

LIVING EPISTLES OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

A CHRISTIAN IS A BIBLE ALIVE.

SCRIPTURE II COR. 3:1-6

"LIVING EPISTLES OF CHRIST" IS A PROPER DESIGNATION OF CHRISTIAN PEOPLE.

1. A LETTER IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE THOUGHTS AND PURPOSES OF ITS WRITER;

A. CHRISTIAN PEOPLE ARE THE EXPRESSION OF THE THOUGHTS AND PURPOSES OF CHRIST.

B. CHRIST IS THE LOGOS (WORD) OF GOD;

~~WE~~ WE ARE THE LOGOS (WORD) OF CHRIST.

C. TO CONVEY THE MIND OF CHRIST TO MEN

2. A LETTER IS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

- A. WHAT CHRIST HAS COMMUNICATED TO US SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED TO THE WORLD.

B. HAVING WRITTEN HIS EPISTLES, HE SENDS THEM.

I. THE TRUE AUTHOR, CHRIST, "AN EPISTLE OF CHRIST"

1. CHRIST IS THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH, HEB. 12:2

2. CHRIST IS THE AUTHOR OF ETERNAL SALVATION, HEB. 5:9

3. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF LIFE, PHYSICAL & SPIRITUAL, ACTS 3:15

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

1. THE SALVATION OF THOSE IN WHOSE HEARTS IT IS WRITTEN

2. TO RECOMMEND CHRIST TO MEN.

3. TO CARRY THE MESSAGE OF THE SAVIOR'S LOVE FOR SINNERS.

III. THE TABLET OF RECORD

1. NOT UPON PAPER, OR UPON STONE, THE MOST ENDURING MATERIAL THEN KNOWN, BUT IN "FLESH TABLES OF THE HEART"

2. ONLY CHRIST CAN MAKE A SPIRITUAL IMPRESSION OF HIS WILL ON THE HEARTS OF PEOPLE.

A. MERELY AN INTELLECTUAL IMPRESSION IS NOT SUFFICIENT.

B. NECESSITY OF THE NEW BIRTH, JN. 1:13.

2. THE RESPONSIBILITY RESTING ON CHRISTIANS AS EPISTLES OF CHRIST.

A. MUST LET HIS FAITH BE VISIBLE

B. MUST LET HIS FAITH BE LEGIBLE

(1). NO INDISTINCTNESS OF CHARACTER

(2). NO BLOTS ON THE LIFE

C. MUST BE UNDERSTANDABLE

(1). NO OMISSIONS

(2). NO CONTRADICTIONS

IV. THE PENMEN. - PAUL AND HIS ASSOCIATES, "MINISTERED BY US"

1. THE INSTRUMENTAL MEANS

2. WE BRING THE GOSPEL OF TRUTH & SALVATION TO MEN.

3. CHRIST NOT ONLY WRITES AN EPISTLE IN OUR HEARTS, BUT HE USES US TO WRITE LETTERS OF COMMENDATION IN OTHER LIVES TO WHOM WE MINISTER

A. PAUL'S ENEMIES BOASTED OF WRITTEN LETTERS FROM CHURCH LEADERS IN JERUSALEM.

B. PAUL NEEDED NO SUCH LETTERS;

THE CORINTHIAN CONVERTS WERE SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE OF HIS DIVINE COMMISSION.

Some had charged Paul as an egotistical braggart who loves to recommend himself. Here he answers this charge.

In dealing with the Corinthians, Paul, whose love for them was so well known, did not need, like outsiders, to bring letters of recommendation.

Instead of a written letter of recommendation from the church, this active and well-known church is itself all the recommendation Paul needs.

The expression "written in our hearts" shows how deep and constant is his love and concern for them.

His tie with them is not formal or transient but personal, close, and marked by enduring love and compassion.

Paul was the penman or scribe who wrote down the letter at the dictation of Christ, whose letter the church really is. The Greek word which the KJV translates "ministered" centers attention on the TIME of the founding of the Corinthian church. The word carries out the figure of a letter or epistle in suggesting that in preaching and converting them Paul was the scribe or agent of Christ, who was Himself the "author" of their salvation.

Their Christian faith and position are due not to themselves, nor even to Paul ultimately, but rather to God. This is expressed by the fact that they are a letter of Christ and were written by "the Spirit of the living God." It was Paul's hand which had written the epistle, but that hand was only the instrument of the Spirit of God.

