

THE EPISTLE OF CHRIST

ALL are familiar with the fact that we have in our Bibles epistles, or letters, by various ones of the Apostles – St. Paul, St. Peter, St. John, St. James, St. Jude. But not many, perhaps, have heard of the Epistle of Christ. St. Paul tells us that it was written in his day. He describes the writing of it, how it was done, and declares that he was one of the instruments used by the Lord in connection with the writing of the Epistle. Here are his words: "Ye are manifestly declared to be the Epistle of Christ, ministered [written] by us; written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart." – 2 Cor. 3:3.

How beautiful and poetical is the thought here expressed! It is a compliment to both the Apostle as the Lord's faithful servant, and also to the Lord's people at Corinth. It is in line with the Apostle's statement elsewhere, "We are God's workmanship." (Ephesians 2:10.) Wherever there is a true Christian – not merely spirit-begotten, but spirit-developed in the character-likeness of the Savior in meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly-kindness and love – we have the evidence of the power of God at work in him to will and to do His good-pleasure, not arbitrarily, but in cooperation with the will of the individual. And wherever there is a Church, an Ecclesia, a class of Bible students who show these evidences of the Lord's Holy Spirit working in them and developing them, we have the Epistle of Christ, declaring and showing forth the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.

In the context, the Apostle gives the same thought in words a little different, declaring the Lord's true people to be living epistles, "known and read of all men." (2 Corinthians 3:2.) Bibles are invaluable, indispensable. So are books that are really helpful in Biblical interpretation; so are hymn books and tracts. All of these

show forth the Lord's praises, and assist in pointing in the right direction those of the world who are feeling after God if haply they might find Him. But the best Epistle – even more valuable than the Bible, as respects reaching the hearts of men – is the life of a true Christian, a New Creature in Christ Jesus, to whom old things are passed away, and all things are become new." – 2 Cor. 5:17.

And yet, in a previous letter from St. Paul this same Church at Corinth was criticized sharply because of its carelessness as respects proper standards of morality. The Apostle assures us, however, that his words of reproof did much good, working in the Church a repentance toward God, and proved to be of lasting benefit to them. Thus in God's providence, He overruled for their good a mistake made by these followers of the Master, by using a faithful and courageous Apostle, who gave the proper rebuke in a proper, loving manner.

THE SECRET OF ST. PAUL'S POWER

What is by inspiration thus declared of the Church at Corinth, we see to be true also respecting the Lord's people today; and we may suppose that it has not been without faithful witnesses, living epistles, throughout the Gospel Age. We are especially interested, however, in conditions today. The Editor and all of the Pilgrims and the Elder Brethren in the Church have in St. Paul a noble example of faithfulness and loyalty. He did not preach himself; he did not preach enticing words **[R5968 : page 301]** of men's wisdom and science, falsely so called. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 1 Timothy 6:20.) Giving himself up to the Lord's service, and seeking not his own glory, but to do the Lord's will, the Apostle became more and more an able and qualified minister, or servant, of the Lord. The Lord used him more and more in the presentation of the glorious Message of God's Love, as revealed in the great Divine Plan of the Ages.

St. Paul's faithfulness is manifest to us in the words, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before [in the promises of God's

Word], I press toward the mark for the Prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13,14.) That was the secret of the Apostle's power. That is the reason why the Lord, by His Holy Spirit, has used him so much and so efficiently in the blessing of the Church since that time – through the streams of Truth which have come down through his Epistles.

What a zeal the Apostle had! Hearken to his words, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16.) This does not signify that the Gospel was preached for fear of being tormented after he would die, but that he felt that he could not be satisfied except when doing all in his power to make known to all who have the "hearing ear" the Message of God's grace centered in Christ Jesus. Thus it was when he was giving his time exclusively to preaching. Thus it was when he was obliged for a time to be a tent-maker to support himself – while preaching evenings, holidays, and at his work. Thus it was that he preached with special liberties while still a prisoner at Rome. Anyhow, anywhere, under God's providence, St. Paul was ready and glad to preach the "good tidings" to all who had hearing ears.

WHY ELDERS SHOULD BE CAREFULLY CHOSEN

This should be the spirit, not only of the Pilgrims, of the Elders of the Church of Christ, but the spirit of every member of it; for in a large sense each one of us is privileged to be a minister, or servant, in writing the Message of God's grace in the hearts of others.

But let us not forget that we shall not know how to write in the hearts of others what we have not already had written in our own hearts. Hence the propriety of great caution in the choosing of Elders – to find those who already have the writing of the Lord in their hearts, and who therefore will be competent assistants, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, for the writing of the Lord's character-likeness in the hearts of the younger brethren.

And what is the Message, what is the Epistle, that is written in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through various agencies? Is it the knowledge of chronology? Is it the unraveling of types and shadows? Is it the cracking of hard theological nuts in respect to differently understood passages of Scripture? Is it the knowledge of the history of the Jews, the history of the world, the history of the Church? Is it the understanding and appreciation of the different Covenants, past, present, and to come? No, it is none of these.

All of these subjects have more or less of value, and are more or less used of the Lord in connection with this writing that is to be done in the hearts of His people. But writing the Epistle of Christ is different – the writing, the tracing of the character-likeness of the Master in the hearts of His people – His meekness, His gentleness, His patience, His long-suffering, His brotherly-kindness, His love, His joy, His peace.

We might have all knowledge respecting chronology and history, might be able to quote every text in the Bible, and to cite it, too; and yet not have the Epistle of Christ written in our hearts. It is the Epistle of which the Apostle Peter says, "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren [idle, inactive] nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"; for knowledge will have its place. [R5968 : page 302] And thus with these characteristics of the Master deeply engraved upon our hearts, we shall be granted an abundant entrance "into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." – 2 Peter 1:8,11.

THREE VALUABLE LESSONS

The three great lessons which will be required of those who will be heirs of the Kingdom are: (1) A proper, thorough *appreciation* of JUSTICE, and a *manifestation* of that appreciation of justice by an endeavor to comply with the requirements of the Golden Rule – to love our neighbor as ourselves. (2) A further lesson is that of LOVE, sympathy, compassion, mercy. However *exacting* we may be

respecting *ourselves*, our own thoughts, words and deeds, we are not to *exact* from others, but be willing to *take* from them whatever they are pleased to *give* – as did our Savior. This will mean (3), suffering with Christ, having *fellowship* in His *sufferings*. It will mean the learning of valuable lessons to fit and qualify us for the work of being kings, priests and judges with our Lord in His coming Kingdom.

St. Paul emphasized the importance of having the Christ-character engraved on our hearts when he wrote that God's predestination is that all who will be of the Church in glory must be copies of His dear Son – must have the Epistle of Christ written in their *hearts*. (Romans 8:28-30.) No matter how imperfect their *bodies*, how imperfect their *attainment of their ideals*, those ideals must be *according to the Divine standard*. And they must be so in sympathy with those ideals as to be glad to *suffer* for their *attainment*.

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