

Identity—Christ's Letter pt. 1

2 Corinthians 3:1-6

[Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-6]

2 Corinthians is considered one of Paul's most personal and emotional letters.

Paul planted the church in Corinth, pouring his heart into them.

Hear his love and concern:

"For I wrote to you with many tears out of an extremely troubled and anguished heart — not to cause you pain, but that you should know the abundant love I have for you." **2 Corinthians 2:4**

Corinth was anything but a perfect church, with a long list of problems.

In this letter, Paul finds himself defending his ministry against critics, false apostles who had slipped into the church and started turning the people's heads with their polished speech, their Jewish pedigree, their skill, and their supposed "success."

These men boasted in their letters of recommendation.

They demanded credentials from Paul, and some of the believers, influenced by them, began expecting the same.

Their message was simple: "Paul isn't the real deal. Compare our resumes."

Paul refuses to step into this competition with his opponents or to cater to the Corinthians' expectations.

"We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to be proud of us, so that you may have a reply for those who take pride in outward appearance rather than in the heart."

2 Corinthians 5:12

"For we don't dare classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. But in measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves to themselves, they lack understanding. For it is not the one commending himself who is approved, but the one the Lord commends." **2 Corinthians 10:12, 18**

"I have been a fool; you forced it on me. You ought to have commended me, since I am not in any way inferior to those "super-apostles," even though I am nothing. The signs of an apostle were performed with unfailing endurance among you, including signs and wonders and miracles. So in what way are you worse off than the other churches, except that I personally did not burden you? Forgive me for this wrong!" **2 Corinthians 12:11-13**

"Rather than demanding proof (*dokimē*) that Christ was speaking through Paul (v. 3), the Corinthians ought to be examining and testing (*dokimazō*) their own selves...

[He was saying to them]

'Don't you know yourselves [*heautous*] sufficiently well to recognize that Christ Jesus lives within each of you [cf. Rom 8:9] and that therefore you are in the faith?'"¹

Paul's answer:

So, you want a letter, how about this: "You yourselves are our letter." **2 Corinthians 3:2a**

You want proof, "Your changed life is the letter not written by me—but by Christ."

You want to examine me, Paul says they should examine themselves, because if you reject me, you are rejecting what Christ has written."

1. You are Christ's Letter, authored by Christ, not by people.

Paul's opponents were obsessed with human approval: (letters of recommendation, credentials, reputation, status, and comparisons)

The Corinthians were tempted to define their identity the same way:

"Who endorses me?"

"Who validates me?"

"What do others say about me?"

[Abraham Lincoln]

When Abraham Lincoln died, a small, folded piece of paper was found inside his wallet.

It was a worn-out newspaper clipping—just a few lines long.

It said that Lincoln was "one of the greatest men of the age."

Nothing fancy.

Nothing official.

Just words.

Historians say he read it often... because Lincoln battled deep insecurity.

He fought crippling self-doubt.

He carried enormous pressure.

And that little piece of paper—those lines of encouragement—helped steady him when the world shook.

Why? Because it reminded him who he was.

¹ Harris, Murray J. 1976. "2 Corinthians." In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein, 10:403. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Paul reminds the Corinthians who they are: “You are Christ’s letter—written by Him, not by people.”

Your identity is not written by people’s opinions.

Your worth is not determined by human approval.

Your value is not shaped by performance, résumé, success, or credentials.

Your story is authored by Jesus Himself.

You are who Christ declares you to be; no one else has the authority to define you.

2. You are Christ’s Letter written by the Spirit, not by your past.

Paul says the letter is (vs 3):

- Not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.
- Not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

This is the New Covenant identity.

[verses 7-18]

Under the old covenant:

God’s law stood outside of the people.

It told them what to do, but could not change them.

It revealed sin but couldn’t give life.

Under the new covenant:

God writes His law inside His people.

The heart is changed, not just the behavior.

The Spirit empowers the obedience God requires.

The Spirit Himself has written new desires, new life, new power, and a new heart.

You are not defined by past sins, by past failures, by old patterns, by what others say about your past.

You are not defined by the “stone tablet” version of you because in Christ, your heart has been rewritten.

The Spirit has given you a new identity.

3. You are Christ’s Letter with a purpose.

Your life is a letter others must and should be able to read.

Paul’s words missional: “You are a letter from Christ, delivered to the world.”

This means identity is not just who you are, but also what you display.

You are a living testimony of Jesus’ power.

Your life preaches before your words ever do.

As Christ's Letter, you are a witness to God's grace.

As Christ's Letter, you are evidence of the new covenant.

As Christ's Letter, you are a picture of the gospel.

As Christ's Letter, you are meant to be read by the world.

As Christ's Letter, your transformed life is God's message to others.

As Christ's Letter, your life is Christ's message to a watching world; your identity carries a mission.

Identifying as Christ's Letter means:

- **Christ authors your identity—not defined by people.**
- **The Spirit writes your identity—not defined by your past.**
- **Your identity has a mission—you are a living testimony.**

So if you are Christ's Letter—authored by Jesus, written by the Spirit, and sent on mission—then the question becomes: What exactly does this letter say about you now?

Paul doesn't leave that vague. In the very next verses, he shows us that this identity shapes how we live, how we serve, and what we carry into the world.

Part two will unfold this truth:

Because you are Christ's Letter, you are rooted in God's sufficiency and empowered by the Spirit to live out the New Covenant life He placed within you.