

## **“Are We Beginning Again To Commend ...”**

“... ourselves? or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you? Ye are our epistles, written in our hearts, known and read of all men; being made manifest that ye are an 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 tables that are hearts of flesh” (2 Cor. 3:1-3).

The phrase “Are we beginning again to commend ourselves?” is directly related to the strong words from 2:17: “For we are not as the many, corrupting the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” With these emphatic words some might regard Paul as a braggart, commending himself by asserting he was not as the “many” were. In the substances of these verses Paul shows that he needed no commendation: the Corinthians themselves provided such for him.

Further, Paul's question “Or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you?” is not to be taken as a blanket reflection against giving or receiving letters of recommendation. Paul received epistles from Jewish authorities to aid him in his proposed work of persecuting Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:2), and while Paul was on the side of error at that point in his life, he claimed always to have acted sincerely in all things he did. On the other hand, brethren in Ephesus had written the Corinthian brethren, recommending Apollos to them (Acts 18:27) and Paul said of the collection for needy Jerusalem saints which Corinth (and others) were in the process of amassing: “and when I arrive, whomsoever ye shall approve, them will I send with letters to carry your bounty unto Jerusalem” (1 Cor. 16:3); all of which serves to show that epistles of recommendation are not wrong within themselves.

Yet, while that is true in the case of Paul to Corinth they were not needed neither from others to Corinth to commend Paul to them, nor letters from them to commend Paul to others. The Corinthians were Paul's letter of commendation; they were, in essence, both an epistle of Paul and of Christ. Why would Corinth need letters from anyone to commend Paul to them? They knew who he was. His signs of an apostle had been wrought among them (2 Cor. 12:12). They could scarcely deny his genuineness without reflecting upon their own for they were what they were through their reception of Paul's teaching: their spiritual gifts were the direct result of his laying hands on them to bestow such to them. And, just as Paul had amply commended himself to the Corinthians, so he would to others wherever he went in precisely the same way.

The Corinthians were also an “epistle of Christ”. Paul was the one responsible for their standing for his mission from Christ had brought about revolutionary changes within them and in his first letter he had asked, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” he then enumerated that neither fornicators, adulterers, et al. would be God's heirs, he adds, “And such were some of you” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). These Corinthians no longer were fornicators etc. because they had been washed, sanctified and justified. They had been forgiven. But, it was imperative that they cease those

practices that had kept them from being God's heirs, but which sins they had been forgiven of.

The Corinthians were epistles, but they were not written in ink; rather it was with the spirit of the living God. They had been born of the Spirit, as well as water (Jn. 3:5). They had been saved through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). This writing had been made, not in tables of stones, but tables that were hearts of flesh.

Certainly "tables of stone" is a reference to the Law engraved on stones, revealed by God and ministered by Moses. By such reference here, in subsequent context all doubt should be removed as to what he has reference to when he contrasts the two covenants. Presently, however, ponder the apostle's words "tables that are hearts of flesh." Ink on paper; words chiseled on stone. Tables that are hearts of flesh. Impressions in our hearts by the living Spirit. It is this latter that is of lasting duration. By the renewing of the Holy Spirit, thieves are turned into honest men; liars are turned to men who speak truth; fornicators and adulterers are turned into people of holy and pure lives. These changed, transformed lives become epistles of Christ, known and read of all men. Just as all men know we are Christ's disciples if we have love for one another (Jn. 13:35); so all men see the nature of the gospel by its transforming power in our words and lives and recognize by such that we are epistles of Christ.

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