V. THE INK OR MATERIAL USED TO WRITE WITH.
THE HOLY SPIRIT, "WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD"

1. WORKS ACCORDING TO HIS OWN PLAN

A. SPIRITUAL MATERIAL RATHER THAN PHYSICAL.

B. HIS WAYS NOT OUR WAYS

2. PREPARES THE PAGES OF THE SOUL TO RECEIVE THE MESSAGE.

A. STAINS TO BE ERASED

B. HABITS AND PREJUDICES TO BE DESTROYED

C. CONVICTION OF SIN NECESSARY

VI. THE READERS, "KNOWN AND READ OF ALL MEN"

1. PAUL. HE KNEW THEIR SHORTCOMINGS AS WELL AS THEIR GOOD.

2. THEIR FELLOW CHRISTIAN BRETHREN.

A. WHO ARE INTERESTED IN THEIR GROWTH AND PROGRESS IN GRACE.

B. SHOULD BE AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO EACH OTHER.

3. UNSAVED ACQUAINTANCES

SOME MEN REFUSE TO READ THE BIBLE,

OR LISTEN TO THE GOSPEL,

OR CONSIDER FAIRLY THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,

BUT THEY CANNOT IGNORE THE TESTIMONY OF A
CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN LIFE.

4. WORLD WIDE REPUTATION

A. ROMANS 1:8, "YOUR FAITH IS SPOKEN OF THROUGHOUT THE
WHOLE WORLD."

B. I THESS. 1:8, "IN EVERY PLACE YOUR FAITH TO GOD-WARD
IS SPREAD ABROAD."

C. OUR FOREIGN MISSION WORK ^{among other races} IS DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY
OUR PREJUDICES AND CONDUCT HERE AT HOME.

CONCLUSION:

MANY READERS FAIL TO SEE THE MEANING OF THE PLAINEST LETTERS.
NONE ARE SO BLIND AS THOSE WHO WILL ~~NOT~~ NOT SEE.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IS INDEED AN IMPERFECT ~~OR~~ LETTER,
BUT ANY WHO WILL CAN READ IN THE LIVES OF GENUINE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE
THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST WHO CAN SAVE TO THE UTMOST THOSE THAT
COME TO GOD BY HIM.

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There is a special quality in a genuinely Christian life which nothing but the power of Jesus Christ can explain. The difference Christ had made in them he describes in Galatians 5:19-24, where he contrasts the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.

This special quality of life had been revealed to Paul himself as he watched the dying Stephen and felt the serenity and power of a firgiving spirit. Stephen's life at that point was a translation of the gospel, seen and read by Paul and resulting in his conversion.

Now the Corinthians had the responsibility to offer their lives for others to read in them the message of the gospel. And we Christians of our time must do likewise. Every Christian life ought to be a translation of the gospel.

There is no other way in which multitudes of those around us will read the gospel. They read it in our hearts and in our lives. But this does not relieve the Christian from the duty of communicating his experience in conversation or teaching.

The truth that it is the LIFE that speaks must not be made an EXCUSE for cowardly SILENCE. Every Christian is responsible to spread the message of Christ by his or her life and also by our verbal witness if we have the gift of vocal speech.

The generation following Paul and the Apostles was one of the greatest ages of expansion the church has ever known.

Can you name a single great outstanding missionary leader of this period?

There is not one. How do you explain this ? The answer is that the real work was done by countless obscure men and women who made it their first duty to spread the message in their own circle of friends and neighbors.

INTRODUCTION:

This past year has seen many changes in our life...
For some of us, our address has changed,
our assignment
style of ~~clothes~~ *life*,
philosophy of life; *There have been*
changes in moral standards,
permissiveness,
administration in gov't
national priorities
the cities
~~the world~~
the church, etc.

Our chief concern is this.
In all the changes of life is there anything that abides?
In 1st Corinthians 13 Paul says there are three
abiding realities: FAITH, HOPE, LOVE.
Some things do not change:
Natural law, the sense of proportion,
the basic principles of life,
and JESUS is always the same.

TEXT: Heb. 13:8

I. 5. Redeemer from sin...

The world today is long on knowledge and
woefully short on things that make us wise unto
salvation.

We can read the story of our planet & moon in the rocks,
but that does not save us from the threat of
destroying ourselves by pollution.

We can travel through the air at a speed
faster than sound,
but that does not save us from hatred & fear.
We can surround ourselves with comforts that no
previous generation dreamed of,
but that does not save us from sin.