

FPFWC Christian Development



Experiencing Hope

June 2024

Summer Quarter

June 8, 2024

Lesson #2 - Bold Ministers

SCRIPTURE TEXT – 2 Corinthians 3:5-18

ICE BREAKER –

How can the knowledge of the hope you have in Jesus Christ increase your boldness of faith and witness?

Why is it necessary for us to “turn to the Lord in repentance?” (Luke 1:17; Acts 9:35; 1 Thessalonians 1:9)

Key Verse: “ We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”—2 Corinthians 3:18

LESSON BACKGROUND

By AD 57, the year that Paul wrote the letter we call 2 Corinthians, he had developed a multiyear relationship with the church he had planted in Corinth. He had established that congregation on his second missionary journey of AD 52–54 (Acts 18:1–11). Bible experts recognize this letter as the most difficult to understand among all 13 of Paul’s epistles. This letter and others to the church in Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 5:9; 2 Corinthians 2:3–4; 7:8, 12) reveal that Paul had stayed in touch. Such was the nature of his church-planting ministry.

The letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians show a congregation troubled on several fronts. Challenges to Paul’s apostolic authority aggravated those troubles, and his letters to that church feature responses to personal criticisms leveled at him (1 Corinthians 9:1–2; 2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:5; 12:11–12; etc.). Therefore, Paul used much ink in 2 Corinthians to defend the legitimacy of his apostolic calling. Indeed, the more than 500 words of 2 Corinthians 2:12–3:18 set the stage for longer defenses of his apostolic ministry later in the epistle. Today’s lesson covers a majority of those 24 verses.

LESSON COMMENTARY

3:4–6a. Such confidence before God (i.e., the adequacy of his ministry from God [2:16–17] and the evidence of adequacy in Corinthian conversions [3:1–3]) comes by means of Christ. Lest they misunderstand this confidence, Paul

explained that his sufficiency for new covenant ministry came from God, not from himself.

3:6b. The current new covenant is now contrasted with the old covenant of the past. The letter refers to the law as chiseled in stone. This external code stated commandments but did not empower the hearer to obey. The result of disobedience was death for the rebellious (Ex 32:27–28). There was nothing wrong with the content of the OT law. It reflects the holy character of God, and most of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the NT. Here Paul stresses the inability of an external code to enable a person to keep it. The new covenant, however, is characterized by the inner work of the Spirit, which enables a person to do the will of God. The result of obedience is life. This letter/Spirit contrast should not be understood as pointing to a spiritual interpretation of the Bible over against a literal interpretation.

2. The Glory of New Covenant Ministry (3:7–4:6)

Based on a running explanation of Ex 34:29–35, Paul argued from lesser to greater for the permanence of the new covenant ministry.

3:7–8. Even though the old covenant resulted in death for the rebellious in Ex 32:27–28, it nevertheless possessed the glory of God—a glory that was evident in the glowing face of Moses (Ex 34:29). Israel in their rebellion could not gaze intently on this glory lest they be consumed. As an act of mercy, Moses veiled his face before Israel lest they die (the OT never mentions that the glory was fading; it was “a glory which was made ineffective” [NET] by the veil, cf. Scott Hafemann, 2 Corinthians [NIVAC], Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000, 144–163, and see the comments below on v. 13). Both covenants reflect the glory of God in equal degree, but their results are different: rebellious Israel died, but the believing Corinthians lived.

3:9–10. Rebellious Israel died because the law pronounced condemnation on sin (see the comments on Gl 3:10–14), and Israel was not able to keep all the law so as to avoid this condemnation (see Dt 29–31, Israel under the old covenant established a right relationship with God only by faith in God’s promises that ultimately found fulfillment in the person of Christ). But the Corinthians lived because the Spirit brings and promotes righteousness. The glory of God, therefore, abounds in the new covenant because of its results. When compared in this way, it is clear that the old covenant ministry has come to an end. It has, by comparison to the new covenant, no glory at this time.

3:11. The very nature of the old covenant, which veiled the glory of God, revealed that it was temporary. The new covenant inaugurated by Christ replaced the old covenant and remains as a permanent covenant that manifests the unveiled glory of God.

3:12–13. The remainder of the chapter highlights the significance of Ex 34:29–35 for the Corinthians. Because Paul had this confident hope that the new covenant remains, he preached the gospel with a courageous boldness. This is in contrast to Moses who spoke through a veil to Israel. The purpose of the veil was to keep rebellious Israel from experiencing the end (telos, here refers to the consequence of destruction) that the unveiled glory of God would bring on “stiff-necked” people in a time of rebellion (Ex 34:33–35). The fact of a new covenant means that only those who embrace Paul’s gospel can be saved. There is no separate way of salvation for the Jewish people.

3:14–16. Why then were so many Israelites rejecting Christ? Their minds continued to be hardened (see the comments on Rm 11:7–27). This is evident because the veil (which now was representing Israel’s hardness) remained over their heart when Moses (i.e., the old covenant) was read (v. 15). The hardness is only removed when they embrace Christ as Savior. Just as Moses used to remove the veil to behold the glory of God (Ex 34:34), so Jewish people now have the veil of hardness removed when they repent and see the glory of God in the person of Jesus (v. 16). Moses was a paradigm for a person who turns in repentance to the Lord (a reference to God the Father in this quotation from Ex 34:34). Just as Moses removed the veil in the presence of God, so people throw off their hardness of heart when they turn to God.

3:17. By saying the Lord is the Spirit, Paul was not equating the Father and the Spirit as one person. He was explaining the significance of Ex 34:34 to NT believers. Moses uniquely turned to the Lord (Yahweh) in the tent of meeting; but now NT believers turn to the Spirit in their conversion. The liberty that results is not an independence to do whatever one pleases, but rather is liberation from hardheartedness.

3:18. In contrast to Jewish unbelievers (3:14), all followers of Christ, Jewish or Gentile, now have an unveiled face—Paul’s image for freedom from hardheartedness. Unlike rebellious Israel in the Exodus account, Christians can see God’s glory and live. Those who intensely ponder this glory are continuously transformed (from the initial glory of their conversion to the final glory of the future) into the image of Christ who reveals the glory of God. This transformation comes from God who now works through the Spirit. Paul expected every true follower of Christ to experience an ever-increasing growth in godliness.

LESSON NUGGET – The New Covenant in Christ brings freedom - the law brings bondage (Acts 15:10), but Grace gives glorious freedom that makes us more and more like Jesus Christ. Each day, you can have your own personal transfiguration as you worship the Lord and yield to the Spirit.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word for Today Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*