

You Are His Epistle

by Robert Ketcham

You are the epistle of Christ, and you are the only Christ that the unsaved world will ever see until they face him face to face at the great white throne judgment.

Duration: 36:46

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 3:3, Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 3:17, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Christ Likeness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of believers being the message of Christ to the world. He uses an anecdote about a man who received the wrong order at a restaurant but accepted it with a smile, illustrating how Christ can be seen through our actions. The preacher explains that Christ accomplishes this by purchasing our bodies and making us His message to the lost. He emphasizes that believers no longer have the right to make their own decisions, but should allow Christ to direct their steps and use them as His instruments. The sermon concludes with a reminder that everything we are in heaven is in Jesus Christ.

Transcript

Second Corinthians 3-3, ye are manifestly declared to be the epistles of Christ. Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistles of Christ. Now, before we look at that, I'd like to preface those remarks with this observation.

When I say to you this morning that there never has been a time in the history of the Christian Church when real, stalwart, sound, solid, sensible Christian living is more important than it is today, that sounds trite. You've heard it a thousand times, you're going to hear it again. You've already heard it now one thousand and one.

But if I can somehow these days, together with you, take that idea that we are living in a time of such crisis and danger and confusion as has never been known in the history of the Christian Church, which in turn calls for a new brand of Christians, young men and young women as well as old men and old women, who are realizing and will realize that it is a serious business to be a Christian. The Christian life is not some little Sunday school picnic or a pleasant canoe trip up a shaded stream. It may have been that at one time, but no longer.

The Christian life now is a battle to the death. Every day and every hour of every day, the issues of this battle that is closing in on us in the end time is coming closer and closer and impinging more heavily upon every single individual Christian than it has ever done before. And I'm still thinking of the dark ages.

For our enemy is no longer on the outside pressing in, our enemy is on the inside working from the inside, using our vernacular, using our words and putting new meaning into them. And the crisis of the hour demands a new brand, men and women who will take this business of being Christians seriously. Now I know, I know we're all Christians and all that.

But my friend, we're going to have to shake ourselves together and shake ourselves up and wake ourselves up to the fact that the kind of Christians, that is, not any better Christians, I don't mean that in the sense of their relationship to the Lord, but your fathers and your grandfathers and grandmothers were not facing the crisis that you're facing. When I entered the ministry 51 years ago, if you meant a modernist, you had 40 miles on either side of him to get around him. You didn't have to fuss with him, he was just an isolated guy.

That's no longer true. The corridor has narrowed, and you face them every time you turn around, all shades and brands of them, and when you meet them now, you youngsters meet them now, there is no longer any room to get around them. You have to face them head on and eliminate them or be eliminated, not one or the other.

You have to face their false philosophies and theories and theologies and doctrines and enter into combat with them and stand your ground without giving an inch. And that's where we are. Now, back to the text.

We are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ. We need to get a definition or two straightened out here. First of all, what is an epistle? Some years ago, up in Michigan, I was talking to about 50 youngsters, I suppose anywhere from 8 to 10 years of age, maybe some of them younger than that, and I was having to use the word epistle.

And so I stopped and I said, does anyone here know what an epistle is? Is there anyone who can tell me what an epistle is? The little fellow shot up his hand and I said, yes sir, what is an epistle? And he stood up and squared his shoulders and he said, Dr. Ketchum, an epistle is the wife of an apostle. Well, that will hardly do, but, well, an epistle is a letter, that's all it is. Now, another question we need to get clear, why letters? Why do people write letters? What's the purpose of a letter? Well, here's a man over here who wants to get a specific, definite message to a man over here.

They're not together, they're separated, they're far apart. And this man has a message that must be gotten to this man over here, so he writes a letter. That's the purpose of a letter, to convey a message to someone who is not with you.

The only place that I ever saw people writing letters to people who were sitting right next to them was in my balconies of some of my churches where I preach. And once in a while out of the corner of my eye I could see it going on in my choir, too. But where people are possessed of all their senses and their right minds, they do not write letters to someone sitting right next to them.

It's someone who is far off, and a message must be gotten to them. That's the purpose of a letter. Now then, the word of God says that you are the letters of Christ.

Jesus Christ has a message that he wants to get to this sinner over here who is far off from him, separated from him, alienated from him, no line of communication, whatever, it's all down, it's dead. Adam shot it to death way back there in the garden and pulled the wires down and they've never been put up. There is no communication whatsoever between the mind and spirit of a lost man and the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ.

