but it would never change your life. The New Covenant ministry is an inside job", the Spirit of the Living God indwelling, empowering and transforming believers from the inside out!

**Tablets of human hearts** is "tables which are hearts of flesh."

Moses records that the Old Covenant was also written by God...

And when He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, **tablets of stone**, written by **the finger of God**. (Ex 31:18)

Paul in speaking of **tablets** of human hearts (which speak of the New Covenant) is led to recall the **tablets of stone** (which speak of the Old Covenant), and in the succeeding passages is led by the Spirit to launch into a description of the superiority of the New over the Old Covenant.

Some have suggested that Paul launched into a discussion of the superiority of the New Covenant because some of the false teachers did not want to see the Mosaic system set aside.

In other words, the **New Covenant** which was prophesied in the Old Testament provided a "*spiritual heart transplant*", Ezekiel recording God's promise that...

I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the **heart of stone** out of their flesh and give them a **heart of flesh**, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be **My** people, and I shall be their God (Ezekiel 11:19, 20+).

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the **heart of stone** from your flesh and give you a **heart of flesh**. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezekiel 36:26-27+)

**Comment:** Both of these passages in Ezekiel describe the New Covenant which was inaugurated by Christ on the Cross. See study of New Covenant Promised in the Old Testament.

**Jeremiah** reiterates the prophetic promise of the New Covenant God declaring...

This (see Je 31:31-32) is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them and **on their heart I will write it**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jer 31:33).

**Tablets** ([4109](#))(**plax**) describes a flat, broad surface, tablet or plain (or land), and in the NT describes a flat stone on which inscriptions are written. **Plax** - 2Co 3:3 (2x), He 9:4 Hebrews 9:4 having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the **tables** of the covenant;

**Plax** - 33x in 21v **Septuagint (LXX)** - Ex 31:18; 32:15, 16, 19; 34:1, 4, 28, 29; Dt 4:13; 5:22; 9:9, 10, 11, 15, 17; 10:1, 2, 3; 1Ki 8:9; 2Chr 5:10 --- 2 Chronicles 5:10 There was nothing in the ark except the two **tablets** which Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the sons of Israel, when they came out of Egypt.

**Human** ([4560](#)) (**sarkinos** from **sarx** = flesh) is an adjective meaning fleshly, describing that which is made of or consists of flesh. The suffix **-inos** refers to the material from which the noun is composed.

**Solomon** uses a similar metaphor exhorting his readers...

Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the **tablet of your heart**. (Pr 3:3) ([William Arnot's comment on Pr 3:3 = The Art of Printing](#)) ([Proverbs 3:3-6 J Vernon McGee's Commentary](#))

Bind them ("my words" - Pr 7:1,2) on your fingers. Write them on the **tablet of your heart**. (Pr 7:3)

**Paul Apple** writes

The Only Valid Commendation for Effective Ministry = Changed Lives

A. Impressive Disciples - Changed lives evident to all

B. Imitators of Christ - Nurtured by Good Role Models

1. Producing Christlikeness - "being manifested that you are a letter of Christ"

2. Using us as Spiritual Caretakers - "cared for by us"

C. Supernaturally Changed – by the Holy Spirit - "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God"

D. Internally Transformed -- a Matter of the Heart (not external reform) - "not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts." ([2Corinthians](#))

**David** writes of the righteous that "The law of his God is in his heart; His steps do not slip." (Ps 37:31)

**Spurgeon:** The **best thing** in the **best place**, producing the **best results**. Well might the man's talk be so admirable when his heart was so well stored. To love holiness, to have the motives and desires sanctified, to be in one's inmost nature obedient to the Lord -- this is the surest method of making the whole run of our life efficient for its great ends, and even for securing the details of it, our steps from any serious mistake. To keep the even tenor of one's way, in such times as these, is given only to those whose hearts are sound towards God, who can, as in the text, call God their God. Policy slips and trips, it twists and tacks, and after all is worsted in the long run, but sincerity plods on its plain pathway and reaches the goal.

