

Series: 2 Corinthians

Title: The Commendation of Able Ministers

Text: 2 Cor 3: 1-6

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**2 Corinthians 3: 1: Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you, or *letters* of commendation from you?**

Our subject is “The Commendation of Able Ministers.” God’s preacher does not commend himself to the Lord’s people nor does he need to. Nor did Paul need a letter of recommendation to the Corinthians or a letter of recommendation from them.

But “*some*” require letters of recommendation and are impressed only with such things. The “*some*” Paul speaks of are the same false preachers he called “*the many who corrupt the word of God*” in chapter 2:17. They were natural Jews, natural sons of Abraham.

2 Corinthians 11: 21: I speak as concerning reproach, [concerning those who reproached him]... 22: Are they Hebrews? so *am* I. Are they Israelites? so *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so *am* I.

These false preachers claimed to believe on Christ. They gave lip service to salvation through faith in Christ but “*corrupted the word of God*” by declaring it necessary that believers keep the law in order to be saved. When men make it a necessity that the believer must do something or he cannot be saved, they preach “*the letter that killeth*” rather than “*the spirit that giveth life*.” That is why Paul declares God’s preachers are “*able ministers of the new testatment, not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life*.”

Since these men were natural-depraved sinners whose hope was their works, their message and methods were the same. Natural religious men do not have the Spirit of God abiding within. So they need outwards signs of works and religious activity. They need sermons preached in “*enticing words of man’s wisdom*.” They require their preachers have “*letters of recommendation*.” It is impressive to natural religion.

When I am flying and someone asks what I do, the first thing they ask is where I went to seminary. They are impressed with a preacher who has letters behind his name: a masters or doctorate from seminary. They want letters of recommendation from men, the more famous the better.

But it is God who commends his preacher to his people in a way only God can do it. The apostle Paul declares,

**2 Corinthians 3: 2: Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: 3: *Forasmuch as ye are* manifestly declared to be the 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 fleshy tables of the heart. 4: And such trust have we through Christ [toward God]: 5: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God; 6: Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.**

**Proposition:** Christ commends his minister to his people by the Holy Spirit writing the gospel in our hearts as his minister preaches Christ.

**GOD MAKES HIS MINISTERS**

**2 Corinthians 3: 6: Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.**

Education is useful for the minister so that you learn to make an outline, to speak and so on. But no seminary has ever made a true minister of God. Most seminaries in our day teach false doctrine and unscriptural methods. I do not know of one I would recommend.

God alone makes his ministers—“*Who also hath made us able ministers.*” Speaking of himself and his fellow ministers, Paul said,

2 Corinthians 5: 18: And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19: To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world [of his elect] unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. 20: Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.

God makes his minister an *able minister* by working effectually in him, making him faithful to Christ and gifting him for the ministry and then putting him in the ministry.

Ephesians 3: 7...I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

1 Timothy 1: 12: And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

Christ made Paul a faithful, able minister of Christ. For that or because of that which Christ did to make him faithful to Christ, Christ imputed him faithful. When Christ imputes anything to us, it is not that he is treating us as if, it is because he has made us so. Christ made Paul faithful. For that, Christ imputed him faithful and put him in the ministry.

1 Peter 4: 11...if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Colossians 1:29: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Now, hear this and get it! God only makes his ministers to be ministers of the new everlasting covenant of grace—“*[God] made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*”

That means God’s preachers have been given spiritual discernment to know Christ, to believe Christ has put an end to the old covenant and has established the everlasting new covenant of grace for each of his people through his blood. Therefore God’s minister, preaches Christ only.

2 Corinthians 4: 13: We having the same spirit of faith, according as it written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe and therefore speak; knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise us up also by Jesus, and shall present us with you....For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward is renewed day by day.

In 1 Corinthians 2, though it is true of all God's saints, Paul is speaking particularly of himself and other faithful ministers of Christ. He said,

1 Corinthians 2: 9: But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 10: But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit:...12: Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

God makes his minister to know we were freely chosen by God, not based on any good or evil in us; freely redeemed out of bondage by Christ; freely given life and faith in Christ; freely given righteousness and sanctification by Christ; freely justified by his blood; freely given all things that pertain to life and godliness. When God makes his minister to *know the things that are freely given to us of God*, God makes his minister preach those things.

1 Corinthians 2: 13: Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14: But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. 15: But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. 16: For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that [the Lord] may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

That means Christ is the only message Christ's ministers preach is Christ and him crucified.

2 Corinthians 4: 5: For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

The only way to preach the new, everlasting covenant of grace is by preaching the Mediator of it: declaring Christ's death perfected his people in righteousness and secured eternal righteousness, eternal life, eternal inheritance for each one he calls to faith in him.

Hebrews 9: 15 :And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance...

Hebrews 10: 9:...He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

Hebrews 10: 14: For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

Christ gave us the Lord's Table to his saints to remember by the wine that "*This is the new covenant in my blood.*" The new covenant promises of God are all yes and amen in Christ. There is no covenant work left for his people to perform. Christ has fulfilled them all for his people.

