

II Corinthians Lesson 03

II Cor. Chapter 3

Distributed by: KJV Bible Studies

Website: www.KjvBibleStudies.net

E-mail: mailKjvBibleStudies@gmail.com

Introduction: Last week in Chapter 2, Paul spoke of how the church needed to be forgiving when it came to the one that had been excluded from the church if the man repented and asked for forgiveness. The purpose of church discipline is to bring believers back in fellowship with the body of Christ.

In Chapter 3, Paul proceeds to defend the New Testament ministry in general, pointing out it is superior to the old in that it is spiritual and not legal. The law blinded and hardened. The ministry of the Spirit rather gives liberty.

I. True Gospel Ministry Proves Itself by Changed Lives

2 Corinthians 3:1 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? 2 Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

“Do we begin again to commend ourselves?” Paul, having asserted that he and his fellow ministers have always triumphed in Christ, and made manifest the sweetness of the gospel in every place. They did not corrupt the word of God, as some did. Some might have insinuated that he was guilty of arrogance and vain glory; wherefore to remove such a charge, or prevent its being brought, he asks, “do we begin again to commend ourselves?” Judaistic critics who had come to Corinth carried such letters of recommendation introducing themselves. Paul’s point is simple. He did not need such. Men do not call men: God calls men. The local church separates men for the purpose of the ministry thru the divine leadership of the Holy Spirit. The same principle applies today as many question credentials and not authority.

A school has no God given authority in church matters. A board has no God given authority in church matters. Neither does a convention have God given authority in church matters. The authority is God’s own and His means of carrying out His will are in accordance with His Word. Paul here states the reason why they stood in no need of letters of commendation, to or from the church at Corinth, because that church was their living epistle, and was preferred over any written one.

The apostle calls them “their” epistle in the same sense, as they are said to be his. Paul had started the Corinthian church. They were his work and fruit in the ministry. Paul recognized God’s purpose and direction in the establishment of the Corinthian church. Many in the church failed to recognize the purpose of the ministry.

It is evident that some of Paul's critics had accused him of boasting about himself. He states that he had need of no letter of commendation to them or from them. Some might have requested this, but Paul says his life had been a letter of commendation by his example.

Our lives should be lived that others can know that Jesus lives in our heart. The people there in the church were the epistles of Paul written in his heart. There is no better letter of recommendation than for a Christian to have a consecrated life with the law of God written in their hearts. And lives lived like this will produce fruits.

Romans 2:28-29 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

2 Cor 3:3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. 4 And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: 5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

Paul points out that the apostles and ministers of the word were only workmen and instruments used by the Lord. The epistle to which he refers was not written with ink and certainly not inscribed in tables of stone as was the Law. Rather, the message was written in the heart. The contrast is of tables of stone versus tenderness of the heart. His ministry to them was one of the heart and not the legalities of the Old Testament Law. Further, he is about to contrast the old covenant given on tables of stone with the new covenant which pertains to the heart.

Paul refers to what he had said in the end of the previous chapter, and the beginning of this one. He pointed out that they made manifest the knowledge of God and Christ everywhere, and were the sweet savor of Christ to many souls. They were sufficient in some measure, through the grace of God, to preach the Gospel sincerely and faithfully with success. Paul had confidence in the Corinthian church through Christ unto God, and had greater confidence that the Spirit of the living God had so worked in their hearts.

Though we are sufficient for this work to which God has called us, and we have confidence that he has delivered us, and performed great things by us, we should not attribute anything to ourselves. We are unable to impress the Word of God upon the heart: The gospel is delivered by the epistle of Christ, not by any proactive power or self-sufficiency.

In verse 3, Paul amplifies his illustration to its full extent. The author of the epistles Paul speaks of is Christ. Paul is the one who pens the words that the Holy Spirit gives to him. The wonderful thing about these epistles are that they were not written on tablets of stone like the ten commandments, but were on the

fleshly tables of the heart. The changed lives of Paul's converts provided sufficient commendation for his ministry. God is the one who provides the sufficiency, and that is why Paul had this great confidence.

II. The Greater Glory of the New Testament Ministration

2 Cor 3:6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

Here we find the answer to the question in II Corinthians 2:16 "who is sufficient for these things?" It is God who had enabled them as ministers of the new covenant. Furthermore, the new covenant is not of the letter of the law, but of the spirit of adoption. The allusion clearly is to the engraving of the Law on Mount Sinai. The Law, representing Old Testament Judaism, was a legalistic system which emphasized its technicalities (i.e., letters). The new covenant refers to the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the human heart. The Apostle furthers a comparison, for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. The letter of the law brought spiritual deadening whereas the spiritual nature of the gospel brings spiritual life.

