



QUALIFIED BY THE SPIRIT

Pastor Dillon Barber // September 14, 2025

Text: 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 (ESV)

Big Idea: Christians are qualified and transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Good morning Foothills Church. It's a pleasure to be here with you this morning. My name is Dillon Barber if we have not had a chance to meet yet and it is my joy to spend time with you this morning as we study God's word together. Today we will be looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 3 if you want to turn there in your Bible.

This is an amazing chapter. It really could have been part of our Holy Spirit series this past summer because it is all about the work of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout 2 Corinthians Paul makes mention of a group of people who have come to Corinth and are influencing the church with a different message, a different gospel than the one that Paul has preached. Furthermore they are challenging Paul's authority as an Apostle and attempting to undermine him and his influence. Paul mentions them in chapter two when he calls them "peddlers of God's word" which is a slightly derogatory remark. He's essentially calling them swindlers. These peddlers are preaching a Jesus + gospel. What do I mean Jesus +? They were teaching that in order to be truly saved you have to put your faith in Jesus, plus you have to follow the strict observation of Jewish Law. This includes things like circumcision, food laws, purification laws, observation of feasts, all the things that were part of the Old Mosaic Covenant. We have come to call these people Judaizers because they preached a Jewish mashup of the gospel. Later in the letter Paul mockingly calls them "super-apostles" because of the claims that they made.

So in Chapter 3, Paul is defending two things, he is defending his own ministry, and he is defending and clarifying the gospel of the New Covenant that he preaches, which is the gospel that the church received when they came to Christ. Namely that salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone. Does all that make sense so far? Paul is defending himself and the gospel against these Judaizers.

I have done my best to summarize Paul's argument for us this morning in one clear sentence. It goes like this. "The New Covenant is far greater than the Old Covenant because it is a ministry of the Holy Spirit transforming the hearts of believers into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ." The New Covenant isn't a covenant of laws and rules and regulations and death like the Old, it is a covenant of transformation and life by the Spirit. Because of this it is far more glorious and powerful than the Old Covenant it is replacing.

So let's hold on to this summary this morning as we walk through Paul's argument and see how he unpacks the layers and reveals the working of the Holy Spirit. There are five statements regarding the ministry of the Spirit in this New Covenant argument that I want to look at this morning.

1. Under the New Covenant we are recommended by the Spirit. Let's take a look at verses 1-3. Now it appears that these Judaizers came into town with letters of recommendation from people who supported them and agreed with them and maybe even sent them out. And they are showing these letters around as if the recommendation gives them authority to preach and teach. Judging by Paul's response they wanted to know if Paul had any letters of recommendation that supported his claim to Apostleship. But Paul wasn't going to play that game.

To Paul, the very existence of the church in Corinth as a body of believers filled with the Spirit is the all the recommendation that he needs. This

small church, with all of its divisions, issues, challenges, sin, and messiness, this church is Paul's beloved church, marked by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Friends, it doesn't matter what other people think about us or say about us as believers and humans. It only matters what God thinks about us. If our lives are marked by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, that is all the recommendation and affirmation that we need before God.

Now I know this doesn't fit the world's economy very well. If you are looking for a job and an employer asks for letters or recommendation, you need a letter of recommendation. I get it. But in God's economy we shouldn't be looking to others to affirm us or build us up or brag about us, we only need to focus on God's opinion of us and make sure that we are living in a way that pleases him. And for Paul, all the evidence he needs is in the Spirit Filled church that he planted in Corinth. The only recommendation we need is the recommendation of the Spirit.

2. Under the New Covenant, we are qualified by the Spirit. Let's read the next section, verses 4-6. The English Standard Version uses this word sufficient three times here. It can also be translated competent, worthy, qualified or good enough. I like the word qualified. Paul is saying that there is nothing we can do, nothing about us or our nature that would qualify us to be ministers of the New Covenant. On our own, there is nothing we can do to become more qualified, more sufficient more capable of pleasing God or doing his work. In contrast, Paul say our qualification, our sufficiency comes from God himself, by his Spirit. God is the one who qualifies us to be his ministers, God is the one who gifts us with the tools and abilities that we need to do his work. God is the one who appoints us and guides us and uses us for his ministry. So if you are a believer, if you trust in Jesus and your lord and savior, God puts his Spirit in you and qualifies you to be his servant and his minister. You

don't need a diploma or a degree or a certificate that says you can do ministry, the Spirit is the only qualification that you need.