So first, we see that God makes his ministers and God makes them preach Christ only. So when you hear a man not preaching Christ from all the scriptures according to the scriptures, but preaching do's and don't's and morality, now you know that God did not make that man his minister.

## **GOD COMMENDS HIS PREACHER TO HIS PEOPLE**

**2 Corinthians 3: 4: 1...need we, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you, or from you? 2: Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: 3: *Forasmuch as ye are manifestly***

**declared to be the 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 fleshy tables of the heart.**

Christ writes the letter of recommendation for his preacher by writing the gospel of the everlasting covenant of grace in the hearts of his people making his people our letter of commendation—“*Ye are our epistle written in our hearts,...*” The Corinthians believers were born again of God through Paul’s preaching. So Paul said, “*If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.*” (1 Cor 9: 2)

Christ makes it known he alone made his child his epistle by his preacher--“*[ye are] known and read of all men; Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us,...*” If we want to see what Christ does to openly reveal to all that he has worked effectually in the hearts of his people, we find it in 1 Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 1: 4: Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. 5: For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. 6: And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord,...

Christ makes it known that he had made his child his epistle by making his child a follower of Christ and his people.

1 Thessalonians 1: 6:...having received the word in much affliction,

Christ makes his child receive the word even though we are afflicted by adversaries without and sin within trying to convince us not to believe on Christ.

1 Thessalonians 1: 6:...with joy of the Holy Ghost:

Our natural minds were enmity against God but by creating a new heart within us, Christ makes his child joy in Christ alone by the Holy Ghost.

1 Thessalonians 1: 7: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. 8: For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

Christ makes his child triumphant always by making us a savor of Christ in every place we speak. He makes us give all the glory for all the work to God in Christ!

1 Thessalonians 1: 9: For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

Christ makes his child turn from all our former idols of self and freewill, works religion to serve the true and living God.

1 Thessalonians 1: 10: And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Christ makes his child cease working for salvation and makes us to wait on Christ by faith, knowing Christ has delivered us from the wrath to come. Christ promised in Isaiah’s prophecy that we would know it is Christ speaking in our hearts through his ministers preaching the gospel to us.

Isaiah 52: 6: Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I. 7: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! 8: Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with [Christ] the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.

Christ makes his preacher lift up their voice together with Christ the Voice. And Christ and his preacher shall be in perfect accord declaring the gospel—*seeing eye to eye*. The message of his minister is *Thy God reigneth!*

Nothing about this is natural or in the letter or simply outward in appearance. It is spiritual in the heart by the Spirit of God—*written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy [soft] tables of the [newly created] heart*.

By this effectual work in our hearts, Christ demonstrates the power of the Spirit making our faith stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

## **GOD MAKES US TRUST GOD FOR ALL SUFFICIENCY**

**1 Corinthians 3: 4: And such trust have we through Christ to Godward: 5: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.**

By making his preacher and his people experience the power and grace of God through Christ Jesus—by making us his able ministers, by commending his minister to his people by Christ making his people his epistle—we are made to trust only his power and grace to save through the gospel. It makes us trust God through Christ for all sufficiency in all things rather than trusting ourselves.

This is a rule that always applies. It is the power by which God makes his people receive his mercy that he makes us trust God rather than ourselves so that we preach the truth of Christ even though it offends men. After saying that we trust God through Christ, finding no sufficiency in ourselves, but all sufficiency of God, he picks up with this thought in chapter 4, writing,

**2 Corinthians 4: 1: Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;**

The same manner as we have received mercy—through the power and grace of God—we faint not.

2 Corinthians 4: 2: But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

That is another way of saying that as we preach the gospel of Christ, Christ commends his preacher to his people by making his people a living epistle by writing the gospel on their hearts. Drop to verse 5,

2 Corinthians 4: 5: For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

What makes God's preacher do so? Why do we not trust ourselves for sufficiency? Why do we trust only God through Christ for all sufficiency? It is because we have experienced the power and grace of God ourselves.

2 Corinthians 4: 6: For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Why do find no sufficiency in ourselves but only in God?

2 Corinthians 4: 7: But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

It is Christ who makes the difference in those who preach Christ only. He does so by making his ministers experience his power and grace by making us able ministers of the new covenant. He does so by making his people experience his power and grace by commending his preacher to his people by making his people his epistles. Therefore, since we have received mercy by experiencing the power and grace of God through the preaching of the gospel, we trust God, through Christ, that he will continue to do the same in his lost sheep-- *"And such trust have we through Christ [toward God]"* So, brethren, by believing and preaching the gospel of Christ in spirit and in truth according to the word of God, we declare to all that we are Christ's epistles and that *"Our sufficiency is of God!"*

The false preachers and false churches, by mixing law and grace, are declaring they are not Christ's epistles. They are declaring by the message they preach and believe that they have some sufficiency in themselves.

But by believing and preaching the gospel of Christ according to the scriptures, we declare to all that Christ made us willing to do so—we are his epistles. We declare that all our trust is, not in us, but only in God through Christ! And we declare our sufficiency is not of us but of God alone! Christ made the difference by his effectual work in our hearts!

**Amen!**