They're far into each other, alienated from each other, far removed from each other. But the Lord Jesus Christ has a message that he wants to get to this fellow over here, that if he'll do certain things, communications can be set up again, the lines can be rebuilt, and he can have converse and communion and fellowship with a holy God. He doesn't have to walk out there in the thralldom and the misery of sin.

He doesn't have to walk out there in the darkness of midnight. He doesn't have to keep his face turned toward the blazing pits of an endless hell. The Lord Jesus Christ has a message that he wants to get to that fellow, that if he'll believe on what he did for him on the cross, that communications will be reestablished, he'll be born anew and again, and he'll have the very nature of Christ imparted and imputed to him, and that communications can be set up, and he can have his face set toward heaven.

That's the message, that's the letter that Jesus Christ wants to get to this fellow over here, and the text says that you're it. Now, don't read this optically correct and mentally wrong. This doesn't say that you are manifestly declared to be a messenger boy or a messenger girl carrying a letter.

That's not what it says. What it says is that you are the letter! You are manifestly declared to be the letter. Now, that puts a little different slant on it and ties it down a little more tightly to our conduct and our deportment.

You begin to see now where the spotlight is going to focus, don't you, on this matter of the high cost of writing papers. You're it. You are the paper that Jesus Christ writes his message on, and you're it! Now, let's get at it from this angle there.

I know of nothing in all of my 54 years of being a Christian that shocked me so and rocked than when I discovered this, that the only Christ that the unsaved world will ever see until they face him face to face at the great white throne judgment, the only Christ that this world will ever see is the Christ they see in you. You want to challenge that? Better not, for I'll come back and challenge you to show me one place on the face of this ball of dirt. Show me one place anywhere where Jesus Christ can be seen except in the lives of those who claim to have him living within.

The Lord Jesus Christ in his corporeal body and presently up there at the right hand of the Father, maintaining you and me in that place of acceptance and acceptability. But, he has a message that he wants to get to a lost world, and you're it! You go out and you say to the unsaved world, I am a Christian, that means Christ in, and the world immediately has a right then to judge Jesus Christ by what they see in you. There is no other place, I want to drive this home and quench it a dozen times, there is no other place on this planet where an unsaved person can see Jesus Christ except as they see him in you.

Now I want to ask you, what kind of a Christ do they see when they look at you? This isn't true, I trust here in a crowd of students like this, but out in an ordinary church I could say, and I'm not so sure, but it might strike fairly close to a target, even here. You say to somebody, I'm a Christian, and if this was an ordinary congregation I would say, and then they see you smoking the same brand they smoke. They see you reading the same Pope literature that they read.

They see you in your home on your music rack, the same jazzy stuff that they've got in their house. They go to the movie and someone comes in and sits down in the chair and the side of them in the dark, and when the lights come on they turn and there are you! There you sit. And they say this, well, so that's a Christian, so that's Christ.

Now I don't see why I should take on the added expense of church duty. There's no difference between this person who says that they're a Christian and myself who's not a Christian. No difference.

They say what I say, they do what I do, they sing what I sing, they read what I read, they go to the same movies I go to, they do exactly the same things I do. Why in the wide world do the foolish folks call themselves Christians and join a church and then have to pay for the upkeep of it? I'm not going to do it. Now hear me, let's stop this business of jumping with hobnail shoes on the unsaved around this world because they do not accept the message of salvation.

Let's stop that kind of business and turn the spotlight in on ourselves and see whether or not the Christ that we have presented to them is attractive enough to them to give them the idea that they should consider it. You are it. Paul said, I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live.

Yet not I, no, no, not I, but what? Christ lives where? In me. In Philippians he declares, for me to live is Christ. Now, I do not believe that we can exhaust the meaning of that phrase by saying that that applies to his passion, to his objective.

He just wants to live for Christ all the time. For me to live is Christ, just to be Christ-centered and all the rest of it. That's no doubt there.

But I think I am within limits of conservative exegesis when I say that I think it means that I exist also. For me to live, for me to call myself a Christian and live as a professed Christian, for me to live is Christ to somebody. The world has no other place that they can go to discover who Christ is and what Christ is, only as they look at you.

Only you say, they've got the Bible, they can read it. Wait a minute, they do not have the Bible. You have it, the world doesn't.

