

# How Are You Being Read?

2 Corinthians 3:1-3

## Intro

When you meet someone new, how long does it take you to size him or her up and come up with your first impression? Most people would say less than a minute, but science proves it's a lot less time than that. Psychologists at Princeton University have found through a series of studies that it only takes people one-tenth of a second to make an initial judgment of someone, primarily based on body language.

I read an interesting article in Psychology Today where a psychologist talked about on how to read people. You already pick up on more body language cues than you're consciously aware of. UCLA research has shown that only 7% of communication is based on the actual words we say. As for the rest, 38% comes from tone of voice and the remaining 55% comes from body language. (Source: Psychology Today, Feb. 26, 2014).

My question then is: How are people reading you? What message do you communicate to people? How do you come across to others?

What persona are you portraying or emanating? Persona means the aspect of your character that is presented to or perceived by others.

How are you being perceived? This is a very important question especially if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. Did you know that as a believer you are a letter? Have you ever thought of yourself as a letter? Have you ever thought of yourself as a living communication? Somebody said that the only Bible some folks will read and see is YOU. The only way that some folks will ever hear about a Saviour who is able to save is through you and me.

Christians are meant to be living letters of Jesus Christ, bearing a message of good news of great joy to the entire world.

The Apostle Paul talks about believers as being letters. Let's look at the passage of Scripture found in 2 Corinthians 3:1-3.

## Background to 2 Corinthians 3

It is unthinkable in our society to present yourself to a prospective employer without a résumé in hand and a list of references at your fingertips. It was much the same in Paul's day. He lived in an equally mobile society that placed similar value on personal achievements and introductory letters. Itinerant preachers or speakers, in particular, were expected to carry letters of reference with them as they traveled from place to place. It was often the only means by which they received hospitality and provisions for the journey ahead.

There were attitudes in the Corinthian church which were hindering the delivery of the message of God. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians rebuked them for their attitudes and indifference. Paul detected strife, pride, and a certain tolerance of the church members regarding evil. In essence he said to them, *"Your indifferent attitude toward these evil things in your church is hindering your delivery of God's message. Your attitudes are keeping you from showing progress in the Christian faith. You are only spiritual babies in the Christian life. You should have grown more than that. You should have matured in the faith, to the extent that the people in your circle of influence might see that you are really Christian through and through, that you are committed to Christ, and that you intend to deliver His message."*

Christianity will never be very important to us until we willingly allow the Spirit of God to write the script for our lives.

The Apostle Paul had visited Corinth and some challenged him to produce letters of commendation from the leaders of the Church. With justifiable indignation he cries: *“Why should I carry letters, when my converts, given me by the Lord, are circulating everywhere, with the attesting signature of Christ upon them? Surely they are a sufficient guarantee and proof that I have been commissioned and sent by the Lord Himself?”*

Paul gave utterance to a true and striking description of a Christian disciple. He or she is an autograph letter, the Author and Writer is the Lord Himself – *“You are a letter from Christ”* (verse 3). The ink is *“the Spirit of the Living God”* (verse 3). The pen is the teacher or preacher of the Gospel – *“the result of our ministry”* (verse 3). The Material is the heart and life – *“not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts”* (verse 3).

What is a letter and what does it do?

I want to talk about 3 things what a letter is and does.

### **1. A Letter Conveys a Message**

First of all a letter is written to convey a message.

God has designed every believer to be a deliverer of good news. It is the news that *‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life’* (John 3:16).

We were designed to convey the heart and mind of Christ to people. To tell them that there is a reality in serving a true and living God. Let this mind be in you that is also in Christ Jesus. People may refuse to listen to the gospel message but they cannot ignore your testimony of a changed life.

The message you and I carry is an urgent message. Telling somebody that the price of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. The message that we carry is a message of life and hope.

Every Christian is an advertisement for Christianity. We judge a store by the quality of goods it sells. We judge a craftsman on his quality of work. We judge a Church by the kind of Christians it produces. Therefore the world judges Christ by His followers!

### **2. A Letter is to be Read**

Secondly, a letter is written to be read. Every Christian should let his or her faith be visible before the world. Matthew 5:14, 16 says, *“You are the light of the world... Let your light so shine that men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”* Those who are Christians in name only are simply forged documents designed to deceive and mislead.

#### **Illustration**

It was said that Alexander the Great would have a tribunal once in awhile during his war campaigns. Alexander would have all the soldiers who were cowards during the battle to be prosecuted before him. One time there was one particular soldier who he cross examined. He asked the soldier his name. The soldier whispered, “Alexander.” Alexander got up from his chair and asked him again for his name. The soldier replied in a louder voice, “Alexander, sir!” At that moment Alexander’s eyes fixed on the soldier and pointed his finger directly at him and said, “Young man, change your name or change your conduct!”

At times we may say we are Christian but we don’t act like it. Our conduct does not follow our profession of faith.

