

2 Corinthians 3

3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? ² You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. ³ You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Paul starts this chapter in a peculiar way. He starts by talking about letters of recommendation. The letters that he is talking about are different than the ones that we think about. These letters are a list of people that you have led to Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 7:16-20, being a Christian is about bearing fruit and that is the only thing worthy of putting into a letter of recommendation. Does John 13:35 contradict what we read in Matthew 7:16-20? How do we show our love for one another? No. Telling others about salvation through Jesus is showing your love for them.

The product of Paul's ministry was "changed lives". In 1 Corinthians 3:6-8, Paul describes what he is talking about in these verses. According to 1 Corinthians 3:7, what are our jobs regarding leading someone to the saving knowledge of Jesus and how does that translate into the real world?

1. Plant the seed. Tell someone about Jesus.
2. Water. Teach them more about Jesus, by example or word.
3. Whose job is it to make their faith grow? God's
4. If they reject what you say, who are they rejecting? God
5. Is planting any more important than watering? No. How does the amount reward get determined? According to the amount of work and not according to souls saved.

Paul says in verse 2 that the members of the Corinthian church are part of his letter of recommendation. When he came to Corinth, they knew nothing about salvation through Jesus. In verse 2, Paul says those that have accepted Christ become a letter of recommendation for Christ. The letter is written on our hearts. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, he will say it differently. He will say that we are a new creation in Christ. Again, we are a changed person. According to Exodus 31:18, by whom and how were the original tablets of the 10 Commandments written? "*inscribed by the finger of God.*"

Jesus says in Acts 1:8, "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" That is what Paul is talking about in these verses. Consider the changes to Peter. Before the Holy Spirit, he denied that he even knew Jesus. After the Holy Spirit came upon him, he preached Jesus to the Sanhedrin. All in all, the change is made by the Holy Spirit and the credit for the change is given to Jesus, the Son of God.

In his time in Corinth, when Paul preached, he taught them about a Christian's love and God's love for this church. Paul told them all through 1 Corinthians that in everything, his and their motivation should be love.

4 Such confidence we have through Christ before God. 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Verse 4 makes me think of the old hymn, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Christ, my righteousness”. Through our faith in Jesus, we have salvation. Without our hope or our confidence in our salvation through Jesus, then we are lost, just like the rest of the world.

Verse 5 says that it is all about God and not about us. Remember from 1 Corinthians 3, we have no control of whether or not someone that we share the Gospel message actually accepts it. We witness and leave it to God. God gives us a blessing when we do share but the rest is all about God and He should be praised.

All through verses 5 and 6, the NIV uses the word ‘competency’ and the NASB uses the word ‘adequacy’ to describe our ability to change lives. We do not change lives on our own, it is God that changes lives. Our competency or adequacy to lead someone to Christ comes from God through the Holy Spirit.

You have heard Pastor Brian or me say, when someone sits down to write a sermon or message and it is a message from God, it all flows as if God is giving it to you as you write. The author just needs to be open to God through the Holy Spirit.

In verse 6, Paul compares the New Covenant through Jesus and the letter that kills (NIV). What is this letter that kills? It is the Law. The Law points out the mistakes we make. If all we had was the Law, then we would all fall short of the glory of God. The New Covenant gives us everlasting life. (John 3:16)

7 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9 If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

In verse 7 and 8, Paul says that if the ministry of the Law was glorious, then the ministry of salvation through the Holy Spirit would be even more glorious. How glorious was the ministry of the Law? Paul uses the change in Moses appearance as an example of how glorious it was.

But the glory that shown from Moses face was not permanent and it came from the Holy Spirit and not the Law.

In verse 9, Paul says that the Law only brought condemnation but grace through faith brings righteousness. The Law gave no salvation. Through the New Covenant we have Jesus' righteousness (imputed righteousness) since we have none of our own. (Read Romans 4:18-25)

In verse 11, Paul says "If God's glory that is temporary is amazing, then how much more amazing would permanent glory be?" Remember the glory that showed up on Moses face only lasted a short time and he had to cover it with a veil so no one could see it was gone.

12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. 15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

In verse 12, Paul says that since we have salvation through Jesus or "the hope", we should be able to speak boldly about it to others. Consider the fear in Peter during his denial of Jesus (Luke 22:54-62) compared to the way he spoke before the Sanhedrin a short time later (Acts 4:5-12). This is the transformation God wants from us. He wants us to speak boldly because our hope is not in this world but in Jesus.

In verse 13, Paul reiterates what he said earlier. When Moses was in the presence of God, his face glowed but it was not permanent. It lasted a short time so he wore a veil so others wouldn't know when the glow was gone. Also in verse 13, Paul ties the Law to Moses' veil. The Law was given to point out our sins but the Law's time had passed. The Law offered no salvation just a roadmap for keeping your life right.

In verse 15, Paul says that even in his day, the Jews couldn't see that the Law was fulfilled by Jesus. The Jews were still following the Law by mistake because they thought it was all God had to offer. The Law was the veil that kept salvation through Jesus from being seen as God's new covenant or way to be right with God. All through Paul's missionary journeys, he ran into Jews that rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Every time Paul preached grace through faith in Jesus, Jews would argue using the Law. Even the Christian Council in Jerusalem didn't accept that salvation comes only through Jesus with nothing added. What does Jesus say in John 14:6? No one comes to the Father but through Jesus.

When we share the Gospel message with others, they have a choice to accept or reject God's new covenant. If they choose to remove the veil and stop seeing Christianity as a bunch of rules and

laws that keep them from enjoying life, then they can see the love that it gives, the salvation that it brings, the true freedoms that Jesus gives us.

“Many Christians with a heart to preach to their Jewish friends wonder why it is rarely so simple as just showing them that Jesus is the Messiah. This is because a veil lies on their heart. Unless God does a work in them so they turn to the Lord and have the veil taken away, they will never see the fading glory of Moses’ covenant and the surpassing glory of Jesus and the new covenant. Of course, it could be said that the Jews are not the only ones with a veil... on their heart. Gentiles also have “veils” that separate them from seeing Jesus and His work for us clearly, and Jesus is more than able to take those veils away. This points to the essential need of *prayer* in evangelism. It has been rightly said that it is more important to talk to God about men than it is to talk to men about God, but we can do both of these important works.” (Guzik)

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

In verse 17, Paul points out what every Christian should know. Jesus told us that the Father and the Son are one (John 10:30) but here Paul completes the Trinity. He says that the Father and the Holy Spirit are one. Also in verse 17, Paul also reiterates what Jesus said in John 8:36, “*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*” Paul includes the Holy Spirit in giving us freedom from sin. Jesus didn’t include the Holy Spirit because when Jesus said the words recorded in John 8:36, the Holy Spirit had not come.

In verse 18, Paul says that as we become mature Christians we will look more and more like Jesus. In Paul time, a mirror was just a piece of polished metal that showed a distorted view. As a young Christian, it should be less evident that we are a Christian. As a mature Christian, others should be able to see Christ in us.

Verse 18 also has the following truths:

- a. As we mature we reflect the glory of God.
- b. The Holy Spirit and God are one.
- c. Our transformation is performed by God through the Holy Spirit.
- d. It will not be complete until we look like God or Jesus.