You want to challenge that one? Better not. For the same apostle whom I'm quoting in this text says that the unsaved man cannot understand this Bible, that he knows nothing about it. It's all foolishness to him.

The things of a man, the spirit of a man knows. And the things of God, the spirit of God knows. And the man who does not have the spirit of God cannot know or understand the things of God.

This book is a closed book to an unsaved man. This book is put in your hand now as a saved person who heard somebody tell you about it and you believed it. And now this book is put into your hands and you in turn are to read this book and study this book and find out what a Christian really is and be that so that this unsaved man out here who cannot understand it through this book, he sure can understand it through you.

You are the epistle. You are the letter of Christ, not simply a letter bearer. You're it.

What kind of a Christ do men see in you? What kind of a Christ does your father and mother see in you? What kind of a Christ do your brothers and sisters see in you? What kind of a Christ do your schoolmates see in you? And believe you me, they're watching. Sometimes the most simple little thing will spell Christ

to somebody. A friend of mine was taking dinner with a friend of his and his friend had ordered filet mignon steak and when it came, the waiter all flummy diddled up and what have you, it was filet of soul and his friend, this friend of mine wanted the waiter to take it back and change it and his friend said, no, no, it's all right, that's all right, I know.

I ordered the other, but this is okay, this is okay, let's forget it and move on. And the next day he said to his friend, he said, I learned a lesson from you yesterday. He said, I saw Christ in your reaction to that boo-boo that that waiter pulled.

He said, I know 25 men that would have had a scene in that restaurant. You see, dear friend, you never know, you never know who is watching you and what they're looking for, but that man who sat at that table and ordered this steak and got fish instead, accepted it with a smile and wouldn't allow it to be corrected, just went on and ate it as though that's what he had originally ordered. That was Christ to somebody.

Now, how is Christ, how does Christ implement this business of being the message, making you the message to some lost person? How does he do it? Well, he does it, first of all, by the purchase of your body. The purchase of your body, 1 Corinthians 6, 19 and 20, what know you not that you're not your own? You are bought with a price, therefore glorify God where? Class where? In your what? Body. Now, let's not get that all up here in the air, too.

Let's bring it down, your body, your body, your body, that's what I'm talking about, that thing that you got up out of bed this morning and washed it up and dialed it up and fixed it up and fluked it up and scented it up and all the rest of it, and took it down to the breakfast table and stoked it, and you bought it here now and doubled it up in a letter Z and it's sitting in those seats, that's the thing I'm talking about. Jesus Christ bought your body and he paid the same awful price for your carcass that he paid for the fellow or the fellowess who lives inside it. You see, there is a difference between you and your body.

You say, I saw Dr. Ketchum, you never saw me in your life, I've never seen you. We see the houses that we live in. You're down there looking up at me through a couple of windows and you see me.

I'm up here looking down at you, one window is completely busted, the other isn't much good, but I can still see a little of you. I know you're down in there, but that's not your body. So, the old tombstone in England had it right when it said, here lies the body of William Pease.

Pease isn't here, this is only his pod. Pease has shelled out and gone home to God. Well, the pod's going one of these days too, that's what I'm interested in right now.

What in the wide world did Jesus Christ want of your body? Wouldn't it be enough just to save your soul, that ego, that thing that has all the senses and what have you in it, and take it to heaven? Wouldn't that be enough? What does he want of that body of yours? He wants it for writing paper. And he bought at awful cost the great standing forest of countless millions of pulpwood trees, and you're one of them. Beginning tomorrow, we'll see how that tree is transformed from a tree to a piece of writing paper.

But we're dealing now with the purchase of Christ. He bought your bodies because that's the only way that he can express himself is through your body. He lives in it for the express purpose of living his life out through it.

And if he's not in it, then he can't express himself. See, my hand keeps going that-a-way because I, Bob Ketchum is down in here and he says go that-a-way. Now, one of these days, Bob Ketchum is going to

move out.

And that hand isn't going to go that-a-way anymore. I hope, I hope, I hope. It'll be up here on my breast with a lily in it.

Let me ask you, what could you do without a body? Think that one, sir. There isn't a woman in this auditorium this morning that could whip up a mess of pancakes or biscuits tomorrow morning, even with the help of Betty Crocker, if you didn't have a body. You couldn't shovel Hoover over the rug if you didn't have a body.