**John Trapp:** He hath a Bible in his head, and another in his heart; he hath a good treasure within, and there hence brings good things.

Again **David** wrote "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; Thy Law is within my heart." (Ps 40:8)

**Spurgeon:** Yea, thy law is within my heart. No outward, formal devotion was rendered by Christ; his heart was in his work, holiness was his element, the Father's will his meat and drink. We must each of us be like our Lord in this, or we shall lack the evidence of being his disciples. Where there is no heart work, no pleasure, no delight in God's law, there can be no acceptance. Let the devout reader adore the Saviour for the spontaneous and hearty manner in which he undertook the great work of our salvation.

**James Denney** sums up this section writing that "Amid all these details let us take care not to lose the one great lesson of the passage. Christian people owe a testimony to Christ. His name has been pronounced over them, and all who look at them ought to see His nature. We should discern in the heart and in the behavior of Christians the handwriting, let us say the characters, not of avarice, of suspicion, of envy, of lust, of falsehood, of pride, but of Christ. It is to us He has committed Himself; we are the certification to men of what He does for man; His character is in our care. The true epistles of Christ to the world are not those which are expounded in pulpits; they are not even the gospels in which Christ Himself lives and moves before us; they are living men and women, on the tables of whose hearts the Spirit of the living God, ministered by a true evangelist, has engraved the likeness of Christ Himself. It is not the written Word on which Christianity ultimately depends; it is not the sacraments, nor so-called necessary institutions: it is this inward, spiritual, Divine writing which is the guarantee of all else. ([2 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

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**Here is a [illustration](#) of a living epistle from Christ = The Life of Adoniram Judson** - Many years ago when the great missionary Adoniram Judson was home on furlough, he passed through the city of Stonington, Connecticut. A young boy playing about the wharves at the time of Judson's arrival was struck by the man's appearance. Never before had he seen such a light on any human face (cp 2Co 3:18-note, 1Co 15:49). He ran up the street to a minister to ask if he knew who the stranger was. The minister hurried back with him, but became so absorbed in conversation with Judson that he forgot all about the impatient youngster standing near him. Many years afterward that boy—who could never get away from the influence of that wonderful face—became the famous preacher [Henry Clay Trumbull](#). (author of the insightful and fascinating book [The Blood Covenant A Primitive Rite And Its Bearings on Scripture](#)) In a book of memoirs he penned a chapter entitled: **What a Boy Saw in the Face of Adoniram Judson**" That lighted countenance had changed his life. Even as flowers thrive when they bend to the light, so shining, radiant faces come to those who constantly turn toward Christ!

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**D Thomas** refers to this section as **'Soul (Heart) Literature'** — Christianity written on the soul is Christianity —

### **I. IN THE MOST LEGIBLE FORM.**

**II. IN THE MOST CONVINCING FORM.** Books have been written on the evidences of Christianity; but one life permeated by the Christian spirit furnishes an argument that baffles all controversy.

**III. IN THE MOST PERSUASIVE FORM.** There is a magnetism in gospel truth embodied which you seek for in vain in any written work. When the "Word is made flesh" it is made "mighty through God."

**IV. IN THE MOST ENDURING FORM.** The tablet is imperishable. Paper will crumble, institutions will dissolve, marble or brass are corruptible.

**V. IN THE DIVINEST FORM.** The hand can inscribe it on parchment or stone, but only God can write it on the heart, ([The Biblical illustrator](#))

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**Bogue** comments on Christ is the "Writer" and Christians as His "Letter"...

**Christ has blotted out "guilty" and written in "no condemnation."**

**He has erased "earthly" and supplied "heavenly."**

**Licentiousness** has given place to **purity**, **profanity** to **prayerfulness**, **selfishness** to **love**, etc. We judge of the authorship of an epistle, not merely by the penmanship and signature, which a clever forger might imitate, but also by its contents.

A hypocrite, a false professor, is like a *forged* letter.