I've been thinking about the distinction we make in the church between professional ministry and lay ministry. I mean I get it. I'm a pastor, we have pastors and leaders on staff at Foothills, churches all over the world have paid pastors on staff leading churches and missions and non profits and NGO's and all that stuff. And many of us went to Bible College and Seminary and earned degrees in Bible and Theology and we have shiny pieces of paper that say that we are qualified to be in "full time ministry." Now, don't misunderstand me. I think that Bible education is really important and super helpful, I am very grateful for my seminary education, but that's not what qualifies a pastor to be a pastor. In fact, I've known a few highly educated seminarians that have no business leading a church, just saying. But there is no rule, no verse in the Bible that says that you must go to pastor school to be qualified to be a pastor. Just like there is no verse that says if you want to exercise the gift of mercy you have to go to mercy school. Are there things you can learn about exercising your spiritual gift? Sure, there are, but that's not qualifies you to be a minister. God alone qualifies you by his Spirit inside of you. He makes you sufficient, he makes you good enough to do the work that he has called you to do.

Now I know that some of you have doubts about serving or doing ministry or if you are qualified to serve. I want to free you from those doubts. God has qualified you by his Spirit to serve in the capacity he has created you for. You don't have to be a gifted teacher to help teach Sunday school. You don't have to be an evangelist to share about Jesus. You don't have to be a theologian to lead a small group Bible Study. You don't have to be a missionary to go visit with your neighbor and share life with them. Charlie Kirk never graduated from college, but he went onto

hundreds of college campuses and talked to college students, he debated with professors, he interviewed people across the political spectrum and asked hard questions. Through his ministry he impacted millions of young people in our country. All you need is a willing heart and a desire to love and serve the people that God puts in your path each day. If you have the Spirit, you are qualified to be a minister of the New Covenant.

3. Under the New Covenant we are made alive by the Spirit. Look again at the end of verse 7. For the letter kills (That is a reference to the Old Covenant Law) but the Spirit gives life. There are a few passages in the Old Testament that speak about the New covenant. Jeremiah 31 is a famous one and another is Ezekiel 11:19-21. God talks about gathering his people from the nations and then he says. "And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people and I will be their God." Isn't that beautiful. What an incredible promise.

Paul is making reference to this promise of the New Covenant when he says the letter of Christ is written not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of the human heart. The Law of the Old Testament was written on tablets of stone. Stone is lifeless and unable to give life. The Law on stone was only good at pointing out the sin of the people and their need for forgiveness through sacrifice over and over again. In contrast the Spirit gives us life. These Judaizers in Corinth were trying to convince people that they should go back to obeying the law in order to be saved, but Paul is arguing that a dead heart is incapable of obeying. The only way to follow God and to walk in obedience is if your dead heart is removed and a new heart is placed in you by the work of the Spirit. The Spirit gives life.

4. Under the new Covenant we are set free by the Spirit. Look at verses 12-17.

Paul is recounting the story of Moses told in exodus 34. When Moses went up on Mt. Sinai and spent time with God and was given the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone. God's glory shone around the mountain with thunder and lightning, and when Moses came down off the mountain his face shone with the glory of God. Wouldn't that be incredible to see? Everyone who saw Moses freaked out. His face was glowing, so he covered his face with a veil because they couldn't look at the glory of God reflected in his face. Moses covered himself with a veil, not for himself, not for God, he did it for the people who couldn't handle God's glory, who didn't want to be exposed to God's holiness and power and authority. Paul flips this around in this chapter. Now it's not Moses who wears the veil its everyone who reads Moses and follows Moses. The Old Covenant has become a veil over their faces and they wear it because they don't want to be confronted by the truth of God's redeeming grace and love. They want to cling to what they know and are comfortable with in the Old Covenant. They can't stand the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done for them.