There isn't a man here that could saw a boar to drive a nail if he didn't have a body. We would never have known of a Gallicurchie or a Caruso had they not been possessed of a body. We would never have known of a Paderewski had he not had a body.

You have to have a body through which you can express your identity, your personality, and your presence. When I was a pastor, they'd meet them on the street Monday morning. They'd say, well, I was sorry I couldn't be there yesterday, Dr., but I was there in spirit.

Bud, if you're not going to bring your body, leave your spirit at home. I don't want a bunch of ghosts rolling around under my seats. I want them sitting up where I can see them and know what they're doing.

Hear me. Hear me. You are absolutely helpless to make yourself known or your presence felt without a body.

Now, I'm convinced that I'm not clear off in left field when I say that Jesus Christ in this dispensation is just as helpless without a body as you would be. His corporeal body is up there, but he must have a body down here in which he can live and through which he can express himself, and that's why he brought you. And that body sitting there in that seat this morning no longer belongs to you.

You have no more right to that body of yours than I would have to go down here on Main Street and walk into a store or a house and say, this belongs to me. Somebody bought that and paid for it, not I didn't. And Jesus Christ bought your body.

And he bought it for one great purpose, that he could have a body, millions of them, in which he could live and take full possession of it and dress it so it'll be a witness to him. Put a vocabulary in its vocal organs that will be a witness to him. Put feet on it that will go in paths of righteousness and not worldliness.

Put hands on the things that will do his bidding. Jesus Christ has no feet to go anywhere in this world without yours. He must have feet by which he can tread the paths of the foreign fields.

He must have hands that can minister to the needy and the lost around him. He must have vocal organs that he can use to bring the message of salvation and comfort and hope and cheer to those all around us. You have no authority over your body, what you put on it to wear, what kind of clothes you buy, what kind of cars you buy, what kind of houses you live in, put it in to live, where you put it to work, it's none of your business.

That's his. That's his. And this is what I mean by saying that we've come to a day when Christians have got to wake up and know that being a Christian isn't just a kind of a pleasant tour through a foreign world with nice little shady spots where you can take time off to go sightseeing and all the rest of it.

No, no, no. We have come to a day now in the development of the purposes and the counsels of God where young men and young women and old ones too have got to take themselves in hand and understand that they are bought with a price, their bodies belong to Jesus Christ and they are no longer your own. You have no right to direct your steps and say, I'll do this or I'll do that, I'll say this or I'll say that, I'll sing this or I'll sing that.

You have no right to say that anymore, that's for him to say. I'll be this or I'll be that, I'll marry that girl or I'll marry that fellow, that's not for you to say anymore, that's for him to say. And he bought you that he might make writing paper out of you so that his message, you will be his message to a poor, lost, sin-ridden, hell-bound world.

So much for sort of a preliminary observation. We will bring it down a little closer to where we live in the next four mornings together All I want you to see this morning is this one further thought, and we shall be through. This moderator this morning said I could half to 45, the other one the other morning told me I could only half to 40, so I'm going to get a raise in salary for the doctor.

We have a lot to say and sing about. All we are in heaven is in Jesus Christ, right? Well, is it right or wrong? All we are in heaven is in Jesus Christ, amen? Great day in the morning. Is there a law against saying amen here? All we are in heaven before the Father's face is in Jesus Christ, amen? Well, if that's true, my friend, if all I am in heaven before the Father's face is in Jesus Christ, let's turn it around and face it.

All Jesus Christ is in this world before the face of unsafe people is in me. You show me any other place where they can see Christ except in Christendom. That kind of rocks your back on your heels a little bit, doesn't it? Jesus Christ is up there presenting our case to the Father, our Advocate, while we are down here presenting His case to a lost world.

Now, I want to ask you this one question, and then we'll be dismissed. If Jesus Christ hasn't been doing a better job presenting your case to the Father in the last 30 days than you have of presenting Jesus Christ to the world around you, how secure would you be? If Jesus Christ hasn't done a better job on His end of the representation than you have on your end of representation, how far do you think you'd get in heaven? We're not on a summer trip, my friend. This is desperately serious business.

For me to live is Christ to somebody. May God help me not to distort His image. Our Father, solemnize our hearts and our minds this morning.

Bring us down to earth with a thud. Get us down out of the clouds of fantasy and hop, skip, and jump. And pay time and realize that we have the most serious and tremendous job in the universe.

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