God had made Paul an able minister of the "New Covenant" which was the New Testament. There was great difference between the written law and the ministration of the Spirit. The Law killed because it made us come to the realization of our sin. The penalty for disobeying any of the ten commandments was death. (thus the term "ministration of death") But praise God, the ministration of the spirit was life.

J. Vernon McGee said this about verse 6:

We are ministers "of the new testament" would be better translated, ministers of the new *covenant*. We will see a contrast between the old covenant (the Old Testament) and the new covenant (the New Testament). There is a contrast here in several different ways.

"Not of the letter, but of the spirit." In the Old Testament, and specifically in the Law, the letter kills; the letter of the Law actually condemns us. The Law says that you and I are guilty sinners. Those letters which were written on the tablets of stone condemned man. The Mosaic Law never gave life. That is the contrast he is making here. The letter kills. "For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." I have often challenged congregations to name somebody who was saved by the Law. Did you know that even Moses, the law-giver, could not be saved by the Law? Do you know why not? He was a murderer! Also David broke the Law even though he was a man after God's own heart. Friend, you can't be saved by keeping the Law. The Law kills you; the Law condemns you.

2Cor 3:7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of

Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

There are many differences between the law and the gospel. Paul, having observed the difference between the law and the Gospel. The law being one that was a killing letter, the other (the gospel) was a quickening spirit. He enlarges upon it, and more, fully explains it; and proceeds to take notice of other things in which they differ; and to show the superior glory and excellence of the one to the other.

The service of Moses in bringing the law of God to the people of Israel was described as “glorious.” The glory of the law was manifested by the fact that the very face of Moses shone when he descended from Mount Sinai to present God’s statutes to the people.

Exodus 34:29-30 And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses’ hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. 30 And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him.

As time passed, the glory that shone on Moses’ face gradually disappeared and was eventually “done away”... this speaks of the law going away, but certain things, like the ten commandments, did not go away.

2 Cor 3:8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? 9 For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. 10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

His point is, if the old covenant had glory, how much more the new? By “the ministration of the Spirit”, refers to the Spirit of God himself, by whom it is not only dictated but also who qualifies persons for the preaching of it. By these means the Spirit conveys himself into the hearts of men, and makes it authoritative for illumination, consolation, edification, and an increase of every grace; and therefore must be much more glorious than the law which is the ministration of death. The ministration (or, ministry) of death of which he speaks is a reference to the old covenant because it placed all under the sentence of death—for all have sinned and the wages of sin is death.

No glory prior to the appearance of Christ was so wonderful. His appearance provided superior and exceeding glory. This spoke of the superior glory of the New Testament ministration.

Matthew 17:1-3 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, 2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was

white as the light. 3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

If the ministry of the Law, whose purpose was to illustrate the sinfulness of man, had inherent glory; the ministry of true righteousness certainly exceeded it in glory. The law is the ministration of condemnation; as sin is a transgression of the law, it accuses for it, convinces of it, pronounces guilty, and judges certain death on account of the condemnation it brings. This includes Adam and all who transgress, to all unbelievers and believers alike. As believers, the law ministers to our conscience when convicted, though it is never executed on us because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ and our position in Christ.

2 Cor 3:11 For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

Here another difference is pointed out, which exists between the law and the Gospel, and proves that the one is more excellent and glorious than the other. The law referred to here is not merely the ceremonial law, or the judicial law. It is inclusive of the whole ministry of Moses, and particularly the law of the Decalogue. May God help us to distinguish between the matter and the ministry of the law. The ministry of the law by Moses is disposed of while the matter or moral nature of the law of the law still abides.

There is a difference between the law, as in the hands of Moses and of Christ. As in the hands of Moses the law is broken to pieces and abolished. In the hands of Christ, it remains. Some commandments are partly moral, and partly ceremonial such as the fourth and fifth commands while others are not. What is ceremonial, or purely related to the Jews while in their civil policy, and in the land of Canaan, is done away with, but what is purely moral, is in full effect. The law as a covenant of works is done away with The law as a rule of walk and conversation still continues. To them that are redeemed from the law, it is done away to them that are under it, it remains.

Any use of the law to justify us before God, by our obedience to it is not only abolished but was never intended as such. Obedience to God was never a means of justification. The law may be of use to convince sinners of sin, and to direct saints in a course of righteousness, so it abides. Paul left no question that the old covenant had been fulfilled and was no longer valid. His point remained. If the old covenant had glory, though done away; how much more must be the glory of the new covenant which remains?

This verse does not teach that the then commandments were done away with. Verse 7 clearly teaches that the "glory" on Moses' face was what was removed. The ceremonial part of the law was done away with when Christ fulfilled it on the cross. The glory of the New Testament ministration will never be removed.

