

A Lord's Day Snippet!

Biblical And Southern Studies

H. Rondel Rumburg, ThM, DMin

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1 Chosen not for good in me,
Waked from coming wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Savior's side,
By the Spirit sanctified—
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show
By my love, how much I owe.

2 Oft I walk beneath the cloud,
Dark as midnight's gloomy shroud:
But, when fear is at the height,
Jesus comes, and all is light;
Blessèd Jesus! bid me show
Doubting saints how much I owe.

3 Oft the nights of sorrow reign—
Weeping, sickness, sighing, pain;
But a night Thine anger burns—
Morning comes, and joy returns:
God of comforts! bid me show
To Thy poor how much I owe.

4 When in flowery paths I tread,
Oft by sin I'm captive led;
Oft I fall, but still arise—
Jesus comes—the tempter flies;
Blessèd Jesus! bid me show
Weary sinners all I owe.

Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843)

The Lord's Living Letters

"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men."

2 Corinthians 3:2

Corinth was a wicked place, and Paul came to preach Christ to them. There the Lord owned the ministry of Paul to the hearts of those who were brought to faith. It was true here as everywhere that when the devil begins to lose some of his patrons he retaliates. He begins by bringing in unawares, deceivers and antichrists. These began casting

aspersions and spiritual apparitions to the point of questioning the authenticity of Paul and his ministry. Paul questioned his need to have a letter of commendation like these false prophets, who seemed to flash their creds to look authentic. They were challenging Paul as often as they could get by with it. Paul and those who ministered with him had pointed these Corinthian believers to Christ. He asks, if they need after this period of ministry to present some credentials or letters of commendation!

Paul does not need to present credentials to prove his ministry as authentic because that was what the Lord had already done. His apostolic authority may be challenged by the false prophets at present, but he need not present a letter of reference after the blessings of God had been displayed so clearly on his ministry. No! Paul says, “You (regenerate Corinthians) are our epistle or letter.” Ages ago they had what was called a “palimpsest” which involved skins that had been previously used to record obscenity, the raunchy and other worldly things, but when times were hard these skins were used to record portions of Scripture as they would rub off the old dirty writing and write the eternal good news of salvation in Christ alone. Thus, he is saying our letter of recommendation is the regenerating work of God the Holy Spirit through Christ on those who were dead in trespasses and sins. Those who had been given over to evil hearts have been given new hearts by the eradication of sin through the blood of Christ. Paul said our letter is personified in the saved Corinthians. The saved Corinthians are the authentication of our ministry.

These very ones are “written in our hearts,” said Paul. This phrase could be translated, “having been inscribed or engraved in our hearts.” Paul does not need this written on paper because there is an engraving of them on his heart. He is aware of what God is doing in Corinth and these false prophets do not have a heart for these people who are affixed to his heart. These believers are cherished by the Apostle. These people were “the seal of mine apostleship ... in the Lord” (1 Cor. 9:2). They are “known and read of all men.” The earthly child of God is the Bible that men read and know. Yes, living epistles. “There is not so powerful a sermon in the world, as a consistent Christian life. The eye of the world takes in more than the ear. Christians’ lives are the only religious books the world reads” [JFB]. The transformed lives of the Corinthian converts were on public display as they worshipped and served the Lord. Their lives were an open book read by all men.

These were “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 fleshly tables of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:3). These who were known and read were “manifestly declared or visibly known to be the epistle of Christ.” These epistles of Christ were “ministered by us” said Paul, that is they came to Christ under our ministry. We could say that they were letters of Christ written by the hand of Paul. This epistle was not “written with ink, but

with the Spirit of the living God.” Writing with ink was a norm but only Christ can write with the Spirit of God. Paul is saying this work is supernatural in nature, and proof that he is the instrument in the hand of Christ. Yes, this letter supersedes any letter written in ink. This letter was not engraved on stone—“not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.” This writing was not on tablets of stone but on the living heart softened and renewed by the grace of God. Oh, remember the Lord’s promise, “I will take away the stony heart, and I will give you a heart of flesh” (Ez. 36:26). This was what the Spirit of the living God had been doing in Corinth in spite of the false prophets, for God was acknowledging His servant Paul’s ministry as His own.

Robert Murray McCheyne’s life was hidden with Christ in God, and he had a heart for the people of Dundee, as Jesus who wept over Jerusalem, and as Paul whose heart was set on the believers of Corinth. McCheyne was a “living epistle” himself. Those converted under his ministry agreed that it was not so much what he said as the spirit in which he said it which lured them into the kingdom. Andrew Bonar, in his biography of McCheyne, told how his wife, Mrs. Andrew Bonar, before their marriage, was affected by McCheyne’s presence. It was at a meeting at St. Andrew’s Church, Edinburgh, a few months before McCheyne’s death at twenty-nine years. She noted, “It was neither his matter nor his manner that struck me, it was the impression of his likeness to Christ—a picture so lovely that I felt that I would have given all the world to be as he was!” One of Andrew Bonar’s parishioners was talking to him about McCheyne, and said, “Before he so much as opened his lips, there was something about him that sorely affected men.” Bonar wrote about a number of those converted under McCheyne’s ministry who testified that it was not his words that broke them down; but the fact that he appeared to them to be standing in the immediate presence of the Most High, whilst, when he prayed, he seemed to be looking into the very eyes of God and talking with Him face to face. One woman declared that “When McCheyne spoke of my being alienated from God by my sins, it seemed so terrible that I felt that hell itself would be some relief from the horror of it!” Robert Murray McCheyne was “the epistle of Christ ministered ... (and) written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.”