

LIVING LETTERS

2 Corinthians 3:1 - 6

What is the basis for this New Covenant lifestyle, and what does it produce in human relationships? These questions are answered here as Paul continues to open his heart to the Corinthians. Can you see a reflection of your own life in these words?

I. Letters of Christ 3:1-3

II. The source of adequacy 3:4-6

WHAT DOES IT SAY?



Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? ² You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. ³ 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.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Once again we can detect that Paul is defending himself against critical attack. What is it about this time?

What is a "letter of recommendation" and why does Paul react against the idea? (see Acts 18:27, Rom. 16:1, 1 Cor. 16:3)

The Corinthians are "letters" of...

- a. Paul
- b. Christ
- c. both?

Who are you a "letter" of?

"Known and read by everybody" - what does that mean?

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

⁴ Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. ⁵ Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶ He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant ~ not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

In 1989, J. Hudson Taylor III discovered the tombstone of his great-grandfather, J. Hudson Taylor, pioneer missionary to China, in the cluttered storage yard of a museum in Zhenjiang. The graveyard where it stood had been destroyed years earlier, and local believers had tried to have the stone mounted at another site. Permission was granted, but the museum director demanded that the believers pay for the 26 years of storage, which amounted about \$13,000. Pastors in China overseeing the restoration project informed the curator that he could keep the grave marker. In their letter they said that what was etched in the hearts of people as a result of the ministry of the revered missionary was more valuable than what was written on stone."

from Free at Last, by Ron Ritchie

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Note the contrasts in verse 3 and how effectively Paul uses this literary device. What is he referring to? (see verse 7)

Why did Paul say he was not "competent" for the ministry he is describing? (Note: "competent" can be translated "adequate")

Do you think of yourself as a "**minister**"?

What is the difference between a "minister" and a "servant"? Look up both words in a Concordance or Bible dictionary, or even an English Dictionary.

Read **Jeremiah 31:31-34** and **Ezekiel 36:25-27**.

What are the characteristics of the New Covenant? (Note: God has future plans for the nation of Israel, as is obvious from these passages. But the New Covenant began with Christ, and we experience that, even though some aspects of it may not take place until the end times.)

How does the "letter" kill? (see James 2:10, Rom. 7:7-13)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

In your own words, summarize the main point of this passage.



“Nothing coming from us; everything coming from God! That is the secret to human sufficiency... Jesus and Paul both teach that activity which depends upon human resources for its success will, in the end, accomplish nothing.”

Ray Stedman, Authentic Christianity

LIFE RESPONSE

How is God asking you to put this into action in your life this week?



Paul says that God has made you a “*competent ... minister of the New Covenant.*” Do you believe that? If so, relate one situation where you felt spiritually incompetent, but stepped out in faith and found that God’s resources were there for you.