**Its design. To convey the mind of Christ to men** Men may refuse to listen to the gospel, but they cannot ignore the testimony of a consistent Christian life.

**1. As a letter is written for the purpose of being seen, a Christian should let his Christianity be visible.** We do not write letters merely for the sake of writing them, but that they may be read. So, if Christians do not let their Christianity be seen in their lives, they defeat one chief end which Christ had in view in making them what they are. Those who are Christians in name only are in no sense of the term epistles of Christ; it were vain to exhort such to let what Christ has written in them be seen by men, for they have nothing to show.

**2. A letter being written for the purpose of being read should be legible.** A letter may be so written that it is impossible to make out the writer's meaning. Such a letter may be worse than useless, for, owing to its illegibility, it may convey a wrong meaning. When the letters of men are illegible it is the fault of the writers, but this is not the case with Christ's epistles. He never writes illegibly. The fault lies on the side of the epistles themselves. Note one or two things which render writing illegible.

**(1) Indistinctness of character.** One word may be mistaken for another, and thus the whole meaning of a sentence may be altered. And Christians may be illegible as epistles of Christ through the wavering, unsteady character imparted to the writing that is in them by their want of decision for Christ and their compromises with the world. What we want is boldness on the part of Christians in testifying for Christ in their everyday lives.

**(2) Blots.** Perhaps the most important word in a sentence is completely hidden by a blot. Alas! in how many cases is the testimony of a Christian for Christ made of none effect by the unsightly blot of some gross inconsistency, some dark sin, which the eye of the world rests continually on, and refuses to see anything else.

**3. A letter is written that it may be understood. What prevents letters from being intelligible?**

**(1) Omissions.** Were the little word "not," e.g., left out, the meaning of a sentence would be entirely reversed. In like manner, the lack of one essential Christian grace-charity, e.g. — if it do not render the character of a Christian unintelligible, makes it less easily understood.

**(2) Contradictions.** We cannot possibly make out the meaning if one sentence says one thing and the next the opposite. And how can men understand our testimony for Christ if we have one kind of conduct for the Church and another for the world? ([The Biblical illustrator](#))

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**F B Meyer's** devotional "**An Autograph Letter**" -

THE APOSTLE Paul's life was made weary by the incessant opposition of his enemies and critics, who sowed discord in the churches which he had formed in Europe. Amongst others, they visited Corinth and challenged him to produce letters of commendation from the leaders of the Church. With justifiable indignation he cries: "Why should I carry letters, when my converts, given me by the Lord, are circulating everywhere, with the attesting signature of Christ upon them?" Surely they are a sufficient guarantee and proof that I have been commissioned and sent forth by the Lord Himself.

St. Paul gave utterance to a true and striking description of a Christian disciple. He is an autograph letter, the

Author and Writer is the Lord Himself--"an epistle of Christ." The ink is "the Spirit of the Living God." The pen is the teacher or preacher of the Gospel, "ministered by us." The Material is the heart and life--"not on tables of stone, but on hearts of flesh."

We ought to be Christians in large type, so that it would not be necessary to be long in our society, or to regard us through spectacles, in order to detect our true discipleship. The message of our lives should resemble the big advertisements which can be read on the street-boards by all who pass by. The merit of good letter-writing is to state what the writer wants to say as clearly and concisely as possible. Sometimes we have to wade through long and weary pages before we can get at the gist of our correspondent's meaning. Let us take care that the message of our lives is clear, concise, and unmistakable.

We are to be pens in the hand of Christ--our sufficiency is of God, who makes us ministers. Milton's pen had only to yield itself relentlessly to the hand of the daughter or amanuensis, to whom the blind master dictated his immortal words. And the messages which we are to inscribe on the hearts and lives of men do not originate in us, but with Christ. If others are used more than we are, it is because they are more meet for His use (2Ti 2:15-21).

PRAYER- Live in us, blessed Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit, that our lives may be living epistles of helpfulness and blessedness. May the Name of the Lord Jesus be glorified in us. AMEN.

