

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

APRIL 27TH–28TH, 2024 // 2 CORINTHIANS

## THE NEW COVENANT (2 CORINTHIANS 3:1–6)

Paul's own competency and character as a minister had been attacked by his critics at the church in Corinth.

- False apostles had sought to discredit him and his ministry in any way they could in order to come in and peddle their own teaching (works-based legalism as Judaizers).
  - In response to these attacks, Paul has to work to defend his ministry.
- "Letters of recommendation" were common and sometimes necessary in the early church.
- The Christian faith was very young, so false apostles or teachers could travel easily from city to city and say, "I'm an apostle sent by \_\_\_\_\_, so you should support me!"
  - To guard against this, letters of recommendation from established leaders/apostles were often sent with Christian ministers.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with letters of recommendation or ordination papers, but Paul's credentials were different—Paul's ministry was verified by the changed hearts and lives of the people he'd served (vs. 1–2).

- Everybody can see the fruit of changed lives! Real ministry success isn't found in impressive titles or academic degrees but in results (changed lives and hearts of people).

Paul's letter of recommendation is the changed lives of the Corinthians, and that's been written on their hearts by the Spirit of the living God (v. 3).

- Paul had been used by God in this process, but God was the one who had done the work.
- True Christian spirituality is not centered on religious forms, traditions, head knowledge, or the work of a certain minister, denomination, or method.

True Christian spirituality is centered on the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to transform us into the image of Christ.

- The questions that matter are "Do I look more like Jesus today than I did yesterday?" and "Am I growing in my obedience and holiness?"
- Sometimes it's a lot easier to simply focus on all the other stuff related to church, religion, and the Christian subculture.

None of us are competent in ourselves for this great task of pointing people to Jesus so their lives can be changed, but our adequacy in this monumental responsibility comes from God and God alone (vs. 4–5).

- Anyone serving in genuine Christian ministry is a minister of the new covenant of life and the Spirit, not of the letter that kills (v. 6).
- What does Paul mean by this?

Some of the false apostles peddling their legalistic doctrines taught that Christians were still bound by the law of Moses, the old covenant God made with Israel.

- Paul says that the "letter" kills—the old covenant under the law simply exposes our guilt and thoroughly establishes us before God as sinners unable to earn salvation.
- The new covenant of the Spirit gives life.

When we turn from our sin and place our faith in Christ for salvation, the Holy Spirit fills our hearts and gives us new life.

- We now have a power from God and a desire for God that we didn't have before to live a different, new kind of life of obedience, holiness, and freedom.
- This is the blessing of the new covenant! We have access to God's transforming power.

## MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT (2 CORINTHIANS 3:7–11)

It's not that the old covenant God gave to Israel through Moses, chiseled on stones, was bad, it was actually quite glorious (v. 7).

- As Moses descended from Mt. Sinai after receiving the law from God, his face shone (Exodus 34:29–35).
- The giving of God's law was a glorious thing! But it brings death because it shows our sin and guilt before God so we can be pointed to Jesus.

As glorious as the shining face of Moses was, that glory faded over time and was set aside.

- If there was glory and power in the giving of the law that brought death, how much more glory is there in a ministry that brings life by the Spirit (v. 8)?
- This is a glory that points not just to God's righteous standards and how we're condemned because we can't keep them, but to true righteousness.

The glorious ministry of the new covenant brings about true righteousness in our lives (v. 9).

- God's law and rules can show you what to do and what not to do, but they can't give you the power, desire, or ability to keep them.
- Under the law, you can have "self" righteousness, where you're confident in your own supposed moral superiority compared to other people, but that's not true righteousness (Isaiah 64:6).

The surpassing glory of the new covenant is that God transforms us from the inside out by His Spirit and covers us with the righteousness of Christ, making us truly righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21).

- As glorious as the giving of the law was to Israel, this new covenant is so much more glorious and better (v. 10).
- What was set aside was glorious, but what endures is even more glorious (v. 11).

The life God has invited us into through the new covenant is a life of beholding and experiencing personally the glory of God at work within our hearts and lives.

- It's not focusing on rules we can't keep and don't really like to try to hopefully earn salvation from God.
- It's a life of astonishing splendor in God's presence as we see the miracle of God's transforming work in the human heart.