2 Cor 3:12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: 13 And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

Paul returns to the underlying principle of the ministry in general. Because of the great hope inherent in the gospel of the new covenant, he was bold in his preaching. The Apostle possibly is responding to critics who accused him of being overbearing in his ministry.

The ministration of the New Testament remains with glory and gives great hope. New Testament ministers are not like Moses who put a veil over his face to keep the children of Israel from seeing the glory pass away. The glory of Moses was not recognized by Israel as a figuration of Christ's glory since their minds were blinded. Even to this day, Jews have this same veil of blindness when the Old Testament is read. They have unbelief concerning scriptures about Jesus Christ being the son of God.

2 Cor 3:14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. 15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. 16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

The Apostle moves from the veil upon Moses' face to a related truth, the spiritual blindness of Israel. Israel over the years became spiritually blind through the hardness of their hearts. This verse shows, that not only the Israelites in Moses's time, but the Jews during the time of the Gentiles, have their minds blinded and cannot behold the glory of the Gospel or Christ as the end of the law; (see Romans 11:7,8,25).

The true spiritual meaning of *the* books of the Old Testament, in respect to Christ and the Gospel dispensation, which were read in the synagogues every sabbath day, they could not understand for the darkness they abode in, for which the veil on the face of Moses was a type.

This veil can only be removed by Christ, by his Spirit and grace, and through the light of the Gospel of Christ, shining into the heart; and so dispel that blindness and ignorance which is in the understanding; whereby the books of the Old Testament are understood, and appear to agree exactly with the Gospel of Christ, in the books of the New Testament.(see Isaiah 6:9-10).

Paul jumps from Old Testament history to the condition of Israel to this day. As the Scripture is read to this hour, a veil of darkness remains upon Jewish people. It goes back to the curse of Isaiah 6. (See also John 12:40, Romans 11:7, and II Corinthians 4:4.) The prophecies of the Old Testament will be seen in their proper light, and to be evidently fulfilled in Christ.

The true nature, use, and end of the law, will be discovered; and they will be freed from all darkness that now attends them. The Jews themselves acknowledge, that though the law is light, yet there is an obscurity in it, by reason of the several ways of interpreting it; and therefore, he that studies it, has need to remove the veil which is upon the face of it, in order to come to the light.

There is a day coming when the nation of Israel will recognize their great error and mistake... the veil shall be taken away.

III. The Glory of the Children of Liberty

2 Cor 3:17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Paul begins to bring resolution to the entire chapter. Now the Lord is that Spirit. Earlier in the chapter, he had alluded to the Spirit (3:3 and indirectly 3:6,8). The Lord is the Spirit of the new covenant. Turning to Him is turning to the Spirit thereof. He goes on to note, "and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty" The liberty spoken of is not the freedom to do as we please. Rather, both contextually and spiritually, the thought is of being freed from the bondage of the Law referred to in 3:3—the tables of stone. God's Spirit brings liberty from error, sin, and the flesh. It gives the freedom to do what is right.

The Lord is said to be "that spirit." This is a direct reference to verse 6. He is the Spirit who gives life in contrast to the letter of the law which brings forth death. The Spirit of the Lord gives life and true liberty. The believer who looks unto God's Word prayerfully and regularly takes on the likeness of Christ. As he or she reads, the Word of God reveals the risen Savior. One day, we will be totally changed and take on a glorified body like Christ's.

The chapter culminates with a most amazing finale. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory. The word translated as open (anakaluptw *anaka- Olupto*) literally means to 'unveil' or 'uncover' (by drawing back a veil). The word translated as beholding as in a glass (katoptrizomai *katoptrizomai*) has the sense to 'behold one's self in a mirror.'

The word translated as are changed (meta- morfow *metamorphoo*) also has the sense to be 'transformed' and is translated as 'transfigured' in Matthew 17:2, referring to our Lord's transfiguration. Together, the thought is, 'But we all with an unveiled face beholding ourselves in a mirror are transformed into his image, from glory to glory.' What an amazing truth. As we from our heart turn to Christ, the veil is thus removed from our eyes. Then as we would look into a mirror

spiritually, we see the very image of Christ in us. We have been transformed by His power into His image. Glory is reflected in us and through us—from glory to glory. This astounding transformation within us is accomplished “*even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

The Holy Spirit is the operative agent affecting such glory in us. As we turn to Christ, gazing upon Him, not only is the veil removed, but even as Moses physically shone, we will spiritually. We are transformed spiritually into His very image with His glory, being replicated in us by His Spirit.

KJV Bible Studies are prepared and distributed free of charge. The lessons may not be sold without consent. If you have questions or wish to discuss the lessons, or possibly need help in finding Jesus Christ as your Personal Lord and Savior, contact us at the email below.

Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Website: www.KjvBibleStudies.net

E-mail: mailKjvBibleStudies@gmail.com

Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.