

FORGOTTEN TRUTH #3—WE ARE ALL BEING “READ!”

INTRODUCTION:

Today—February 3rd, 2019—is the 34th day of the year. How is your life-building going so far in 2019? Unlike building a house—which is pretty difficult to forget when we are in the process of doing it—we can often forget that every day we are building—we are working on—our **spiritual** lives. In I Cor 3:10 Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. **But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.**”

Every day—day after day—we are building our spiritual lives—and spiritual legacy. In the way of review, Forgotten Truth #1—we are sowing! Every day, throughout the day, we are participating in actions and attitudes that are either sowing to the flesh—our selfish, sinful nature—or we are sowing to the Spirit. What have you been sowing to? Galatians 6:7 reminds us “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Not only do we often forget we are **sowing** every day, we also forget that we are **servicing** someone—or something—every day. We have a choice as to who we are going to serve. Although there are a number of substitutes we can choose in place of serving God, I believe the most common one is **self**. **Romans 1:25** “Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and **served the creature more than the Creator**, who is blessed for ever. Amen.” Is that not the underlying reason behind abortion—a defiant, rebellious service of **self** instead of God?

So, who are you serving? Jesus reminds us in Mt 6:24 “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” ‘Only two choices on the shelf: serving God—or serving self!’

Please take your Bibles and turn to II Corinthians 3:1-6. Notice again verse 2 “Ye are our epistles written in our hearts, **known and read of all men:**” Forgotten Life-Building Truth #3—We are **being read!**

1. They—and us—are a universally read epistle

Paul told the Corinthians in v 2 “Ye are our **epistles...**” What is an epistle? It is not a word that we use often in our everyday speech, but we see it here in verses 1, 2, and 3. It comes from the Greek word “*e-pistol-ay*” and simply means “letter”—the kind you write or receive—as opposed to a letter of the alphabet. As we look at these verses, it is important to realize what **kind** of epistle—what kind of letter—Paul meant when he said “Ye are our epistles.”

Notice verse 1. In the way of background, it was not uncommon for traveling believers to bring letters of commendation with them from people they knew and show them to others when they arrived in a new city. An example of this is found in **Acts 18:26-27** “And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. ²⁷ And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, **the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him:** who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:”

The “he” and “him” referred to in these verses is a man by the name of Apollos. Because Apollos was not well-known, the brethren wrote a letter to send with him that “exhorted the disciples to receive him.”

When Paul refers to the Corinthians as being “our epistle,” he means that they are his letter of recommendation. In verse 1, he reminds the Corinthians that he didn’t need a letter to them or from them because their changed lives was proof of his ministry in their midst! As Paul’s letter of recommendation, he reminds them of a couple of things:

A. We are being read by all men (v 2)

First, Paul reminds them—and us—that we are “known and read of all men.” What does that mean? In the context, it means that collectively—as a group—their reputation as believers spread further than just the city of Corinth. Corinth was the largest city in first century Greece and was an important center of trade at that time. Pretty much anything that was shipped to or from Rome passed through Corinth. In addition to being a busy and wealthy city, it was also a very **immoral** one.

I Corinthians 6:9-11 “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither **fornicators**, nor idolaters, **nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind**,¹⁰ Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ **And such were some of you:** but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

As more and more Corinthians were saved and became radically different, word spread throughout the city—as well as throughout major trade routes—as travelers came in and out of Corinth. I think it is also important to note the fact that those who had been **slaves** to sexual sins—like the ones becoming more and more prevalent in our society today—were transformed: “And such **were** some of you...” Don’t buy into the lie that people are born that way and can’t change—they **can** change through the miracle of salvation and power of God in their lives.

What about us? Although our reputation may not spread as far as that of the Corinthians, we are “read” of all those that know us. Let that sink in—the people that know you are watching you; they are **reading** you like a letter. Not a new saying by any means, but you and I may be the only Bible an unbeliever reads. You are being read by family and friends, neighbors and co-workers, and people you meet while you are out and about. And don’t forget you are being read by those you share the roads with!

B. We are being read all the time and everywhere

Let that sink in, too! We don’t get to take a break from when we are being “read.” We can’t come home from a hard day of work and tell our kids, ‘Don’t “read” me right now, I’ve had a bad day.’ Or the stay-at home Mom who is being challenged by the “little people” in the house doesn’t get a “snow day” from being read—she is being read whether she wants to be or not. It is not just adults who are being read, though—the same goes for teens. If you claim to be a Christian, you are being read. It doesn’t matter if you are in the classroom, in the halls, on the basketball court, or behind the school, it is still happening.

My guess is that all of us have been somewhere where we never **imagined** we would see someone we knew and—Woa-lah—all of a sudden, there they were! Were **they** embarrassed because of what you saw **them** doing—or were **you** embarrassed because of what they saw **you** doing?

There are no break times; there are no time-outs or vacations; there are no ‘this is off the record’ for being read. We are epistles of Christ being read by all who know us—everywhere and all the time!

We are not just a universally read epistle, though. Secondly--

2. They accurately reflected that they belonged to Christ

Look at verse 3 “Forasmuch as ye are **manifestly declared** to be the epistle of Christ...” What does it mean to be “manifestly declared”? It means to be “clearly demonstrated” or “openly revealed” or “plainly recognized.” So what was it that was obvious—clearly demonstrated—by the Corinthian believers?