## GLORY TO GLORY (2 CORINTHIANS 3:12–18)

Access to God and His transforming presence are ours by the new covenant.

- Because we have such an incredible hope, we can act with great boldness (v. 12).
- The old covenant restricted and separated humanity from God, but the new covenant brings us to God and enables us to come to Him boldly.

Even Moses didn't have the kind of boldness and access to God that we have (v. 13).

- When Moses came down from communing with God, his face shone because he'd been in the presence of God's glory.
- When he spoke to the people, they were amazed and terrified at his shining face, which reflected God's glory.
- But over time, that glory faded away.

Moses wore a veil to not only shield Israel from his shining face, but also to hide the diminishing glory of his face because that glory was fading.

- That glory faded over time, but it was also a glory that was mostly concealed from God's people.
- In a way, that same veil still remains over the hearts of the Jewish people (vs. 14–15).

As an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul saw many non-Jews receive Christ while also witnessing the Jewish people rejecting the truth and persecuting Paul and the church.

- Why is that? Because there was a spiritual veil over their hearts and minds (v. 15).
- The glory of God is still present through the old covenant and the law, but it's a glory that's concealed and fading because of the veil.

It's not just Jewish people who have a veil that keeps them from seeing God's glory—many people are blinded by their own religion.

- God's glory is somewhat visible to them by the forms, traditions, and heritage of their faith, but it's a concealed and fading glory.
- Whenever a person encounters Christ and turns to the Lord, that veil is removed, and God's glory is made known to them personally (v. 16).

By the Spirit of God living in us, we have a newly found freedom that wasn't possible under the old covenant (v. 17).

- The freedom we have in Christ by the Holy Spirit is not a freedom of excess, but a freedom of access.
- It's not a "freedom" to do whatever I want because I have the Spirit, it's the freedom to live in God's presence in a relationship with Him.

## REAL FREEDOM THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT BRINGS ABOUT IS LIBERTY FROM OUR BONDAGE:

- Bondage to the law and trying to earn salvation, God's love, and God's favor through the law.
- Bondage to sin and staying in a place of brokenness, selfishness, and destructive behaviors.
- Bondage to the opinions and approval of others as the way we establish our significance.

By faith in Christ, the veil has been lifted from our hearts and minds and we are given access and freedom to behold the very glory of God.

- As we behold the glory of God, it's like looking into a mirror—we see who we truly are, but we also see the glory of the Lord at work in us (v. 18).
- As we behold the glory of God, we are transformed from "glory to glory" by the Holy Spirit.

"...FROM GLORY TO GLORY..." (V. 18)

Knowing about God's word, His laws, and His character is a glorious thing.

- But God wants to transform you from being someone who knows about Him into someone who looks like Him—that's the greater glory.
- How does that happen? From looking at the Lord's glory by reading His Word, worshiping, praying, and spending time with Him.

## WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT?

- The Christian life and Christian ministry aren't about rules, denominations, titles, programs, letters of commendation, or ordination certificates.
- It's about God saving sinful, broken human beings through Jesus Christ and transforming them by the Holy Spirit at work in their lives.
- A Christian is someone who has access to and is witnessing God's power at work (2 Timothy 3:5).

## HOW DO I BECOME WHO GOD WANTS ME TO BE?

- For all of us, there is a disconnect between the person I am and the person I desire to be.
- We can try to pretend we're further along than we really are, we can try to justify our behaviors/attitudes, or we can try to improve ourselves by our own effort and morality.
- Access to God and His transforming power are ours under the New Covenant!

## YOU WILL BECOME LIKE WHAT YOU BEHOLD.

- Your heart has a tendency to follow your eyes, and out of the abundance of your heart, your actions, speech and mindsets will follow (Luke 6:45).
- If you behold nothing but entertainment and meaningless frivolity, you will become a shallow, empty, and worldly person with little interest or care for God, His work, or the people He's called you to serve and love.
- If you behold angry, demonizing news talk radio...
- If you behold sexually immoral content, violence, or profanity...
- If you behold the talk and behavior of people the Bible describes as fools (Proverbs 13:20)...
- If you behold nothing but materialism, financial gain, and greed...
- If you behold those obsessed with popularity, acclaim, and physical beauty...
- 2 Corinthians 3:18
- Have you turned to the Lord and had the veil removed? Are you daily looking and beholding the glory of the Lord? Is He transforming you?