

A Love Letter from Jesus 2 Corinthians 3:2-3

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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.

Introduction:

A. Evangelism or Edification?

1. Some who have read the letters written *to* the New Testament churches have concluded that the letters say very little, if anything, about evangelism.
 - a) They see the purpose of the letters as primarily edification.
2. In a sense, they are correct.
 - a) These letters were written to build up the body of Christ.
 - b) But the reason these people say that the epistles have little or nothing *to* say about evangelism is that they don't understand God's total plan for winning lost people to Christ.
 - c) They think that evangelism is only a personal and individual responsibility.
3. Don't misunderstand.
 - a) Winning the lost to Christ is a personal responsibility
 - b) But God never intended that individual witness be separated from corporate witness.
 - c) In fact, it is corporate or body evangelism that makes personal evangelism natural (not forced) and truly productive (creating lasting results).
4. In order to understand evangelism in the New Testament we need to understand Christ's teachings in chapters 13, 15, and 17 of the Book of John.

B. John 13, 15, & 17

1. Three ideas:
 - a) Christ commanded His followers to "love one another" so that all people would know they are His disciples (John 13).
 - b) He told them it would bring glory to His Father if they bore much fruit, showing themselves to be His disciples (John 15).
 - c) He prayed for His eleven disciples (and us) that they (and we) might "be brought to complete unity to let the world know" *why* the Father sent Christ into this world (John 17).
2. These three ideas come together to form a powerful principle that is key in understanding evangelism in a New Testament church.
 - a) They are the heart of what Jesus taught in the Upper Room that last night He was with His disciples.
 - b) They are critical for us in The Lighthouse today and for Christians of all time.
3. They form the understanding for Paul's words to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 3:2-3 (NASB)

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C. The Old Covenant and the New Covenant

1. Here Paul contrasted the Old Covenant with the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6).
2. The Old Covenant (the Law) condemned man.
 - a) Though it seemed harsh and cruel, it drove men to seek relief for the burden of their sins.
 - b) It prepared people for the coming of Jesus Christ, who then instituted a "new commandment" (John 13:34-35) that would not drive people to Christ, but that would attract them to Christ.
3. Thus, Paul said, "The letter [the old law] kills, but the Spirit gives life" (3:6).
4. Jesus was developing a unified truth - ***Love, holiness, and unity are interrelated.***
5. This is the emphasis of the entire New Testament.

I. Jesus' Commandments

A. Love One Another (John 13:34-35)

1. In the Old Testament, God's primary means for drawing people to Himself were the commandments He gave to Moses.
 - a) These laws condemned men and made them aware of their sins.
 - b) They also drove people to seek a means of forgiveness.
 - c) God provided a temporary means of forgiveness at Mount Sinai's system of sacrifices given to Israel to atone for sin.
 - d) But in the New Testament, God gave a *new* commandment of love (John 13:34-35).
 - e) And it was love that would reveal to all men the one and final sacrifice for sin-Jesus Christ Himself.
2. This unique and divine strategy for communicating the love of Christ is confirmed again and again in the letters that were written to the various New Testament churches.
 - a) Note the following commandments to "love one another! (This is a selective list).
 - b) We are commanded to love one another throughout the New Testament.)
 - "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (Romans 12:10).
 - "Keep on loving each other as brothers" (Hebrews 13: 1).
 - "Love your neighbor as yourself" (James 2:8).
 - "Love each other deeply because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).
 - "Since God so loved us, we also ought to love One another" (1 John 4: 11).
 - "Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:8).
 - "Be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2).
 - "And this is my prayer. that your love may abound more and more" (Philippians 1:9).
 - "Be encouraged in heart and united in love" (Colossians 2:2).
 - "May the Lord make your love increase, (1 Thessalonians 3:12).
3. God's plan is to show His love through His people.
 - a) Peter and John particularly, as they wrote their letters, were simply reporting what Christ had told them in the Upper Room.
 - b) And Paul following his conversion gained these insights by divine revelation from God Himself.
 - c) Love in the body of Christ is the way God chose to show His love to non-Christians in order to draw them to Himself!
4. But loving one another involves more than kind and gracious experiences.
5. It involves holy and righteous relationships. And this leads us to what Christ said in John 15.

B. Bear Much Fruit (John 15:8)

1. Love involves concern for one another, but it also involves a total Christian lifestyle that permeates our relationships with others.
 - "This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples" (John 15:8).
 - "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all *for* the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31-32).
 - "Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth)" (Ephesians 5:8-9).
 - "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders!" (Colossians 4:5).
 - "Live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:2-4).
 - "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3:15).
2. The intention of the "fruit of righteousness" as lived out by a loving body of Christians is very obvious – it is evangelism – reaching others for Christ!
 - a) When you put these verses with the ones on "loving one another," they help us to see what Christ had in mind when He said, "This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples." (John 15:8).
3. But the most visible aspect of Christ's two commandments and their result is seen in His prayer for unity among believers.
4. Loving one another and bearing fruit were to provide the foundation for unity in the church.