

EXHIBIT A

Mr. Smith sat in his attorney's office and began to lay out the case. "It all revolves around a verbal agreement between Mr. Johnson and myself," he explained. "We agreed to go into a business deal together, but we never set our agreement down in the form of a written contract. So my question to you is: Are verbal agreements binding?"

"Technically, yes," said the attorney. "According to the law, a verbal agreement is as binding as a written contract. The problem comes in proving that the verbal agreement actually took place. If one side denies that such a conversation ever took place, how does the other side prove it? For example, did either you or Mr. Johnson take any notes during your conversation when this agreement was made?"

"No," said Mr. Smith. "No notes were taken."

"Well, then," said the attorney, "were there any witnesses to the conversation?"

"None," replied Mr. Smith. "Mr. Johnson and I were the only persons present when the agreement was made."

"And, of course, I'm sure no recording was made of your conversation," said the attorney.

"Recording?" said Mr. Smith. "You mean, like this one?" He reached into his pocket and produced an audio cassette.

The attorney snatched it and held it up triumphantly. "You mean the entire conversation between you and Mr. Johnson is recorded on this tape? This is wonderful! This is Exhibit A! You have him right where you want him! We'll take him to court and force him to abide by your verbal agreement!"

Instead of joining in his attorney's enthusiasm, Mr. Smith hung his head in despair. "This is horrible!"

"Mr. Smith," said the attorney, "don't you understand? With this tape as Exhibit A, there's no way you can lose in court!"

"No, you don't understand!" Mr. Smith wailed. "That tape--Exhibit A, as you call it--is going to cost me thousands of dollars! I don't want to enforce the verbal agreement--I want to get out of it! That's a copy of a tape Mr. Johnson made of our conversation, and he's going to use it against me in court. Because of Exhibit A, there's no way I can win!"

When we think of the term "Exhibit A," we think of evidence that can't be denied, evidence that persuades and convicts, evidence that clinches the case. In this final chapter of our examination of authentic Christianity, we turn to Paul's "Exhibit A," his incontrovertible, incontestable, undeniable evidence for the validity of the new covenant, God's ironclad "verbal agreement" with the human race. The evidence Paul presents as Exhibit A is nothing less than the story of his own life.

We began this book with Paul's great declaration of his own experience of the new covenant: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him" (2 Corinthians 2:14). Now we have come full circle, for the words with which we

close are taken from the sixth chapter and are, likewise, the apostle Paul's own description of his experience in Christ. But there is a difference. At the beginning of this account Paul spoke in glowing terms of the great principles he had found in Christ which governed and empowered his life. But here, at the end, he speaks more specifically of deeds and experiences and final results.

How we look to others

This is as it should be, for principle must always work itself out into practice. "Faith without deeds," says James, "is dead" (James 2:26). Thus an understanding of the new covenant that does not drastically alter the way of life is a useless thing. Paul's primary concern in this final section is to address the problem of communication with others who do not yet know this great secret of godlikeness, whether they are new Christians or still unregenerate. The new covenant cannot be lived in isolation but must bring us into contact with others, both Christians and non-Christians, because authentic Christianity is designed for the world as it is. Therefore, the apostle says: "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way" (2 Corinthians 6:3,4).

There follows then a most remarkable list of very practical ways by which the new covenant may be commended to others. We shall look at this in some detail in a moment. But first, it may seem a contradiction for Paul to say here: "as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way," after he has said in 5:12, "We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again." The commendation he speaks of in chapter 5 is that of words: boastful self-commendation which seeks to impress others. Here in chapter 6 it is the commendation of deeds and attitudes which speak for themselves.

We shall look now at this impressive list to discover the right way Christians can commend themselves and the teaching of the new covenant to others:

Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors (2 Corinthians 6:4-8).

The translators have obscured, in part, the divisions which the apostle indicates in this paragraph. There are three major groupings of thought:

In great endurance:
in troubles,
in hardships,
in distresses;

in beatings,
in imprisonments,
in riots;

in hard work,
in sleepless nights
in hunger;

By means of:
purity,
knowledge,
forbearance,
kindness;

the Holy Spirit,

sincere love,
truthful speech,
the power of God;

With the weapons of righteousness:
in the right hand and the left,
in glory and dishonor,
in bad report and good report.

