

2 Corinthians 3:1–18

Living Letters, the Glory of the New Covenant, and Transformation by the Spirit

Introduction: Authentic Ministry Under Attack

Paul once again finds himself responding to detractors who sought to undermine his ministry. These men followed in the wake of his labor, attempting to discredit him and draw believers to themselves. Rather than planting new churches or reaching unbelievers, they lived off the work others had done.

The body of Christ does not grow by transferring believers from one fellowship to another. It grows when the gospel reaches those who do not yet know Jesus Christ. Paul's ministry in Corinth was marked by gospel fruit—lives transformed, a church established, and faith rooted in Christ. That fruit was his defense.

I. Living Letters of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:1–3)

Paul begins with a rhetorical question:

“Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?”

Paul refuses to authenticate his calling with paperwork or self-promotion. Instead, he points to the Corinthians themselves:

“You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men.”

Their faith was visible proof of the legitimacy of his ministry. A transformed life speaks louder than credentials.

Paul presses the point further:

“Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.”

The gospel does not merely inform—it transforms. God's Spirit writes truth on hearts, not stone. The church is meant to be a living testimony to Christ, read daily by a watching world.

Practical Application

Your life is a letter others are reading. The question is not whether people are watching, but what message your life is communicating about Christ.

II. Sufficiency Comes from God Alone (2 Corinthians 3:4–6)

Paul makes a crucial confession:

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.”

Paul had already asked, “And who is sufficient for these things?” Now he answers: no one—apart from God. Ministry, spiritual growth, and lasting change cannot be produced by human strength alone.

God often brings believers to the end of their abilities so they will learn to draw from His all-sufficiency. God revealed Himself as the all-sufficient One, and His sufficiency is made available through Jesus Christ.

Paul continues:

“Who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

This statement is frequently misused. Paul is not contrasting Scripture with the Spirit. He is contrasting the old covenant of the law with the new covenant of the Spirit. The law condemns; the Spirit gives life.

III. The Glory of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:7–11)

Paul contrasts the old covenant given through Moses with the new covenant established through Jesus Christ:

“But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious... how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?”

The law was glorious, but it exposed sin and pronounced condemnation. The new covenant, grounded in the blood of Jesus Christ, brings righteousness and life.

“For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.”

The old covenant depended on human obedience and failed because humanity is weak. The new covenant rests on God’s faithfulness and cannot fail. Jesus fulfilled the law, shed His blood for sin, and rose again—securing a righteousness we could never earn.

IV. The Veil Removed in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:12–16)

Paul explains the meaning of Moses’ veil:

“Unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.”

The veil was not because the glory was too bright, but because it was fading. It symbolized a covenant that would one day be replaced.

Paul explains the present condition:

“But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.”

Apart from Christ, spiritual blindness remains. The law itself pointed to the need for a substitute—blood shed for sin:

“Without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

Jesus Christ is that perfect substitute. When a person turns to Him, the veil is removed.

“Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”

V. Liberty in the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17)

Paul declares:

“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

This liberty is not chaos or emotional excess. It is freedom from condemnation, freedom from the bondage of the law, and freedom to approach God through Christ. Because Jesus has paid for sin fully, believers stand forgiven and free.

VI. Transformation from Glory to Glory (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Paul closes with one of the most beautiful descriptions of spiritual growth in Scripture:

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

Transformation happens by beholding, not striving. As believers fix their eyes on Jesus Christ, the Spirit works inwardly, changing character, desires, and behavior.

This restoration reflects God’s original intent—to remake humanity into His image, lost through sin and restored through Christ. Day by day, the Spirit removes the ugliness of the old life and shapes believers into the likeness of Jesus.

Practical Application for Believers

- Stop relying on self-effort and draw from God’s sufficiency.
- Fix your eyes on Jesus, not on people or programs.
- Trust the Spirit to accomplish what you cannot change yourself.
- Live as a visible testimony of Christ’s transforming power.

A Challenge for Believers

Are you trying to change through willpower, rules, or human counsel alone? True change comes from beholding Jesus Christ and yielding to the Spirit’s work. Will you stop striving and start trusting?

An Invitation to Non-Believers

Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross for your sins. God raised Him from the dead, declaring that He is God, Savior, and Lord. The law cannot save you. Good works cannot remove guilt. Only Christ can.

If you turn to Him, the veil will be removed. You will be forgiven, made new, and begin a life of true freedom and transformation.

Today, look to Jesus Christ—and live.