

2 Corinthians 3

Good morning and thank you so much for joining us. Would you please turn in your Bibles to second Corinthians chapter 3 as we resume our study through this powerful epistle.

We saw a few weeks ago how Chapter 2 ended with Paul defending himself against those who questioned his authority. And as chapter 3 begins, Paul continues to demonstrate his authority to instruct the Corinthians, and then he reminds these troubled Christians of the glory, and the privilege of the new covenant that Jesus provided.

What we'll see is that Paul begins to contrast the ministry of Christians with the ministry of Moses. Paul does this so his readers will understand and appreciate the glory of their ministry and its superiority over that of the OT law.

The title of this mornings message is GROW THE GLOW
Let's pray.

Now I'll tell you there are 32 commas in these 18 verses, so we'll read them slowly.

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? A common practice in the early days of Christianity was for traveling preachers to carry letters of commendation, or referrals from their home church.

These letters were common and necessary, especially in the early church because any false prophet could travel from city to city and claim, "Paul sent me, so you should support me."

So to help guard against potential fraud's like this, letters of recommendation were often sent with Christians as they traveled.

Even today when requests come from missionaries seeking support, or folks who want to speak or sing at Calvary, they include references from other churches where they've ministered. It's a way to validate the legitimacy of the person's ministry.

And Paul himself participated in this practice. In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul endorses Titus. Paul's letter to Philemon commended Onesimus.

In Romans 16 he recommends Phoebe. **Romans 16:1-2 1 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2 that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.**

But Paul saw no need for such letters for the church in Corinth. Why would Paul need a letter of endorsement when He was the one who planted this church, and led its first members to the Lord? Remember Paul pastored this church for 18 months!

God used Paul to start the church at Corinth, and through his teaching God saved their soul's, and now they want his resume?

Look what he says in response in verse 2.

2 You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; The false teachers who had come to Corinth after Paul left there had challenged Paul's credentials. But Paul says the proof of his ministry was the changed lives of the Corinthians themselves.

To put this in our terminology today, it's like a ministry degree or a certificate of ordination. Lots of folks think that an ordination or even a diploma automatically means that the person has all of the proper credentials for ministry.

While there is a purpose in a public ordination to ministry, a piece of paper in itself never is a proper credential. The true credentials of the ministry are changed lives, or as Paul described- living epistles.

It doesn't matter how many letters are after a person's name, or how many plaques a person has on the wall. The proof is in the changed lives from that ministry. It's the spiritual fruit that's proof, not just because a man appointed another man.

This is why whenever we publicly announce someone in a position of leadership, it's NEVER because they have a piece of paper, rather it's because they are already fulfilling the role that God has called them too. We're just publicly acknowledging what God has already been doing.

1 last thing for verse 2-it does NOT say, “miracles are our epistle of commendation.” Paul, who worked incredible miracles that we see in the book of Acts, didn’t believe his primary “letter of recommendation” was found in miraculous signs, but found in miraculously changed lives.

3 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. The Corinthian Christians were Paul’s proof of his qualifications. Yet Paul realized that it was less about himself, and more about what Jesus did. Paul knew God used him to change their lives and their eternal destiny!

And notice the tablets of stone reference. Paul now takes his readers down the path of comparing the OC with the NC.

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the New Covenant, when the law of God would be written not on tablets of stone, but rather in hearts.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 31 “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,[fn] says the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor,

and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

God wrote His will on stone tablets. **SHOW PIC** When He gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, God chiseled His commands with His finger into two pages of stone.

With the 10 commandments it was the first time someone ever said "Take these two tablets daily, and you'll feel better." **CLOSE PIC**

The problem was the Jews ignored the prescription. There was nothing wrong with God's Law. The problem is that mankind can never meet God's holy standards!

This is the marvel of the New Covenant - and Paul holds it up in contrast to the Old.

4 And we have such trust through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, Paul's not saying 'I bet God is glad I'm on His side, you know with all my knowledge and talent and gifts.' NO! Our sufficiency is from God-not us!

One of the lies Satan uses to dissuade Christians is to convince us we're "not ready," or able to do that which the Lord has called us to do. We are never ready or worthy.

If we ever get to the point in serving the Lord where we're ready, the sufficiency would be in ourselves and not from God.

It's such a privilege to hear the stories from so many of you of stepping out in faith, maybe to lead a bible study, witnessing to coworkers, it's amazing what the Lord is doing.