It is obvious that the first group deals with the adverse pressures which a Christian can encounter in life. The second group describes the character that must be displayed in the midst of these pressures. And the third group deals with the results produced, both good and apparently evil. And Paul fully exemplifies all these things! The apostles were pattern Christians, chosen to experience the full range of pressures and possibilities in order that we might have in them (and supremely in the Lord Jesus) an example to follow. It is not likely that we will be called upon to endure all these experiences, but we will surely be asked to endure some of them. Let us remember that the world around is watching us and only the manifestation of what Paul lists here will commend us to those who are watching our lives.

Endurance which endures

The key word to the first group is "endurance." It means far more than simply toughing it out. Even a non-Christian can endure hardness in that sense and some take great pride in their ability to do so. Athletes, marines, commandos, frontiersmen, and others often glory in their ability to confront hardship with fortitude and endurance. But this is not merely a reference to passive resignation which is content to wait with bowed head till the troubles have run their course.

The Greek word used here, *hupomone*, goes far beyond that. Rather, it is the courageous triumph which takes all the pressure and emerges with a cheer! It not only refuses to be broken by the pressure but is actually grateful for the opportunity to endure, knowing it will bring glory to God. "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41).

Paul endured triumphantly everything on his list, and often many times over. There were "afflictions" or, literally, "distresses." There were pressures that bore heavily upon his spirit--cares and intense anxieties that seldom let up in his life. There were "hardships"--the inescapable discomforts of life. And there were "calamities," or to be more exact, "strictures," narrow places which seem to close one in on every side, offering no escape. In each of these circumstances the triumphant endurance produced by the new covenant commends Paul to those who are watching his life.

Next, there were troubles that stemmed directly from human opposition. There were "beatings" or "stripes." Further on in this letter Paul says, "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned" (2 Corinthians 11:24,25). These painful beatings left their scars upon him so that he could write to the Galatians, "Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Galatians 6:17).

Often accompanying the beatings were "imprisonments." Clement of Rome tells us the apostle was put into prison seven times, though only four of these are recorded in the Scriptures. At least two imprisonments were for more than two years, so Paul spent at least five years in prison and perhaps much more.

But that was not all. There were also "tumults." This is a reference to the riots and mob violence which he sometimes provoked by the sweeping social changes his preaching produced. Perhaps nothing is more frightening than an angry mob, out of control, bent upon venting its rage upon some hapless victim. But Paul was enabled by God to endure all of these encounters and trials with triumphant courage.

The last category of events calling for endurance involved, first, the "labors" he assumed. The word he uses here describes hard, unremitting toil, to the point of exhaustion. Paul doubtless spent many long hours at his tentmaking in order to present his gospel without charge! There were also "watchings"--sleepless nights, spent

in prayer and meditation. These were not a matter of mere convenience to Paul but required grace and commitment. Then there was "hunger." The reference is probably to periods of fasting, some deliberately chosen and some enforced upon him by the circumstances in which he found himself. These would take their toll of his physical and emotional strength, but through them all he was enabled to endure triumphantly.

The secret described

What was the secret of such endurance? It was never by a clenching of his fists, a jutting of his jaw, and a determination of his will to show the world how much he could take for Christ. Such an approach would soon have left even Paul broken and defeated, as he actually was in the early days of his Christian life. No, the secret of triumphant endurance was the new covenant--"everything coming from God, nothing coming from me"!

There was a certain kind of character he possessed which saw him through his troubles. It had to be invariable, or nearly so, for he never knew when it would be required. It consisted of four elements. First, there was "purity." This refers to the careful avoidance of all sin which defiles or stains the flesh or spirit. Paul never allowed himself to be found in a compromising relationship with anyone. He carefully guarded not only his behavior, but his thought life, for he knew that is where defilement begins. Whenever he found himself toying with impurity, he immediately brought it to the Lord Jesus and obtained His cleansing and forgiveness.

Next there was "knowledge." His mind was deliberately set upon truth, as he had learned it from the Scriptures and revelations of the Lord. He judged all persons and events, not from a human point of view, but from the divine viewpoint as revealed by the Spirit. The doctrine of Scripture was always his guide.