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**Keep On Writing** - The following poem written by Paul Gilbert is intended to encourage us as Christians to be persuasive, flesh-and-blood testimonies for our Savior.

You're writing a "gospel," A chapter each day,  
By the deeds that you do, By the words that you say;  
Men read what you write, Whether faithless or true;  
Say, what is the "gospel" According to you?

Sometimes, however, our writing is done with scratchy pens. Maybe it's badly blurred and so illegible that God's message can't be deciphered.

Hannah More, an outstanding witness for the gospel in 19th-century England, sometimes felt discouraged about the quality of her spiritual penmanship. Although she organized schools for the unevangelized poor and wrote many tracts and hymns, she had a low opinion of her effectiveness. This was her self-appraisal: "God is sometimes pleased to work with the most unworthy instruments—I suppose to take away every shadow of doubt that it is His own doing. It always gives me the idea of a great author writing with a very bad pen."

Yet we need not be discouraged. God, the great Author, is able to use even scratchy pens like you and me to communicate His message to people around us. Regardless of how we appraise our penmanship, let's prayerfully keep on writing. -- Vernon C. Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**We're not called to work for God,  
but to let God work through us.**

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**Living Stones** - I've seen a number of recent reports about efforts to remove monuments with the Ten Commandments from public places in the US. It's regrettable, for the monuments celebrate righteousness, and "righteousness exalts a nation" (Pr 14:34). I believe that removing these reminders is a reflection of our crumbling moral foundations.

There is one enduring monument to righteousness, however, that cannot be removed: the truth of Christ, written on human hearts by the Spirit of God (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Those who have the law of God written on their hearts love the Lord with all their mind, soul, and strength. They demonstrate this love to the world by showing honor to their parents, faithfulness in their marriage, and integrity in their work. They respect human life and treat all men and women with dignity and honor. They don't speak evil of anyone, no matter how much evil has been done to them. They are content with God and what He has given them, and they want nothing more. These are the outward signs that God's law is alive, written on our hearts "by the Spirit of the living God" (2Co 3:3).

You and I are living monuments to His grace. We must stand tall. The world is watching. — by David H. Roper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**God's laws engraved on our hearts**

W Grant describes....

**HOW WE MAY SO USE THIS EPISTLE (referring to the believer a letter written by Christ) THAT IT MAY SERVE THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH IT WAS WRITTEN.**

We may commend Christ —

**1. With our lips.** Our conversation may be an epistle to make known His praises. The circulation of the epistle written with ink — the printed Bible — is our duty. Even so it is our duty to publish the living epistle. It was intended to be an open letter, known and read of all men. How many are there with whom we daily associate who never read the written Bible, the only hope of whose salvation is that they may read or hear the living epistle! By our silence we conceal that epistle from them, and leave them to perish.

**2. By our lives.** It is in vain that we speak of Christ with our lips if our lives belie our words. Our actions, like a pen full of ink, trace certain characters, leave certain impressions on the mind and memory of those who see them. In beholding our actions, have men been led to say of us, “These men have been with Jesus”?

**3. By our character.** A man’s outward manner may be in direct opposition to his inward character. To be true epistles of Christ we must reflect His image, not in word only, or in action, but in our dispositions and desires., ([The Biblical illustrator](#))

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**William Arnot** (author of one of the better commentaries on the Book of Proverbs [Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth]) has a sermon entitled...**Epistles of Christ**

From the example of the Master Paul had acquired the habit of gliding softly and quickly from a common object of nature to the deep things of grace. The practice of asking and obtaining certificates seems to have been introduced at a very early period into the Christian Church, and already some abuses had crept in along with it. We gather from this epistle that some very well recommended missionaries had been spoiling Paul’s work at Corinth. Virtually challenged to exhibit his own certificates, he boldly appeals to those who had been converted through his ministry, and now he glides into a greater thing — Christians are an epistle of Christ. Regarding these epistles, consider —

**I. THE MATERIAL WRITTEN ON.**

1. Many different substances have been employed in writing; but one feature is common to all — in their natural state they are not fit to be used as writing materials. They must undergo a process of preparation. Even the primitive material of stone must be polished ere the engraving begin. The reeds, and leaves, and skins, too, which were used by the ancients, all needed preparation. So with modern paper, of which rags are the raw material. These are torn into small pieces, washed, cast into a new form, and become a “new creature.” A similar process takes place in the preparation of the material for an epistle of Christ. You might as well try to write upon the rubbish from which paper is made as to impress legible evidence for the truth and divinity of the gospel on the life of one who is still “of the earth, earthy.”

