

"Certified Tools Of God"

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[0 : 0 0] spending so little time in one book the uh in one chapter the first chapter took me seven sermons to get through it was four sermons for the second chapter we'll see how many it takes for the third i hope we don't get too fast because there's lots of wonderful truths for us to take our time looking through there's a saying that you've probably heard it's often said out there in the world that the proof is in the pudding i like sayings different expressions and idioms and i also enjoy trying to figure out where they come from looking up the histories of them i find that just interesting i like to know where they they come from so with this saying i thought of it in regards to the passage and i did a little bit of research and i found out that there's an older form of the saying that's a little bit longer and it helps us to understand the point of the saying the proof of the pudding is in the eating this helps us understand the saying a bit more that that the way you tell if something is really good is not just by looking at it but by tasting it you know anyone can make something that looks nice but it's when you put it in your mouth does it actually taste good that matters this is a a good example of what paul's trying to do in the passage he's trying to prove to them or he's highlighting to them that they have tasted goodness and that they should be clear that it is good because they have the proof right there in their stomachs as it were the uh the proof of pudding goodness is not in how good the recipe is or recommendations for other people or in the ingredients that were put in it but in tasting it itself and so paul answers the question of how do you tell an apostle or a teacher is worthy of regard worthy of attention is it by looking on his external traits or is it by experiencing his love and care and the benefits of his work in your life obviously the argument is is the latter that if you want to regard and give someone your trust the best proof that they are worthy of that is by first-hand experience of their conduct of their character of their love and of their teaching so god is not concerned with the the external appearances but internal truths so when it comes to the teachers of his word when it comes to christians we should not first and foremost be concerned with external appearances the best christians are not the ones who have the nicest clothes or the cleanest haircuts or the best cars but are the people who internally have been shaped and marked by god's truth if you just look around and read some of the news it will not be hard to find people who look good on the outside and looked good on the outside for decades but were rotten inside i think about the unfortunate story of a man named ravi zacharias who was the head of a large ministry if you listen to him he sounded like a real bible man like he really loved the word of god and loved people but unfortunately after his death we found out that he was abusing women

i don't say this because i want you to walk around being suspicious of everyone you meet that they might secretly be rotten to the core but i say it because this passage helps us understand that the people we should trust most are the people who we know the people who we see loving well and the people who show clear signs of being used by god this is the same argument that paul makes that the corinthians who trust him that they have seen him personally that they have felt his love and that there have been clear signs that he has been used by god to bring good into their lives those are the people who are more trustworthy and we should go to those standards before we run to worldly standards the church at corinth is tempted to reject paul and this is his answer that part of his response to that his instruction to teach them rightly in chapter 3 starting in verse 1 do we begin again to commend ourselves or do we need as some others epistles or letters 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 when we had studied the last chapter at the end of it we read that that paul comparison of paul to others he says in verse 17 of chapter 2 for we are not as so many peddling the word of god but as of sincerity but as of from god we speak in the sight of god in christ paul sees fit to clarify that his comparison to other people is not an attempt to prove that he is better it is not an attempt to prove to the corinthians that they should trust in him but in fact paul here clarifies that what he is doing is highlighting to them that he has already proven himself and they should know the goodness of his ministry so paul in this chapter in chapter 3 is going to be discussing where the evidence of his authority comes from where does his authority as an apostle find its proof and he opens this up with a discussion of two questions or with two questions so point number one paul's questions paul asks these two questions at the start of verse 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 it should be plain to the church in corinth that the answer to these questions is no that paul is not trying to commend himself to them you know as if he ought to prove that the corinthians need to regard him as if he has not proven himself already the answer is clear paul is not trying to prove himself to the church and so then he continues

