

Ministry of the Spirit

2 Corinthians 3:1-18

Can I tell you guys a little about me? I love being a team player! I love working in a group of people to accomplish something great. I Just feel better that way. And yet there are many people who would say they DO NOT like working in a team, mainly because they like to do things a certain way or feel like not everyone puts in the same level of effort.

Whether you're a team player or not, I think we can all agree that there are some things that no one likes to do by themselves.

For example:

Moving – Has anyone ever moved from one place to another by themselves? Like, you packed up your stuff and moved furniture and appliances by yourself? If so, then I'm convinced that you have mythical powers. I remember my Dad doing this when I was a kid, and to this day I still don't know how he made that happen. It's really inspiring; AND now that I'm a Dad and have my own family do you think that I'm going to do the same thing?

“NO, Nuh Uh.” I am going to get a team of people together to help me move; I'm going get 20 men and two trucks to get the job done! Because “many hands make light work!”

The truth is that whether we believe it or not, we could all use some help, especially when it comes to being victorious in our walk with the Lord. One of the ways that we can receive this help is by staying in touch with a community of believers to lift us up; but as believers we actually have someone that was sent by God to be our “Helper.” The Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit helps by ministering to us in many different ways, ultimately with the purpose of drawing us to God and empowering us to live victorious in this life.

In order for us to unpack further what the ministry of the Spirit is, we have to start by looking at what He was originally sent to do. In John 14:15-18 Jesus makes mention of the “the Helper.” He says, *And I will pray the Father, and He will give*

you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

The context of this passage is that Jesus is reassuring His disciples that after His death, that He won't leave the disciples alone, but will send someone like Him (because He is part of the Trinity) that will give them help to accomplish what He has called them to do.

After Jesus death and resurrection, the promised Helper arrived on the day of Pentecost. *Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.* It was on this day that the Spirit entered His ministry of helping us as an encourager, advisor, defender, healer, mediator, and intercessor, just to name a few.

The beautiful thing is that the Spirit is still doing ministry today! Even now the Spirit is prepping our hearts not to focus on me, but to focus on what He is going to speak to your heart through His word today. As we get into our study of 2 Corinthians 3, we will be focusing on three aspects of the Spirit's Ministry

- The Ministry of the Spirit is LIFEGIVING
- The Ministry of the Spirit is GLORIOUS
- The Ministry of the Spirit is TRANSFORMATIVE

I believe that this message is important because better understanding of The Ministry of the Spirit, will help us to rely on Him for everything we need and make us more like Jesus.

Before we go any further let's get some context of the book of 2 Corinthians:

This is the second letter that Paul has written to the Corinthians, which was probably written around 55 or 56 A.D. The city of Corinth was located in southern Greece in what was a part of the Roman empire and was known as a major trade city. Paul actually founded the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey in Acts 18.

In Paul's first letter – He wrote to deal with specific moral issues in the church at the time, but soon after, false apostles entered and began to attack Paul's authority as an Apostle, which resulted in the people turning against him

In Paul's second letter – He wrote to defend his position as an Apostle and denounced the false apostles that were attacking him. This letter was actually really personal and difficult for Paul to write, because in some ways he is having to re-introduce himself to people he spent so much time with and cared about deeply.

This brings us to our first point....

The Spirit's Ministry is LIFEGIVING (1-6)

“Epistle”/Letters of commendation – This was a common practice in the first century. These letters were kind of like the way we would see a letter of recommendation or resume for what someone has done.

YOU are our epistle – The time he spent with them, their salvation, and their growth in the Lord didn't just happen but it was intentional, and God used Paul to do it. Instead of offering a piece of paper, Paul, to qualify himself, points them to their own lives. This is the ultimate form of impact and qualification of legit ministry, to be able to point to people's lives and acknowledge how God has used you to benefit someone else.

- Think about it, whenever you go to a funeral, you don't hear about how many degrees someone had, how much money they had, or positions they held; it's all about the people they loved and impacted deeply. As believers we are uniquely gifted and equipped to do just that, even in the current state of our culture; we need that more than ever.

Epistles of Christ – This is one of those moments that make you scratch your head because it's so obvious that you shouldn't need to mention it. Paul is clearly stating that their salvation only happened because Jesus did it; even though God used him to minister to them, it was ultimately Jesus that changed their lives.

- Paul didn't manipulate them to accept Christ, but their salvation was genuine because Christ changed their hearts.

Not sufficient in ourselves – At one point of Paul’s life, because he had much to boast about in himself. In [Philippians 3:4–6](#) Paul writes, "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But when he came to Christ, Paul lost all that earthly, religious confidence, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ." ([Philippians 3:7](#)). Now Paul freely reveals his weakness and his inability to make any impact apart from the provision of God.

Sufficient ministers of the New Covenant – When we examine the word “Covenant” it means a “legally binding arrangement” made by one party with absolute power, which the other party may accept or reject, but cannot altar. This new covenant was established by Jesus on the night of the last supper and solidified with His death and resurrection.

Paul is referring to the Old Covenant when he mentions the “letter,” or the Law, as we will see later. The Law was good because it came from God, but Paul labels it as something that kills, because all it did was expose and pile on guilt for anyone that couldn’t keep all its laws.

- On top of that, anyone that tries to keep its rules will discover that the Law doesn’t keep you from sinning, but creates more desire for sin. [Romans 7:5-6](#) *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. 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.*
 - Paul is saying, “I’m not a minister of what kills, but I’m a minister of what brings life!”
 - We may not be living according to the ancient Jewish law, but we all have unwritten laws that we try to live by. One of the most common laws is trying to be “good enough.” Meaning that you strive every day just to be acceptable in the sight of others. This is something that also “kills,” because no one can do this; we all end up failing to reach unrealistic standards.
 - What’s even worse is that instead of seeing that “being good enough for others” is unrealistic, we automatically turn

inward and claim that “there must be something wrong with me.” This is exactly what Christ came to set us free from. No longer do we need to be good enough for others, but we can rest in the fact that He is good enough and allows us to be counted as righteous because of it.