And I'm never concerned about service to the Lord when someone says 'I can't do it but God's calling me to do whatever'. But you know, I become deeply concerned when a person is about to do something for the Lord and they say 'yep I've got it.'

Or, they limit God by saying 'well I'll only serve God in this way cuz that's where i'm comfortable.' That's trusting in your own sufficiency.

It's always a dangerous place to be when we rely on our flesh to do God's will.

In the book of Genesis, God revealed Himself to Abraham as El Shaddai, which means the all-sufficient One. I believe that God deliberately allows us to come to the end of our own abilities so that we might learn to trust in Him. And although the journey is painful, it's always a blessing when we see how the Lord never fails.

Let's read 5 & 6 together

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit;^[fn] for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Assign someone a task without the strength or skills to do it, and you'll sentence them to despair! This is exactly what the letter of the Law did. The Law on stone tablets was impossible for the Jews to keep - not because there was anything wrong with the Law. The Law was perfect, but the people trying to keep it were imperfect - and unable to keep it perfectly.

In the early and not-so-successful days of Chicago's NBA team, the Bulls had a coach named Johnny Kerr. **SHOW PIC** Once before a game, Kerr entered the team's locker room to get his players fired up. He said to one guy, "You go out there and act like the best scorer in the league." To another fellow he shouted, "You pretend to be the best rebounder there is!" And to a third player, "You imagine you're the best defender in basketball." Yet sadly, when the game was over the Chicago Bulls had lost again - by 17 points. Coach Kerr was depressed. **CLOSE PIC**

That's when one of his players encouraged him, "Don't worry coach. Just pretend we won."

See according to God's law, no matter how much we try or even pretend, we're all guilty before God. And this is why God gave us the NC.

So when did the NC come into place and practice? **Luke 22:19-20** 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

So what is this NC we keep talking about? This new covenant presents the terms by which we can have a relationship with God. Through Jesus. **Matthew 5:17 Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.**

Now verse 6 has some strong language-what does it mean when he says the letter kills?

Because the law thoroughly and completely establishes our guilt. The law was like a thermometer. The thermometer doesn't remove the fever, it tells you you have a fever. The law demonstrates all of our guilt, yet the law gave no power to serve God because it didn't change the heart.

7 But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, Let's pause here. Paul now calls the OC the ministry of death! Why? Because that is what the law does to us: It proves that we are guilty sinners before God. It isn't that the problem was with the law, but with us. **Romans 7:5-6: 5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. 6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.**

Let's read all of verse 7...

7 But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which

glory was passing away, What's Paul speaking of here? The Bible tells us in the book of Exodus, Moses went to the top of Mount Sinai as the Lord gave him the 10 commandments, Moses was on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights.

And you'll recall Moses came down, with the 10 commandments, he saw the people worshiping the golden calf right, and Moses gets mad, throws down the tables of stone. He's the only guy to break all 10 commandments at one time!

Moses pleads to God on behalf of the people, and for the 2nd time Moses goes back up to Sinai and Moses received the 10 commandments again. And Exodus 34 describes the face of Moses after he came down the mountain with the Law in his hands. Exodus 34 29 Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. 30 So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them. 32 Afterward all the children of Israel came near, and he gave them as commandments all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. 33 And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. 34 But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out; and he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever he had been commanded. 35 And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the

skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him.

Moses radiated God's glory. Call it the "divine shine" or the "Mo Glow."

I'm sure the Israelites were freaked out when Moses came down. Now you have to understand, these are people that have never seen a neon bulb. **SHOW PIC** They have never seen a light bulb, they don't even know what a light switch is. They've seen the sun and the moon and fire. Here's a guy whose face was glowing.

CLOSE PIC

So explaining how Moses' face showed of God's glory...

8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.If the old covenant, which brought death yet had this glory, how much more glory is there in the new covenant, which brings the ministry of the Spirit and life.

You see, the old covenant was based upon mankind's faithfulness and obedience.

Now, this new covenant cannot fail, because it's founded upon God's faithfulness to His word.

A covenant based upon our faithfulness to the word of God failed; because we can't be faithful. But we know that God is faithful to His word, and because He cannot fail this new covenant which we stand in is certain.

Tragically there are people who try to maintain their righteousness by keeping the law. They find that their glory fades very quickly because in a day or two or three, they're facing their own frailty and their own humanity again because none of us can fully keep God's commands.