to the second question or do we need as some others epistles of commendation epistles just means letters or letters of commendation from you this question is meant to have the natural response of no you have no need of those there's a a sense of ridiculousness that paul is trying to draw out of the question that it would be crazy for them to think that paul needs to prove himself to them to meet some sort of standard we'll get later on into why paul doesn't need to prove himself into the details of that but i want to take a moment and think about what was in the hearts of the corinthians that paul needed to write this to them the corinthian church as we've touched on briefly we're tempted to disregard paul because his life looked weak or looked poor or lowly see paul was often chased out of towns often with very little money or clothing shipwreck there's many different things in paul's life that don't look like a conquering hero but look like a defeated vagrant oftentimes he was sick or infirm and his conduct among them was not proud but humble he made himself lowly when he was with the the corinthian church if i remember correctly he didn't even ask for payment from them which seems to give to the corinthian church this idea of an amateur and so because of these weaknesses and paul's outward external appearance the corinthian church had often debated losing any focus on paul and focusing on other people who were coming by to teach them so paul here is wondering why he would need to prove himself to them and he is trying to teach them not to judge by external appearances but to judge by the heart by truth because if they judge paul by external appearances they will toss him out and choose worse things and if they were judging by the heart paul's point that we'll get to is they would see what good paul has already done for them and how worthwhile regard for him and his teachings has been so i want to think for a minute how are we picking the people that we will talk to and spend time with do we look for people who are appealing in worldly ways who if i'm just going with my flesh i'll naturally gravitate to is it only people like me people of similar ages or races or similar amounts of money similar classes do i look at certain people and say no i don't want to be around them sometimes we're doing that because we're in the flesh judging by external circumstances sometimes we're we're letting things that have very little to do with what actually matters stop us from dealing with people based on what's in their heart so when you're picking those to put your trust into and to spend time with look for people who show their care like paul

does whose life and conduct are great examples of a heart of love don't prioritize the external things but look for people who who show care in the little ways anyone can be can do the flashy thing but in my experience the people who really love they care enough to do the unseen things the quiet things that are hard to notice if you're not paying attention so look at your relationships and prioritize the people who even if they aren't outwardly impressive their hearts are full of christ like love that's the the proof that's in the pudding in how they care for other people and how they live i might be able to to look good up here to you all preaching and might look that i'm a a godly man but i'm telling you that you won't know for sure unless you interact with me personally you see how i treat you and how i handle different circumstances a a person who has no love for you can get up here and like looking good and preach to you but the two true people you should have regard for will show their love for you in the finer details not just when it looks really good to do so and be slow to discount anyone because of their appearance there are so many people that i have seen be ignored and disregarded because they don't look appealing to to us in our natural states and most of those people who i've seen be ignored are some of the sweetest most wonderful people that i have met some of them do have rough edges you know if anyone's interacted with homeschooled children you know that they can be awkward sometimes but they they might have just some of the most wonderful hearts that you've ever met so be careful of judging by the the outside i i actually know a a bigger older lady who many people look at and avoid they have very little interest in talking to her but she is one of the sweetest christians i've ever met she's one of the the most wonderful believers i know and i'm impressed by her faith whenever i talk to her she has all sorts of issues between health conditions and strife in her family and financial struggles but in every time i get up to her talk to her she doesn't rush to talk about the stuff going on in her life but she asks me how i'm doing and tries to press for information about my life and still has joy despite all the things she goes to and if you judge by the outside you will miss out on a precious sister right there i want you to know also that our savior did not look appealing to worldly eyes isaiah 53 which is a passage that prophesies about christ has some beautiful truths that highlight how jesus did not look strong or mighty or appealing during his time on earth isaiah 53 2 through 5 for he shall grow up before him as a tender plant as a root out of dry ground this is speaking of christ he has no form or attractiveness

that we should appeal to him there is no beauty that we should desire him he was despised and rejected by men a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief we hid as it were our faces from him he was despised and we did not esteem him this is our savior it says there's nothing beautiful about jesus that is looking on the outside that should make him appeal to you he didn't draw a crowd because he had nice coiffed hair and fine purple robes and he looked like a king parading around and so people wanted to flock to it he drew people despite the fact that there was nothing appealing about his appearance and as it were the sufferings he endured were so horrific that people looking with worldly eyes turn their faces from him because there's nothing appealing about that and yet if we follow on we find the purpose for all of this suffering all of this stuff that looks bad on the outside we read in verse four of isaiah 53 surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows yet we esteemed him stricken smitten by