The Ministry of the Spirit is LIFEGIVING because it changes our hearts and makes us sufficient for all things.

This brings us to our second point...

The Ministry of the Spirit is GLORIOUS (7-11)

Paul’s history lesson – To underscore the superiority of the New Covenant Paul takes his readers back to Exodus 34:29-35, which is the biblical account of Moses meeting with God to receive specific commandments for the children of Israel.

In order to get these commandments, which would later be known as the “Ten Commandments,” and later “The Law,” Moses would have to travel up a mountain called Sinai and meet with God. Scripture tells us that many times he went up on Mount Sinai to meet with God, and each time he would return from the mountain his face would be briefly illuminated, because he was exposed to the glory of God. As awesome as this was, it didn’t last very long and would quickly fade, but not before freaking out the Israelite people. It got to a point where Moses would just cover his face with a veil so they couldn’t see it.

The Law also had a reputation of death because each year every Israelite would be required to atone for their sins through animal sacrifice. This is why Paul called the Old Covenant “the ministry of Death,” because the death was the only thing that could atone for the sinfulness of mankind.

- Ultimately, this was a foreshadowing of what Jesus would do on the cross, not just for the Israelites, but for all of mankind – with one big difference... Jesus’ sacrifice would finish the work of sacrificial atonement forever.

Hebrews 10:11-12 – And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.

With this in mind... Paul asks his question – “If the Old Covenant – which was written on stone, focused on death, and was unapproachable – had glory, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? To contrast, the New Covenant will not be written on stone, but the hearts of people - *Hebrews 10:16-17* “*This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them...*” The new covenant will not focus on death but life – *John 10:10b* *I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.* The New Covenant will not be unapproachable, but all are welcome – *John 3:16* *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

- The New Covenant, initiated by the Spirit of God, is more glorious because the temporary in the Old Covenant was made permanent in the New Covenant through the Spirit. Now those that follow Christ can claim “that there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus!” (Romans 8:1)

The Ministry of the Spirit is Glorious because it assures us that the law we were required to follow has been completed in Christ and we now live by the grace of God.

This leads us to our third point....

The Spirit’s Ministry is TRANSFORMATIVE (12-18)

Paul explains where his boldness comes from – The Old Covenant, by design, caused men and women to become deeply aware of their own sinfulness and inability to do what was right before God. The result was a lack of confidence before God. Paul again references Moses, because even he lacked boldness under the fading glory of the Old covenant; that’s why he covered his face.

Removing the veil brings liberty – The point Paul is trying to make is that, when Moses went into God’s presence, he had the liberty to take off the veil; the presence of the Lord gave him this liberty, but we have the Holy Spirit and live in the Spirit’s presence constantly under the New Covenant. So, just as Moses had the liberty to relate to God without the veil in the presence of the Lord, so we have liberty because of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

- We can go before the Lord and just be who we are! “No fake it till you make it,” just be YOU. This is such a privilege and blessing that before God I don’t have to hide or clean myself up. I’m free to just “be” as I am in His presence.

Beholding in a mirror - We know what it is to “behold” in a mirror; it’s to gaze at something intently. Before you came here today you did that just to make sure you were “looking right,” lol. Paul uses the example of looking into a mirror to illustrate to us how we can behold the glory of the Lord. Although in the ancient world, they didn’t have mirrors like we have today.

Ancient mirrors were made of polished metal, the result would be a clouded, fuzzy, somewhat distorted image, not fully clear. In the same way Paul says, “We can see the glory of the Lord, but we can’t see it perfectly yet.” Now, this doesn’t mean go home and look in your mirror for Jesus, He won’t be there. But He does give us a clear picture of Himself in His word. That’s the right place to look to behold His glory.

- When we do this something happens to us – the Spirit slowly transforms us into the image of God, meaning that we will see transformational growth in love, grace, peace, and righteousness. **One commentator said, “that looking at Jesus Christ will save you, but gazing upon Him sanctifies.”** In other words, this means that when we behold the Lord we naturally grow in holiness, because we don’t want to allow sin to keep us from getting close to Him.
 - Have you ever asked the question, “How can I change?” Or, “How can they change?” The best and most enduring change comes into our lives when we are transformed by time spent with the Lord. You can try to change in other ways such as guilt, willpower, or coercion, but none of these methods bring change that is as deep and lasts as long as the transformation that comes by the Spirit of God as we spend time in the presence of the Lord, beholding who He is.

Glory to Glory – Paul also wants us to understand something – that being transformed into the image of Christ is a process, and will last our whole lives. **One commentator once said, “The image of God, which has been defaced by sin, may be repaired within us... the progress of this restoration is continuous through the whole of life, because it is little by little that God causes His glory to shine forth in us.** This is called “progressive sanctification,” meaning that we will become more and more like Him as we are changed by the Spirit over time.

The Ministry of the Spirit is Transformative, because of our access to God, who through the Spirit reveals His glory to us.

In CONCLUSION:

The Ministry of the Spirit is LIFEGIVING, GLORIOUS, and TRANSFORMATIVE. The Helper is still doing ministry today and draws all of us to press into Him so that we fully rely on Him as we become more like Christ.

I believe that this message is important, because better understanding of The Ministry of the Spirit will help us to rely on Him for everything we need and make us more like Jesus.