2. The paper manufacturer is not nice in the choice of his materials. The clean cannot be serviceable without passing through the process, and the unclean can be made serviceable with it. Let no man think he can go into heaven because he is good; but neither let any one fear he will be kept out of it because he is evil.

**II. THE WRITING.**

It is not Christianity printed in the creed, but Christ written in the heart. A person’s character may be gathered from his letters. How eagerly the public read those of a great man printed after his death! Our Lord left no letters, yet He has not left Himself without a witness. When He desires to let the world know what He is, He points to Christians. Nay, when He would have the Father to behold His glory, He refers Him to the saved: “I am glorified in them.” A Christian merchant goes to India or China. He sells manufactured goods; he buys silk and tea. But all the time he is a living epistle, sent by Christ to the heathen. A Christian boy becomes an apprentice, and is now, therefore, a letter from the Lord to all his shop mates.

**III. THE WRITER.** “The Spirit of the living God.”

Some writings are easily rubbed off by rough usage or with age. Only fast colours are truly valuable. The flowers and figures painted upon porcelain are burned in, and therefore cannot be blotted out. No writing on a human spirit is certainly durable except that which the Spirit of God lays on. In conversion there is a sort of furnace through which the new-born pass. In the widespread religious activity of the day some marks are made on the people — not made by the Spirit of God — shown by the

event to have been only marks on the surface made by some passing fear or nervous sympathy.

#### IV. THE PEN.

In photography it is the sun that makes the portrait; yet a human hand prepares the plate and adjusts the lens. A similar place is assigned to the ministry of men in the work of the Spirit. Printing nowadays is done by machines which work with a strength and regularity and silence that are enough to strike an onlooker with dismay. Yet even there a watchful human eye and alert human hand axe needed to introduce the paper into the proper place. Agents are needed even under the ministry of the Spirit — needed to watch for souls.

#### V. THE READERS.

1. The writing is not sealed or locked up in a desk, but exposed all the day to public view. Some who look on the letters are enemies, and some are friends. If an alien see Christ represented in a Christian, he may thereby be turned from darkness to light; but, if he see sin, self, and the world, he will probably be more hardened in his unbelief. Those who already know and love the truth are glad when they read it clearly written in a neighbour's life, are grieved when they see a false image of the Lord held up before the eyes of men.

2. Many readers, however, fail to see the meaning of the plainest letters. None so blind as those who will not see. Considering how defective most readers are either in will or skill, or both, the living epistles should be written in characters both large and fair. Some MSS. are so defectively written that none but experts can decipher them. Skilled and practised men can piece them together, and gather the sense where, to ordinary eyes, only unconnected scrawls appear. Benevolent ingenuity has produced a kind of writing that even the blind can read. Such should be the writing of Christ's mind on a Christian's conversation. It should be raised in characters so large that even the blind, who cannot see, may be compelled, by contact with Christians, to feel that Christ is passing by., ([The Biblical illustrator](#))

### 2 Corinthians 3:4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek** : [Pepoithesin de toiauten echomen \(1PPAI\) dia tou Christou pros ton theon.](#)

**NEB** It is in full reliance upon God, through Christ, that we make such claims.

**Amplified**: Such is the reliance and confidence that we have through Christ toward and with reference to God. ([Lockman](#))

**The Living Bible** We dare to say these good things about ourselves only because of our great trust in God through Christ, that he will help us to be true to what we say,