[17 : 45] God and afflicted but he was wounded for our transgressions he was bruised for our iniquities the chastisement for our peace was upon him and by his stripes we are healed so if the savior of your souls who died in your place doesn't look appealing by worldly sense why on earth would you go out and judge what is valuable by fleshly eyes by worldly eyes why would you look on external things instead of peering deeper into the things of truth don't judge the world don't judge with worldly eyes looking on worldly things for you will miss out on the best that there is first and foremost Jesus Christ point number two heart letters Paul should have no need to prove himself to the Corinthians because they are his proof that he is worthy of regard take a look Paul says in verse two you are our epistle written in our hearts known and read by all men why would Paul need a letter of recommendation to them if they themselves are the proof of his work of his love of his care the best proof that they should have a concern for Paul is that he has already shown them his profound love for them that love is so plain on Paul's heart Paul's love for the Corinthians is so obvious that he can talk about it as a letter that everyone everywhere reads sometimes we have people who are known for loving a particular thing you know it's because if you love something you talk about it you know so everywhere they go they're talking about the patriots the patriots you know that's that's the epistle of love on their heart it's the patriots read and known by all well

Paul says you Corinthians I love you so much that everywhere I go people know it and so why would I ever have to prove that you should be close to me who loves you like this and part of his credentials is the work that he's already done in them you know that he's the one who established that church who built it up with his preaching they exist in part because of the work that God did through him and so it would be like if I trained someone at my workplace and then I went to go help them with a project that I taught them how to do and they said uh uh before you touch it I need to know that you're qualified to handle something like this I taught you you know why are you questioning me

I taught you you know so Paul is saying to them I don't need to prove myself to you because I'm I'm the one who taught you all of this it was by my own love you know and by the grace of God that this church came to exist in the first place you are the proof that I know what I'm doing and so you should regard me not for my sake but for the gospel sake and we'll get into that more later so for you can others read your love plain as day like they can read Paul's is the proof in the pudding of your life is there the sweetness of love that people taste when they meet you or is it bitterness and complaining are you always looking for another thing to gripe about or is the first purpose of all of your conversations to get to you you know what's going on in your life and what you care about if we were to peel back your thoughts and the things you feel would it be proof that

I should trust you like it is for Paul Paul's able to say here when people look at my heart it's clear proof that you should trust me would others say that about you that when I look at your heart oh it's obvious that I'm safe to rely on you because you're a loving person like Christ so do not just talk about what is right or seem to be concerned about what's right externally but do it and do it from the heart live out righteousness and a righteous love for others love love God and love your neighbor from the depths of your heart and if you do that you'll find that there's a lot less need to defend yourself because your own actions will speak for you and

I also want to say is that this brings up you know is there any question in your heart about whether or not God loves you in the same way that we might question the trustworthiness of other people how confident are you in trusting that God loves you the answer you know for the Corinthians is to look to Paul's love demonstrated for them to know that he's trustworthy the answer for us is to look to God's love demonstrated for us to know that he is trustworthy to trust his care for us Romans 5:8 says this so beautifully but God demonstrates his own love toward us he doesn't just say I love you but he shows it from the bottom of his heart how in that while we were still sinners while we looked as bad as possible

[24 : 47] Christ died for us so have no question in your mind that that God loves you and is worthy of you entrusting your whole life to him so that whenever you fear like Lord if I obey you here might this be dangerous for me or cause issues now I can trust him because he loves me you know I should have no regard for no one more than God because no one has proven their trustworthiness and their love more than Christ on the cross point number three Christ's letters is such a beautiful way this passage goes on to show that the the Corinthians are not just Paul's letter but Christ's the Corinthian church is a holy letter to be displayed among the whole world they are a holy letter of

Christ the Savior that has been written in part and spread in part by this lowly man Paul and if they are to appreciate their status as a message from God to the whole world they must appreciate Paul who God used on their behalf look at what it says in verse three clearly you are an epistle of Christ ministered by us I want you to know that you are a message from God that if God has saved you it is not so you can be a stack of papers on the shelf but so that you can be a letter that he sends out to the world a letter of good news good news that people should should open up and go this is wonderful that's the gospel you are letters of

Christ you have been saved for this purpose God is writing a story in your life and that story is for his glory in your life is demonstrated is demonstrated the gospel of Jesus where he takes sinners and moves them from death to life so we must preach to the world we must preach to each other that Jesus has died on the cross to save the very worst of people like you and like me preach to them that true forgiveness can be found by trusting in Jesus not by works not by being good enough but the way to heaven is through a savior who dies in your place preach to the world as a letter of