*“Known and read by everybody”* (verse 2). Is your life open to examination? If people read your life, what story would it tell?

Our life and our conversation ought to be a letter to make known Christ's presence in our lives. We ought to honour the Lord at all times and glorify him in our practical living. The bad places we used to go, we ought not to want to go there. The bad things we used to do, we ought not to want to do them. Ways we used to act we ought not to act like that. There are many whom we associate with everyday who will never read the Bible. Their only hope of salvation is that they may read or hear the living letter of your life and my life.

### Illustration

The world knows how British journalist Henry Stanley went to Africa to find the famed missionary, Dr. David Livingstone. Stanley's greeting, "*Dr. Livingstone, I presume?*" is world famous, but few know the rest of the story. After the two had been together for some time, Stanley saw what Livingstone endured and he wrote, "*I went to Africa as prejudiced as the biggest atheist in London. But there came for me a long time for reflection. I saw this solitary old man there and asked myself, 'How on earth does he stop here – is he cracked, or what? What is it that inspires him so?' For months after we met I found myself wondering at the old man carrying out all that was said in the Bible – 'Leave all things and follow Me.' But little by little his sympathy for others became contagious; my sympathy was aroused; seeing his piety, his gentleness, his zeal, his earnestness, and how he went about his business, I was converted by him.*"

### 3. A Letter Should be Legible

Not only is a letter written to be read, but it should be legible.

Now, we all like a letter that is legible. A letter that is not legible is very difficult to read. Have you ever received a letter like that?

### Story

A British missionary in Angola wrote a note of gratitude in Portuguese to a woman who had given her a gift. Her handwriting was not very legible and also her Portuguese was at a beginner's level. What the woman deciphered from the missionary's note was this, "*Thank you much for the gift, it was very much garbage.*" What the missionary meant to say was that it was very much expensive. The word for expensive is *luxo* and garbage is *lixo*.

As Christians our message becomes illegible when we live contradictory lives. Too many times, people cannot hear what we are saying for they are looking at what we are doing. We live one way when at church and another way at home. We can sing and shout on Sunday but on Monday through Saturday we use filthy language and treat people badly. We live one way around our church family and another way around others. When our lives are inconsistent we send mixed messages to an already confused world.

May the world see Christ in our demeanor, our conduct, our attitude and our lifestyle. May they see Christ in all that we say and do?

### Illustration

Habitat for Humanity started officially in 1976 but unofficially when founder Millard Fuller went to Zaire with a church group to build not-for-profit houses in 1968. With a beginning under-girded with little except prayer and vision for what God could do, Habitat has grown into one of the largest home builder's organization of North America.

Fuller describes Habitat as an "alive, dynamic, Christ-centered movement" that welcomes Christians and non-Christians to participate in building houses for the poor.

Fuller takes special delight when people listen to the message behind the sweat, nails and saws.

Recently, he returned to the sight of a Jimmy Carter Work Project in Charlotte, N.C. He spotted a 5 year-old boy playing in the yard of the house that Carter had helped build. After complimenting the

boy on his beautiful home, he asked him who built it, expecting to hear the boy say, “*Jimmy Carter.*” Instead, the boy said, “*Jesus built my house.*” I wish that could be the way we worked. Instead of people seeing us do the work, they would see Jesus.

Here in 2 Corinthians 3:3 we read that there was a letter, a living letter in transformed lives, inscribed by the Apostle but authored by Christ. That's the only letter he needed. Paul says, “*Written not with ink.*” Ink fades, ink is silent, ink is dead, and it just sits there on a page fading.

Words written in ink are silent. Anyone can write a letter with ink. Only Christ can write a letter, look at verse 3, with the Holy Spirit. He calls Him, “*The Spirit of the living God.*” Paul says my letter isn't written with ink on a piece of parchment, it isn't silent, it isn't just a piece of dead parchment with ink on it, my letter is alive, and it's alive in you by the Spirit of the Living God. My letter was written not with ink but with divine supernatural power by the Holy Spirit.

### **Conclusion**

The only Gospel message that the world will read is a Gospel message “*written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts*” (2 Corinthians 3.3). In us Christ is the Message emanating to the rest of the world.

In John 13:35 Jesus said, “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*” The reason the world is not convinced is that Christianity has become just religious talk. Christ's message was a way of life, a way of love.

Jesus' life revealed the Father. Does our life reveal the Son? We need to examine our love for each other. If that is not going on, the message is dark.

In a family, the first Gospel message is the love between Christian parents. In a community, the first Gospel message is the love between Christian brothers and sisters.

You are writing a Gospel, a chapter every day  
By the deeds that you do and the words that you say.  
Men read what you write, whether faithful or true.  
Just what is the gospel according to you?

How are people reading you?

God doesn't Facebook, tweeter or tweet. He posts people, people who are true to him.

YOU ARE A LETTER FROM CHRIST.