**ESV**: Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. . ([ESV](#))

**KJV**: And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward:

**NET**: Now we have such confidence in God through Christ. ([NET Bible](#))

**NIV**: Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. ([NIV - IBS](#))

**NLT**: We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips**: We dare to say such things because of the confidence we have in God through Christ, ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest**: And such confidence are we having through the Christ towards God. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

**Young's Literal**: and such trust we have through the Christ toward God,

- 2Co 2:14 Php 1:6
- Ex 18:19 1Th 1:8
- [2 Corinthians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**PAUL'S CONFIDENCE IS NOT  
IN SELF BUT IN SAVIOR**

Paul is quick to squash any hint of personal pride in the changed lives of the Corinthians, knowing that some might think what he had just said was self boasting.

**Such confidence we have through Christ toward God** - NLT "We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ." REB = "It is in full reliance upon God, through Christ, that we make such claims." (referring to the claims he has just made in vv1-3 about the Corinthians as living epistles testifying to the authenticity of Christ's ministry). In other words, the spiritual success he had been blessed to have with the Corinthians was due not to his work but to Christ's work through him.

**Barton** - Paul did not want to have anything to do with vain boasting (see 2Co 3:1; 2Co 5:12; 2Co 10:18). Yet he expressed his confidence and assurance (see 2Co 1:15; 2Co 5:6, 8) in his own ministry, not because of his own eloquence or sophistication, but because God through Christ had commissioned Paul as an apostle on the Damascus road (see Acts 9:15–19+). ([Life Application Commentary](#))

**Gromacki** - Paul was not cocky or self-assured, but he did know that God had worked both in and through him. Hughes observed: "He who has, through Christ, received all things from God looks with confidence, through Christ, to God."<sup>5</sup> His confidence ("such trust") was based upon the operation of God described in the previous two verses. It was a present possession ("we have") obtained through divine means ("through Christ"). It was a confidence directed toward God and not toward self ("to God-ward"). ([2 Corinthians - Stand Firm in the Faith](#))

**Homer Kent** - The **confidence** Paul had that Christ was speaking through him was no mere personal boasting. This confidence had not resulted from any self-satisfaction based on strenuous effort, skillful performance, or unusual human competence. It was rather a conviction supplied by Christ Himself, and was a confidence that would stand up before God.

**McGee** - This gives me **confidence**. I know the Bible is the Word of God. When I was in seminary, I believed it was the Word of God. I think that intellectually it can be determined that it is the Word of God. But today I don't even need the intellectual demonstrations anymore. I've passed that. To me it is very simple—the proof of the Word of God is what it does. They say that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. God put it like this: "O taste and see that the LORD is good ..." (Ps. 34:8). This is His challenge to you. ([2 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

**Alfred Plummer** - He refers to the  $\pi\epsilon\pi\omega\iota\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$  just expressed, viz. that he has no need of any credentials other than the testimony which the existence of the Corinthian Church bears: that fact by itself suffices to prove his Apostleship. But he at once hastens to show that in this confidence there is no self-praise and no claim to credit; for it is conditioned in two ways which entirely exclude vain-glorious thoughts; it is through Christ, and it is towards God. ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**John MacArthur** - Paul's defense of his ministry was not designed to relieve any nagging self-doubt on his part. The apostle never questioned that God had called him to the ministry. That resolute **confidence** gave him the courage and boldness necessary for a very difficult ministry. No obstacle, persecution, or discouragement could make Paul question his calling. ([MNTC-2 Cor](#))