It was obvious to all that they were the **epistle of Christ**. Although Paul calls them “our epistles”—our letters of commendation—he did not “write” them, *per se*. They were “manifestly declared”—openly revealed—to be the epistles **of Christ**. Paul “ministered” to them—he served them and taught them—but he did not make them what they were. His emphasis shifts from them being a testimony to his ministry, to them being a testimony of God’s grace. Paul does not tell us **in what ways** they reflected Christ, but he does tell us **why**.

First, they reflected Christ

A. Because of how they were written (v 3b)

--v 3b “...written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God...”

We understand what it means to be written with ink, but what does it mean to be “written with the Spirit of the living God?” Not an easy thing to explain, but I’m going to attempt to do what Paul does here—compare a letter “written with ink” with a life written “with the Spirit of the living God.”

i. A life written by the Spirit is lasting

--Words on a page written with ink can fade. I was telling my son-in-law Andrew just the other day that I had found a couple of pieces of paper where I had written down the fish we had caught on a particular day. I had written down the time, what was caught, and who caught it. I threw it away, though, because it was so faded that I could hardly read it. Besides, Andrew out-fished me 25 to 15 and I didn’t want to keep the evidence!

--The work of the Spirit of God is a lasting work—it does not fade away like ink on paper. When we are born again and become a new creature—a new creation—the Holy Spirit moves inside of us.

Romans 8:9 “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God **dwelt in you**. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.”

I Corinthians 6:19 “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the **Holy Ghost which is in you**, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”

When the Holy Spirit indwells a believer, He comes to stay. He does not come and go like He did in the OT. His work is a permanent work. We can grieve the Holy Spirit and we can quench the Holy Spirit and we can try hard to ignore the Holy Spirit, but the fact remains that if we are really born again, the Holy Spirit **comes in and stays**. Notice the wonderful promise there on your sheet:

Phil 1:6 “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:”

That promise is a blessing to me for a couple of reasons.

1) It is true of me. Regardless of how many times I fail the Lord; regardless of how many times I need to be taught the same lesson; regardless of how slow I think I’m growing—or when I feel I am not growing at all—this promise is a great encouragement. We didn’t begin the work in us—God did!

2) It is also true of other believers. I have family members that I believe are saved, but are serving themselves instead of God. If they are truly saved, God is working on them—He will not let them go and He is not giving up on them. God began the work—and He will finish it. That is His promise and He is able to bring it to pass. What a blessing!

Not only is a life written by the Spirit a lasting one, **ii. A life written by the Spirit is life-changing**

--Words written with ink on a page don't always produce results. Sometimes the words are not understood; sometimes the words are ignored; and sometimes the words give inaccurate information.

There are diets and exercise programs and habit-breaking techniques and self-help books that all claim to be "the answer," but they fail to produce the desired change. The Corinthians **had changed**, however—there lives were different. I Cor 6:11—a verse we looked at earlier—says "**And such were some of you**: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." **II Corinthians 5:17** "Therefore if any man be in Christ, **he is a new creature: old things are passed away**; behold, all things are **become new**."

They had changed and it was obvious that they had changed. Their life reflected that they belonged to Christ. Why? Because they were "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God."

Their lives also reflected Christ...

B. Because of **where** the writing took place (v 3b)

Notice the next phrase in verse 3: "...not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart." The writing of the Spirit of God did not take place on "tables" of stone—it took place in the **heart**. "Tables" here are best understood as "tablets"—not a piece of furniture with four legs and a top. I believe there is an illusion here to the giving of the 10 Commandments.

Exodus 31:18 "And He gave unto Moses, when He had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."

Their lives were different—it was abundantly clear that they belonged to Christ—but not because God wrote on tablets of stone. They could not keep the 10 commandments—no one can—and those commandments showed them they were sinful and in need of forgiveness.

--God the H. S. was writing **on their hearts** when He convicted them of the truth of their sinfulness

--God the H.S. was writing **on their hearts** when He convicted them of the truth that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus' death on the cross—not through baptism or good works

--God the H.S. moved into their hearts when they were saved and made them a new creature in Christ

--And God the H.S. was writing in their hearts when He gave them a new "want to"—and ability—to live in a way that pleased God.

Phil 2:13 "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." God is the one that worked in them and spoke to their heart.

They accurately reflected Christ—there was no mistake as to who they belonged to. What about you? Do you accurately reflect Christ? Is it abundantly clear that you belong Christ—or are you sending a confusing, mixed message? Are people surprised to find out that you are a Christian—or did they figure you were?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

The Corinthians accurately reflected Christ that they were epistles of Christ. It was manifestly declared—it was clearly seen—that they belonged to Him. Does your life show Christ? If not, there are one of two reasons.

1) You aren't saved. Your life is not different because it can't be. You have not trusted Jesus for salvation so you are not born again. Because you are not born again, you do not have the Holy Spirit and He isn't writing on your heart.

2) If you are saved—but your life is not reflecting Christ—you need to stop sowing to the flesh and stop serving self and do what the Corinthians did—focus on Christ. When our focus is on Christ in God's Word, the Holy Spirit will change us from the inside out (II Cor 3:18).