

2 Corinthians 3:1–6

¹ Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?

² You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;

³ clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

⁴ And we have such trust through Christ toward God.

⁵ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

⁶ who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Who Is Sufficient? 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

INTRO:

The anteroom to the first paragraph of **2 Corinthians 3** is the question of **2 Corinthians 2:16**. *“Who is sufficient for these things?”* Paul’s answered his question in **2 Corinthians 3:1-6**. His answer has two parts.

I. The Negative Assertion (3:1-3)

II. The Positive Reality (2:4-6)

I. The Negative Assertion (3:1-3)

2 Corinthians 3:1-3 *“Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.”*

A. After explaining how the Lord is always glorified in our efforts in evangelism, Paul asks the rhetorical question that led into this discussion in **2:16**. He asked: *“Who is sufficient for these things?”* He then defined his values in proclaiming the Word of God. He did not make merchandise of the Word. You can almost hear his detractors howling in the background as someone read this epistle in Corinth, so Paul continued with what we read in **3:1-3**.

B. *“Am I bragging about God’s work?”* Paul asks. The two questions Paul asks here expect the answer, “no.” No, I am not patting myself on the back again. No, we do not need to present letters of commendation or recommendation to you or from you?

1. You Corinthians, are yourselves living letters demonstrating God's hand on our ministry. The changed lives of the Corinthians themselves were evidence of God's blessing on Paul.

2. The evidence that Paul was apostle was clear because the Corinthian church existed and God had worked in their hearts. The evident work of God in the church is the presence of lives changed by the Gospel.

B. What kind of evidence was there to prove that God had used Paul to work in their hearts and lives? In his first letter Paul told us in the introduction.

1 Corinthians 1:4–8 *“I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

C. Paul was not bragging, rather he was making an important point. He did not change them. Christ did.

v.3 *“Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart”*

Paul is saying in different words the same thing he wrote before in his first letter.

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 *“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.”*

II. The Positive Reality (2:4-6)

2 Corinthians 3:4-6 *“And we have such confidence through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”*

A. Who is sufficient for the task of proclaiming the Gospel to spiritually dead people and see God resurrect them to new life in Christ? Paul answers his confidence is not in himself. It is in Christ. He did not think he was sufficient in himself. Like Paul, our sufficiency is simply that we are tools in God's hands.

B. Two texts come to mind. First, in **John 15:5** when the Lord Jesus spoke about the vine and the branches, He said,

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

Sometimes the most difficult thing we need to understand is that we cannot do it ourselves and not with the help of the Lord.

C. The second text is **Philippians 4:12-13**.

“I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

If we can live contentedly through the power of Christ, we can do anything.

D. The sufficiency Paul wrote about was the sufficiency to be servants and proclaimers of the new covenant. He drew a contrast between the letter and the Spirit. He will launch into a discussion of a contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant and this verse is a gate to that discussion. We will wait until next time to discuss this phrase.

Meanwhile what do we take from this?

1. We are not able to do the ministry in our strength alone. The presenting of the Gospel is a supernatural business. It is not just learning a slick sales presentation and several answers to possible objections. God the Holy Spirit must work in the heart and the life must be changed for salvation to take place.

2. Because God work in us and through us, we are never sufficient of ourselves to do anything of eternal value. The Lord must act in and through us.