What are you hiding behind a veil? We still do this. Even Christians. We try to hide from God and hide parts of our lives from God. What are you hiding? Maybe it's sin, old habits or new ones that you know are a problem but you aren't ready to confess. Maybe it's a lie that you have been told for years or you have told yourself and now you believe the lie. A lie that says you aren't enough, or you are too much. Maybe you still believe that you have to do something to earn God's favor and love and its holding you back from experiencing all that God has for you. This week take some time and examine your hearts and think about what you

might be trying to hide behind the veil over your hearts, and ask the Lord to help you lift the veil. He already knows.

In Galatians 5:1 Paul says "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." The Spirit gives us freedom so that we no longer have to hide ourselves behind a veil. The Spirit gives us freedom so that we no longer have to try to obey the Law in order to please God. Christ took our place on the cross and paid our penalty of sin and death and brought us forgiveness so that we can be free from our sin and habits that so easily entangle us and to free us so that we can live a healthy life doing the work that God sets before us to do. The Spirit gives us freedom so we can commune with God face to face and behold his glory.

5. Under the New Covenant we are transformed by the Spirit. Lets look at verse 18. The last verse.

This verse really sums up all of Paul's argument. There was glory and beauty and power in the Old Covenant but it pales in comparison to the glory and power and beauty of Jesus Christ and the Spirit at work in our lives. Because of the Spirit we can behold all of the love and majesty and glory of God face to face. Sin is no longer a barrier between us. Shame is no longer a barrier between us. We don't have to be afraid of God like the Israelites were. With unveiled faces we can approach the throne of God with confidence as one of his beloved children.

By the Spirit we are being transformed. From glory to glory, I love that language. It so beautifully expresses the ongoing work of the Spirit. You right now, filled with God's Spirit are a reflection of the Glory of the Lord. Isn't that incredible? You might not feel very glorious, especially if you are middle aged or older, it feels like the glory is fading if you know what I mean. But the Spirit is alive in you and reflecting God's glory in you. I

wish I had eyes that could see the spiritual realm don't you? What if we could see the glory of the lord reflecting off of all of God's people? That would be amazing.

And God isn't done yet. The Spirit is continuing to transform us from glory to glory. The Spirit is changing us, guiding us, healing us, freeing us, taking out the old dead parts of our heart and giving us new hearts, shaping us into the very image of Christ himself. It's amazing. To be transformed into the image of Christ means that we will be like him. That means we will learn to love the way Jesus loved. To have compassion the way he had compassion. To commune with the Father the way he communed with the Father. To serve the way Jesus served. To have the confidence and assurance that Jesus had. To listen the way that he listened. To experience the fullness of joy that Jesus had. All of the attributes of Christ all that is good and desirable and holy in him, those are the attributes that God is giving us through his Spirit. It gives me hope. It means that as much as I have grown in my life and faith, God isn't done growing me and shaping me. It means I don't have to be stuck. God's not finished with us. He is still transforming us by his Spirit.

Let's review the summary of Paul's argument. "The New Covenant is far greater than the Old Covenant because it is a ministry of the Holy Spirit transforming the hearts of believers into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ." Paul teaches us today that the Spirit does this by recommending us, by qualifying us for ministry, by making us alive, setting us free and transforming us in to the image and likeness of Christ.

I want to leave you with some questions to wrestle with this week as you think about this passage.

Who are you looking to for affirmation? If you were to ask for a letter of recommendation from someone right now who would you ask? Is it likes

and views on the internet? Your internet community? Your parents? Your Spouse? Co-workers? We all look for affirmation, we want to belong, we want to be valued and appreciated and accepted. But who are you looking to? Is it God? Is it his Spirit?

Is there something keeping you from doing ministry in your context? If you have been qualified by the Spirit to be a minister of the New Covenant what is holding you back?

Finally, what are you hiding from God? Sin, shame, lies that you have been told, false beliefs that you are holding onto. What are you holding onto that is keeping you from face to face communion with the Father? Ask the Spirit to help you search that out this week.