**Murray Harris** - Paul's confidence before God in claiming that the Corinthians were a letter written by Christ validating his apostolic credentials came through Christ (v. 4). It was not the product of a pious wish or imagination. ([Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**R C H Lenski** - It is the sure confidence which Paul and his assistants have in their office and thus in the genuineness of its product. It comes to us, and we have it, Paul says, "through Christ." He mediates this confidence; he is the channel through which it flows into them. Paul does not as yet name the source; this follows in v. 5. "Through Christ" connects with v. 3: "You are Christ's letter," one which he has written so that all men may see us, our office, and our work. This confidence through Christ is "**in regard to God**," (**TOWARD**)  $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ , the face-to-face preposition especially when it is used with persons: "when we face God, and he us." Many are confident enough in themselves and boldly assert their confidence in order to quash any doubts which men may have regarding their sufficiency. They often do this even when they are facing God, calling him to witness, claiming that they speak "as from God" (2:17), but the work which they do cries out against them. For this reason v. 1–3 precedes, the Corinthian church was a letter that had been signed, as it were, by Christ himself.  $\Pi\rho\ \varsigma\ \tau\ \nu\ \Theta\epsilon\acute{o}\nu$  is easily said, but woe to him who says it lightly, in false self-assurance! It will not remain a mere word, such men will soon enough stand face to face with God, and Christ will disown them, and God's judgment will be against them. ([Interpretation of Second Corinthians](#))

**James Denney** links this confidence with the end of the previous chapter (**see notes**) writing - THE confidence referred to in the opening of this passage is that which underlies the triumphant Sentences at the end of the second chapter. The tone of those sentences was open to misinterpretation, and Paul guards himself against this on two sides. To begin with, his motive in so expressing himself was quite pure: he had no thought of commending himself to the Corinthians. And, again, the ground of his confidence was not in himself. The courage which he had to speak as he did he had through Jesus Christ, and that, too, in relation to God. It was virtually confidence in God, and therefore inspired by God. It is this last aspect of his confidence which is expanded in the fifth verse: "not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God." ([2](#)

## [Corinthians 3 Commentary](#)

**Ray Stedman** agrees with Denney writing that Paul is led "to go on and answer the question he had asked in Chapter 2 (**Ed**: see preceding notes). Christ, he said there, leads us in triumph. He saw himself as the commanding general, marching in triumph through the streets of Rome, having won great victories everywhere he went. In another beautiful figure of speech, he said that his ministry was like a bottle of perfume, the fragrance of which was spreading all through the world -- the sweetness and fragrance of Jesus Christ himself. So Paul's question was, "**Who is sufficient for these things?**" Where do you get the ability to have that kind of impact upon those around you? Do you get it from a school? Is it a special course that you can take? Is it a seminar you can sign up for?" Now he comes to the answer, 2Co 3:4 "Such is the confidence [that is, the sufficiency] that we have through Christ toward God." ([2 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

**Henry Alford** - The connection with the foregoing is immediate: he had just spoken of his consciousness of apostolic success among them (which assertion would be true also of other churches which he had founded) being his worldwide recommendation. It is this confidence of which he here speaks. Such confidence however we possess through Christ towards God: i.e. 'it is no vain boast, but rests on power imparted to us through Christ in regard to God, in reference to God's work and our own account to be given to Him:' ([2 Corinthians 3:4-6 Commentary](#))

**Confidence** (4006) (**pepoithesis** from **peitho** = to persuade) describes the quality or state of being certain. It describes Paul's assurance of mind and his firm belief in the integrity, stability and veracity of God. Paul expressed a reliance on God, the idea of reliance being an expression of **confidence** or trust based on experience, which provides the perfect *segue* (*seg-way* - to move on to another topic without interruption) for Paul to explain his adequacy for ministry. **Pepoithesis** - 6v in NT - 2 Co. 1:15; 2 Co. 3:4; 2 Co. 8:22; 2 Co. 10:2; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 3:4

Paul expresses his boldness a second time in this chapter (2Co 3:12+) in view of his "hope" regarding the permanent glory of the New Covenant.

**Bernard** explains such confidence as saying in essence "we are sufficient for these things" (see 2Co 2:16, 17+); but he hastens to explain the true source of his confidence. ([Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Murray Harris** explains it this way - Paul's confidence before God in claiming that the Corinthians were a letter written by Christ validating his apostolic credentials came **through Christ**. It was not the product of a pious wish or imagination. Still speaking of this confidence before God, he disowns any ability to form a competent judgment on the results of his own ministry or any personal right to lay claim to the results of what was in reality God's work. His qualification and source of competence for the work of the ministry, including the assessment of its success, were not natural ability or personal initiative but divine enabling (**Ed**: As he goes on to explain in 2Co 3:5,6-note) ([Expositor's Bible Commentary](#)).