Third came "forbearance." The Greek word, *macrothumia*, means patience, especially with regard to people. By nature Paul was impatient and hard driving. But he learned by the Spirit to wait for others to catch up, to be understanding about their weaknesses, and to wait quietly for the Lord to do the work of correction that was needed, for "to his own master he stands or falls" (Romans 14:4).

Finally, there was "kindness." The original word has been described as meaning "the sympathetic kindness or sweetness of temper which puts others at their ease and shrinks from giving pain." This attitude was to be shown without respect of persons, whether to a slave or to the emperor himself.

These four marks of Paul's character were what enabled him to endure. Anything other than momentary failure in any of them would have meant defeat. His pressures would have overwhelmed him, and he would have failed dismally to display that triumphant endurance that would commend him to the watching world.

Deeper yet

But there was something deeper even than these. The four characteristics of purity, knowledge, forbearance, and kindness were visible to other people. They lay in the realm of Paul's soul, his conscious experience in life. Deeper still, in the depths of his spirit, were the forces that undergirded and kept on making possible the display of the four characteristics just listed.

Behind everything else and at the root of it all was "the Holy Spirit." The Third Person of the Godhead is the gift of both the Father and the Son, serving as the guarantee of all else to come, dwelling permanently in Paul's heart, was the uncreated source of all that sustained Paul. It was the Spirit's constant delight to release to Paul at all times "the life of Jesus." Jesus Himself, by the Spirit, lived in Paul and upheld and empowered him, just as He lives in us and upholds us and empowers us through all our trials and tribulations. That "life of Jesus" invariably consists of three elements: love, truth, and power. This "life of Jesus" was continually supplied to Paul through the Spirit, explaining all that He was and did. This was the "sincere love," "truthful speech," and "the power of God" Paul talked about. No wonder he could handle life the way he did!

But Paul isn't through yet. Though the new covenant is designed to make us strong, it is designed so that we might affect others. There is always that watching world before which we must be commended! So Paul's final category speaks of the effect of "the weapons of righteousness." He sees the worth and value he has in

God's eyes--worth and value that is based on the righteousness of Christ, not any righteousness of his own--as a kind of sword or spear by which we attack the forces of darkness. With these weapons, we set free those who have been held bondage by Satan. Hence, the term "weapons of righteousness." Righteousness, here, is a summary term gathering up the four distinctives Paul listed in the previous section: purity, knowledge, forbearance, and kindness. These four "weapons of righteousness" have a powerful effect on others in two ways:

First, such righteousness affects both "the right hand and the left." This saying probably goes back to Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matthew 6:3). By this He refers to the public and private life. The right hand is the public life, the left hand is the private. Thus, the effect of a righteous life will touch both the public actions of others (their social relationships) and their private lives as well (changing their attitudes). True Christianity does not make superficial changes--it changes people within and without.

Second, the effect of such change is also twofold: "in honor and dishonor." Those freed by Christ will be placed in varying positions before the world. Some will occupy positions of honor, such as Manaen, a member of the court of Herod, the tetrarch, mentioned in Acts 13, and Sergius Paulus, the converted Roman proconsul described in the same chapter. Others will be obscure men and women about whom the world knows or cares nothing. But even these will find a varying acceptance. Some will be of "bad report" and others will be of "good report." Jesus himself had predicted this: "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20). But, whether honored by the world, or dishonored; whether held in good or bad esteem, all are equally loved and owned by God, all are equally empowered by the Spirit (if they choose to draw upon Him), and all are expected to live before the world in such a way as to commend the gospel to all people.

The paradoxical Christian

In his book *That Incredible Christian*, A.W. Tozer describes some of the many paradoxes one finds in authentic Christianity--and in authentic Christians:

At the heart of the Christian system lies the cross of Christ with its divine paradox. The power of Christianity appears in its antipathy toward, never in its agreement with, the ways of fallen men. The truth of the cross is revealed in its contradictions. ... Simply observe the true Christian as he puts into practice the teachings of Christ and His apostles. Note the contradictions:

The Christian believes that in Christ he has died, yet he is more alive than before and he fully expects to live forever. He walks on earth while seated in heaven and though born on earth he finds that after his conversion he is not at home here. ... He loses his life to save it and is in danger of losing it if he attempts to preserve it. He goes down to get up. If he refuses to go down he is already down, but when he starts down he is on his way up.

