

A Study in II Corinthians

Strength in Weakness

Chapter Three - Lesson Four

Paul's Ministry Vindicated (1-5): Paul had to continually defend his apostleship (see I Cor. 9:1-3). Within the Corinthian church there were those who were denying the important facts of divine revelation, denying Paul's apostleship and message. Here Paul once again defends his apostleship.

Some of those at Corinth sought letters of commendation from Paul and his companions (1). Paul rebuked their thinking saying, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men" (2). Truly, the mere fact there were believers at Corinth was a testimony to Paul's apostleship, ministering the Gospel of the grace of God. The believers at Corinth "were manifestly declared to be the epistles of Christ" (3). It is their manifestation as the "epistles of Christ" that testify to Paul apostleship.

Paul is not boasting here but rather defending his role as the God-given apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13 cf. Gal. 1:11-12). Paul makes it clear that he not being boastful, thinking more highly of himself than he ought to think, but rather his sufficiency is of God! (4-5).

A fading Glory (6-11): Paul goes on here to deal with the Old and New Covenants. It is therefore necessary to review the distinction and association between the two as they pertain to the church, the Body of Christ.

The Old Covenant is the Law given at Mount Sinai. It's overall purpose was to provide the framework for the spiritual fitness of the nation, to be all that God called them to be as a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, ministering the kingdom of God to the rest of the world. This covenant was given to Israel, however the intended goal was that the blessings would flow to the rest of the world, i.e. Gentiles. The failure of the Old Covenant was not in the Law, but in a sinful nature. In its spiritual condition mankind was unable to obtain to its righteous demands. The Law was weak through the flesh. This was exemplified when the Law was first given; Moses had not even descended from the mount and the people had already broken the first and second commandments! The

Lawgiver, having foreseen this weakness in humanity, prepared a way whereby spiritual fitness could be obtained through faith.

The New Covenant is to replace the Old Covenant. To bring in a New Covenant the Old Covenant had to be done away. This was accomplished by Jesus Christ fulfilling the righteous requirements of the Law and thereby redeeming all those under the curse of the Law. Jesus Christ had therefore abolished the Law through the cross, making atonement or payment for all the Law's righteous demands, making Himself the mediator of a better covenant. It is through this better covenant that all can experience the spiritual fitness needed to be all God has called us to be whether in Israel's program or ours, as members of the Body of Christ.

So then, Paul and his companions, by proclaiming salvation by faith in the cross work of Christ are "able ministers of the New Testament." The redemption, and thereby spiritual fitness, is given by faith in Christ by the Holy Spirit of God.

The Law was written on stone and was therefore to be done away (7). The New Testament is written on the heart by the Spirit of God upon all who place their faith in Christ. It is not given to corruption; it fades not away. Therefore, the glory of the New Testament supersedes that of the Old (8-11).

A Veil of Blindness (12-16): Continuing his thought of glory, and specifically the fading glory of one and the unfading glory of another, Paul uses an example of when the Law was given.

After meeting with God at Mount Sinai and having received the commandments, Moses came down in the presence of the people and his face shown with the glory of God so that he put a veil on his face when he was speaking to the people (Ex. 34:32-34). This was done so the people could not see the glory begin to fade. Paul uses this truth to underscore that the Law was only temporary, it was always meant to fade away. It was this fading away aspect that was hidden from the people, their minds being blinded to this truth.

And so it is to this day, Paul points out that the nation is blinded, they have a veil over their eyes concerning the Old Testament, until they turn their hearts to the Lord (15-16). This blindness issue is taught in more detail in Romans 11:7-36.

The Administration of the Spirit (17-18): Paul rounds out this chapter in preparation for the next, dealing with how it is the Spirit of God works in the life of the believer in light of how the Law worked. The Law was composed of do's and don'ts. Being not under the Old Testament (the Law) but under the New, God having written the Law on our hearts by the ministry of the Spirit of God, we are to be conformed to the image of Christ, not by the doing of the Law but by beholding the glory of the Lord (17-18). Just as one looks into a mirror (glass) and that mirror shines on our face, so when we behold Christ, by the Spirit of God we are changed into Christ (18). The mirror is the Word of God (James 1:23-25). It is not do's and don'ts; it is beholding, and when we behold Him in the Word of God, He changes us into "the same image" through the Spirit of God (18).