**Vincent** remarks that Paul had **confidence** "In the fact that he may appeal to them, notwithstanding their weaknesses and errors." ([2 Corinthians 3 Word Studies in the New Testament](#))

**Guzik** comments on **confidence through Christ toward God** - Paul knows that what he has just written might sound proud in the ears of the Corinthian Christians. After all, it is no small thing to say "You are my letter of recommendation" and "I am a pen in God's hand." Paul knows these are big ideas, but his place for thinking them is in Jesus, not in himself. ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Through Christ** - Not **through** Paul but **through Christ** "the Head, from Whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God." (Col 2:17+)

**A T Robertson** - It is not self-conceit on Paul's part, but **through Christ**.

In Romans **Paul** declared that "**through whom** (Christ) we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake (Ro 1:5+)

### **Related resource:**

- Discussion on through Him = through Christ

**Vincent** explains **through Christ toward God**..."**Through Christ** who engenders the confidence, **toward God**, with reference to God who gives us success, and to whom we must account for our work. ([2 Corinthians 3 Word Studies in the New Testament](#))

**"THE PROOF IS  
IN THE PUDDING"**

I love **J Vernon McGee's** comment - This gives me confidence. I know the Bible is the Word of God. When I was in seminary, I believed it was the Word of God. I think that intellectually it can be determined that it is the Word of God. But today I don't even need the intellectual demonstrations anymore. I've passed that. To me it is very simple—the proof of the Word of God is what it does. They say that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. God put it like this: "O taste and see that the Lord is good ..." (Ps. 34:8). This is His challenge to you.

**Paul Apple** sums up this chapter...

#### **PREACHING CHRIST:**

1) Jesus Christ came to change the heart of man ... to transform him from the inside out ... not to reform the externals. Initial conversion plays itself out in ongoing sanctification by the Spirit so that increasing Christlikeness is evident to all.

2) We don't have to worry about how others evaluate our ministry; the only one whose opinion counts is our Lord and Master. It is the Holy Spirit who commends men to positions of ministry leadership in the church.

3) Jesus Christ makes His disciples a "letter of Christ" by transforming them by His grace and writing His law on their hearts and enabling them to fulfill His righteousness. He took a bunch of fishermen and outcasts from society who had no formal training or academic degrees and transformed them into the pillars of His church.

4) Our shepherding work in caring for the flock is patterned after the Chief Shepherd who gave His life for the flock.

#### **DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

1) What type of commendation are we asking others to receive to validate our ministry? Are we overly impressed by the wrong type of credentials?

2) Is our life an open book – transparent to others – so that they can see the reality of our own changed life? Can we be accurately "read" by others, or is there a secret, mysterious side that we do not show to others?

3) Do we acknowledge the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit as the one who changes and molds Christlike character or do we seek to take some of the credit and glory?

4) Are we satisfied with mere external reform and legalistic righteousness or are we truly concerned with the state of the heart? ([2Corinthians - Outline Commentary](#))

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**David Hocking** alliterates this section as follows ([reference](#))...

#### **THE COMMENDATION OF GOD'S SERVANT - 2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-11**

1B. He **POSES** the question – v1 "Do we begin again to commend ourselves?"

Greek: sunistao – used 16 times – "to stand or set together; to exhibit, approve, or introduce" 8 times in 2 Corinthians – 2Co 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 7:11; 10:12, 18; 12:11

2B. He **PRESENTS** the evidence – vv2-3

1C. It was a Writing in the heart – v2 "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men" cf. Php 1:7-8

2C. It was a Work of the Holy Spirit – v3 "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God" cf. Ro 8:2, 9, 16

3B. He **POINTS** to his dependency upon God – vv4-6