Christ preach to the world that he rose from the dead and that in doing so he declared victory over death and over sin and those who were enslaved by it now have a way to go free the key to the chains has been given preached to the world that they might use it let me let me see you all out there living your lives as letters of God to the world point number four written on hearts finally Paul speaks on the grandeur the wonder the amazement of being the work of the work that is being done in believers Paul gives credit to the work that

God is doing through him in the Corinthians look at verse three 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 there's some good letters written with ink letters that are powerful weighty things letters that have started families that have reconciled wrongs or weighty letters that have destroyed lives and caused much problems letters written with ink can be powerful things but is a letter written by the spirit of the living

[29 : 56] God any better than a letter with ink the answer is obviously yes how much greater is something that God himself is doing than a letter written on a piece of paper and if simple words on a sheet can achieve such great things how much more so must a letter written by the living God be capable of overturning the whole world and has this not been exactly what the good news of Christ has done completely reshaped the world changed millions of lives bringing sinners from death to life this is a grand thing to be an epistle of Christ a letter written not with ink but by the spirit of the living God and then

Paul makes this comparison here that might be hard for us to understand at first he has the not ink but the spirit and then he has a second comparison not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh that is the heart I don't know about you but I've never received any mail on tablets of stone that would rock the point here Paul has moved past talking about letters but he's talking about the Old Testament law and the new covenant in Christ and so this is worth us taking a little bit of time to piece through because it's really amazing here the the tablet of stone here is the ten commandments that were written by the finger of

God and handed down to Moses to be brought to the people it is the law but something greater than the law is here I love how the promise of the new covenant is talked about in Ezekiel 36 25 through 27 then that's God speaking of a future day which has come in Christ then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean I will cleanse you from all of your filthiness and from all your idols I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and you will keep my judgments and do them God God God is here moving past writing external laws on tablets of stone to rewriting hearts to be for him and to obey his commands laws have no power to change people's hearts they have power to punish people when they do what's wrong but they don't change people's hearts so when

God gave the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone external rules they were good rules they are good rules but they can't make the sinner want to obey they just proclaim that we're criminals and so there's no salvation in them it's good to know what's right but but the tablets of stone aren't so great but the more amazing thing that's being talked about here is that the work that's been done in the Corinthians the work that Paul has gotten to be a part of the work that's been done in your hearts if you believe in Christ is that God has changed and reshaped your heart so that there are new affections new desires where before the law was outside of you and just a command that you either had the desire to follow or did not now God is in the business of rewriting hearts to have new desires that were strange to them before this writing on the heart is not literal of course you can break open my chest and you won't find the

Ten Commandments have been scrawled there please don't try but it means the affections have been rerouted have been made new and Paul here is cutting at the Corinthians temptation to look on things by external means the law was external and it led to death it just declared people criminals but the greater reality has come that God is rewriting hearts and so the Corinthians must not look on the outside but look for the inside and when they do they'll find the internal truths that Christ has been using Paul to achieve a great work in them and in their lives even if he doesn't look mighty and that oftentimes the greatest things do not look flashy by worldly standards but when perceived with care to look into the inner matters you find things far greater than the flashy world than the bright lights has this not been our experience as believers growing up in a world that that sells you all sorts of things you know big billboards flashing lights say if you could have all of this then you would be happy but I tell you if you had all of the money to pursue everything the world tried to sell you you would find it to be hollow and empty and worthless but there's no flashing lights well maybe the street lamp out there that flashes sometimes but this church doesn't have a billboard when you walk in you're not struck with how amazing it is here you know with the the you know smoke machines and you know all that stuff that that makes say like a concert really good but you find in the humbleness of a simple church building people who love and care people whose lives have been reshaped and the power of

[37 : 22] God to take a sinner who is dead in their sins and transgressions and bring them to life again so go forth into the world and realize the amazing position you've been given the amazing work that God has done in your life that he has rewritten your heart that he has set you apart to be a message to the world he's not using you to reshape stone he's using you to reshape lives you are a gospel people you are letters of christ so go out and be of good use to your savior and preach and love and be used to change people's lives just as your life has been changed let's close in prayer god we thank you for all the wondrous good that you have done in us these things are too wonderful for us might you teach us to be of good use to you and your kingdom a message of love from our savior to a world dying in need of the gospel in our savior's name we pray amen