

Men's Sunday Night
The Book of 2 Corinthians
"Finding Strength in Weakness"
Lesson 3 – 2 Corinthians 3:1-18
"Every Member Ministry"

"I don't need letters of recommendation!" says Paul. "You Christians at Corinth are my letters, written on hearts, not on stones!" "*By their fruits you will know them.*" A person's life and ministry may be seen in his or her work. Paul pictures himself as God's secretary, writing the Word into the lives of God's people. What an amazing truth: every Christian is an epistle of Christ being read by all men.

When Paul says, "The letter kills," he is not talking about the "letter" of God's Word as opposed to its "spirit." Often, we hear confused people say, "It is wrong to follow the letter of the Bible; we must follow the spirit of it." Keep in mind that by "the letter" Paul means the Old Testament law. In this chapter, he uses different phrases when referring to the Old Testament law: the letter (vs. 6), ministry of death (vs. 7), ministry of condemnation (vs. 9).

Certainly, there was glory to the Old Testament ministry. Glory filled the temple, the glory of God hovered over the people in the wilderness. The temple and its ceremonies, and the very giving of the Law to Moses, all had glory attached to them. But it was a fading glory, not a lasting glory. Paul cites the experience of Moses from Ex. 34:29-35. Moses had been in God's presence, and His glory was reflected on his face. But Moses knew that this glory would fade, so he wore a veil over his face whenever talking to the people, lest they see the glory fade and lose confidence in his ministry. God never meant for the glory of the Old Covenant to remain, it was to fade away before the abounding glory of the Gospel.

Paul makes a spiritual application of Moses veil. He states that there is still a veil over the hearts of the Jews when they read the Old Testament, and this veil keeps them from seeing Christ. The Old Testament will always be a locked book to the heart that does not know Christ. Jesus removed that veil when He tore the veil of the temple and fulfilled the Old Testament types and prophecies.

Our position in Christ is a glorious one. The ministry of grace is far superior to Judaism or any other religion, even though the New Testament Christian has none of the ceremonies or visible trappings that belonged to the Law. Ours is a glorious ministry, and its glory will never fade.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-6. Pray and answer the following questions:

Christianity is essentially a lay movement. Every person in Christ is a minister, a priest, a prince or princess in the kingdom of God. This every-member ministry takes place not only in the church but in the home, workplace and out in society. One would not think that every Christian is a minister while visiting the average church or watching church on T.V. or the internet. Too often we get the impression that ministry is for the theologically trained, the ordained, or the polished. In this section Paul tells us why all believers are called for ministry in Christ.

1. In contrast to those who boasted about their letters of recommendation, Paul says the Corinthians are his letter. What sort of letter are they?
2. How do you respond to the idea that you may be the only letter from Christ that some people ever read?
3. Paul recognizes two dangers in service to God: becoming self-sufficient or being paralyzed by false humility. How can you avoid each of these traps?
4. According to Paul, how does our ministry under the new covenant contrast with ministry under the old covenant? (Vs. 3-6; Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-16. Pray and answer the following questions:

In this section, Paul continues to defend his ministry and claim a special relationship with these young Christians. With illustrations of fragrance, letters and freedom, he contrasts the fading glory of God's old covenant with Israel and the lasting splendor of the new covenant in Christ.

5. In verses 12-16 how does the veil which Moses wore help explain the failure by many Jews of Paul's day to understand that the old covenant was fading away to be replaced by the more glorious and lasting new covenant?

6. What must people do to have the veil that covers their hearts taken away?

7. What blessings come to the person who "turns to the Lord"?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. Pray and answer the following questions:

The new covenant brings liberty through the Lord Jesus Christ. Note that the Lord is identified as the Spirit: "*the Lord is that Spirit.*" This does not mean that the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the same Person. They are two different Persons, but they are one in their Godhead and Deity. Jesus Christ is one with the Spirit in the same way He is one with God the Father: one in mind, spirit, being, nature, and essence. Therefore, they are one in will, purpose, and work.

8. Verse 17 may refer to the Jews being set free from the bondage of the law, but how may it also apply to Gentiles who became Christians?

9. How can the knowledge of the hope you have in Jesus Christ increase your boldness?

10. How have you experienced the Spirit's freedom in your personal life?

11. In what ways do you struggle to allow the Holy Spirit to control your life?

Life Application

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts) Write your insights down for review and group discussion.