He is strongest when he is weakest and weakest when he is strong. Though poor he has the power to make others rich, but when he becomes rich his ability to enrich others vanishes. He has most after he has given most away and has least when he possesses most.

He may be and often is highest when he feels lowest and most sinless when he is most conscious of sin. He is wisest when he knows that he knows not and knows least when he has acquired the greatest amount of knowledge. He sometimes does most by doing nothing and goes furthest when standing still. In heaviness he manages to rejoice and keeps his heart glad even in sorrow.

He fears God but is not afraid of Him. In God's presence he feels overwhelmed and undone, yet there is nowhere he would rather be than in that presence. He knows that he has been cleansed from his sin, yet he is painfully conscious that in his flesh dwells no good thing.

He loves supremely One whom he has never seen, and though himself poor and lowly he talks familiarly with One who is King of all kings and Lord of all lords, and is aware of no incongruity in so doing. He feels that he is in his own right altogether less than nothing, yet he believes without question that he is the apple of God's eye and that for him the Eternal Son became flesh and died on the cross of shame. ...Incredible Christian! [A. W. Tozer, *That Incredible Christian* (Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, special edition, undated), pp. 11-13.]

These words of A. W. Tozer echo and expand upon the series of magnificent paradoxes Paul describes in his depiction of the authentic Christian in 2 Corinthians 6:8-10. He says that he and his fellow authentic Christians are genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Clearly, authentic Christians present an enigma to the world, because their lives consist of a series of paradoxes. Only the man or woman who stands poised between two worlds can qualify for such a description. The authentic Christian is in a highly vulnerable position, stretched between God and man. We must be content to be called impostors by some, to be thought of as unknown, to be threatened and punished, to be poor and have nothing--all the while knowing that, before God, the very reverse is true! As God sees us, we are his true children, known to all heaven, living and rejoicing in the spirit when the flesh is perishing, ever imparting the unsearchable riches of Christ to many, and being heirs of all creation when time trembles into eternity.

Is it not fitting, therefore, that the apostle should close this great discourse with an earnest appeal, rising out of the depths of his heart:

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange--I speak as to my children--open wide your hearts also (2 Corinthians 6:11-13).

Love, truth, and power all require response to be fully operative. Each will grow to infinite expansion if it is met by faith, though it be as small as a grain of mustard seed. The Corinthians were not being held back by Paul. He had opened his heart to them and told them everything he had learned from the Lord. Their present weakness was due to only one thing: a failure to respond to the truth they knew--a reluctance to act on what they had been told. So his appeal comes as a father to his children: "Widen your hearts!"

The present low state of the church in the world is surely due to the same cause. Christians do not really believe what they sing about and profess. They have lost the consciousness of the greatness of God and his ability to act today. Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, noted pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, England, has made an appeal similar to that of Paul's:

I speak especially to those of us who are Evangelicals. We must not continue with our religious life and methods precisely as if nothing were happening round and about us, and as if we were still living in the spacious days of peace. We have loved certain methods. And how delightful they were! What could be more enjoyable than to have and to enjoy our religion in the form with which we have for so long been familiar? How enjoyable just to sit and listen. What an intellectual and perhaps also emotional and artistic treat.

But alas! How entirely unrelated to the world in which we live it has often been! How little has it had to offer to men and women who have never known our background and our kind of life, who are entirely ignorant of our very idiom and even our presuppositions. But in any case how detached and self-contained, how removed from a world that is seething in trouble with the foundations of everything that has been most highly prized rocking and shaking. [D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Plight of Man and the Power of God*, p. 11.]

What possibilities lie before us as Christians if only we are worthy of them! How little the world realizes the treasure that lies in its midst in the church of Jesus Christ. But how little the church realizes it, too. Think of what 300 million "qualified ministers of the new covenant" could accomplish around the world if they began to

function as Paul lived. I invite you, as you close this book, to bow your knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in His Name, pray: "Father, make me a qualified minister of the new covenant. Open my eyes to the full meaning of the truth that Jesus lives in me, by the Spirit. Make me hunger and thirst after His righteousness, so that according to your promise I might be filled. Amen."

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