Today, the grace of God and work of His Spirit make a more glorious covenant. The divine shine passed, but the glory of His grace lasts forever.

10-13

10 For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. 11 For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.

12 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech— 13 unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. This is shocking! We assume Moses covered his face with the veil so that people wouldn't be blinded by the brightness of his face because of God's glory. But here Paul says Moses put a veil over his face so that the people of Israel wouldn't see the glow fading.

See there's a picture that's being painted here for us. The prominence and splendor of the OC was fleeting. You could literally watch it fade from Moses' face. But the significance of the New Covenant lasts forever.

But why does Paul seem to take a shot at Moses here in verse 12-saying they had great boldness of speech but Moses didn't. Hey what did Moses ever do to Paul?

Think about it for a moment-you don't wear a veil when you're trying to be bold. A veil is a barrier and something to hide behind. Compared to Paul, Moses lacked boldness because the covenant that Moses ministered under was fading away and fading in glory.

Paul had boldness in the NC because the NC never passes away.

Now with all of that as the backdrop, a truth bomb is about to be dropped...

14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. 15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.

Whenever we study OT passages like Isaiah 52 and 53, Psalm 22 that speak vividly of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we ask ourselves why don't the Jews recognize Jesus as their Messiah?

There are multiple reasons we could give, but the root of the answer is revealed in verse 14 and 15, "Their minds were blinded... when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart." **Romans 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.**

The problem is a spiritual blindness. When the Law is read, pride rises up.

Even when they read the law, there is a veil over their faces, that they don't really understand the law.

A very sad thing has taken place among the Jewish people. Although they still verbally hold to the law, they don't practice or follow the law.

Under the law, under the old covenant, it was necessary that there be a death of a substitutionary animal to atone for their sins. You would bring the animal to the priest. You would lay your hands upon its head. You would confess your sins over the animal, and then the priest would slay the animal and offer it as a sacrifice, a sin offering for you. And thus, your sins would be covered. BTW its interesting the animal was always inspected for no spot or blemish, but not the person bringing the animal. See it was known they're sins would be covered, not taken away.

Now today, the veil is over their faces, for they are trying to approach God through their own good works, ignoring the fact that God required the sacrifice of an animal. Because there is no temple, they have substituted the sacrifice of the animal, and are trying to instead place their good efforts and their good works as the basis for their coming to God and their righteous standing before God.

Yet nowhere in the law are substitutes ever allowed for the sacrifices.

See their thought is “we’re God’s chosen people, we can earn God’s favor, we can keep God’s law.” Sadly they think that by their good efforts and good works they can atone for their sin.

So is all hope lost? The glorious answer is no!!!

16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. The moment a person turns to Jesus the veil of separation between them and God vanishes. The light of God pours into the heart that was dark. Not because a person tried hard, or earned it, or proved our worth - but because of simple faith in what Jesus has done on the cross

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Now this is one of the more misinterpreted scriptures that some Christians will use to justify all kind of weird things. They’ll use this verse to justify their liberty to scream out and to shout out and to run up and down the aisles, and whatever conduct they want as part of their worship service.

But it’s taking this verse out of context. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty from the law and from the bondage of the law. Free from the law, there is no condemnation, for Jesus provides a perfect salvation. And so, this is freedom from the requirements of the law.

18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. God's glory transforms us. It makes us like Jesus. The Greek word translated "transformed" is "metamorphosis" - which speaks of a radical change. When a caterpillar leaves its cocoon and flies off a butterfly - it's a metamorphosis.

Under the OC you conformed, and produced your own righteousness. But under the NC we don't conform, rather we are transformed. We radiate His righteousness. We become like Jesus.

Christianity is a metaphysical miracle. We change-from the inside out! First our spirit; then our thoughts and attitudes; finally our actions - and we do it not by trying, but by looking-looking to Jesus!

Paul said earlier the glory of the OC faded and diminished, but the glory of the NC intensifies. We go "from glory to glory." The Christian life is a progression.

And here's how the glow grows... we "behold as in a mirror..." - As we look to Jesus, we become like Him. It's His Spirit that does the work, we just supply the look.

You keep spending time with Jesus. You keep the focus and attention of your heart toward Him.

We keep our face toward Jesus and He achieves the changes. A mirror effect takes place.