

2 Corinthians 3:1-18

“From Glory To Glory”

The waters of life that Paul sailed on never seemed to be too smooth. It would seem that an appropriate understanding of the general context of his life could be defined by the words which he wrote there in 1st Cor 16, “...*a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*” 1 Cor 16:9 God used his life in radical and unparalleled ways, but opportunities bring adversaries, and the greater the work, the greater the resistance. Now I don’t want you to get the picture that Paul’s life was a constant struggle, certainly there were seasons of smooth sailing, times where the turbulence seemed to die down. But when God is using your life, the enemy is trying to combat that, undermine that, to frustrate that, to irritate and exasperate you, he wants you to come to the point where by you conclude that it simply isn’t worth it. Too much trouble, all you’re trying to do is good, and all you’re getting is flack and resistance. But Paul also understood that glorious truth that we so often find ourselves clinging to, and anchoring us. That, “...*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*” 1 John 4:4 So he was able to press on, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Now I say all that to say this, we’ve noted over the past weeks and months as we’ve studied 1st and 2nd Cor that though Paul was instrumental in planting that church, he had his opponents in their midst.

Paul lived in a period of history whereby the ages of law and grace were sort of overlapping. One period was coming to an end (or in reality had come to an end) and another period was being ushered in (or had been ushered in). But as you might imagine there were people who didn’t really know how to deal with such a thing, we’re by nature creatures of habit. All you’ve known you’re entire existence is the Mosaic Law; it was a way of life. Now these people are coming along saying the law is history, salvation is found by grace through faith in Jesus Christ who died paying the penalty of our sin and He was raised on the 3rd day that we might stand justified before God by simply turning *to* Him and trusting *in* Him for that work on our behalf. Now there were those who were good with trusting in Christ, but they weren’t good with abandoning the law of Moses. and So these people (whom we refer to as Judaizers) would follow around people like Paul who proclaimed the message of salvation by grace through faith and When Paul left, while his tracks were still fresh they would swoop in and say, “Well trusting in Christ is fine, but if you really want to be right with God you’ve got to keep the law of Moses, and you need to be circumcised, keep the Sabbath,...” and on and on they would go. and They would completely seek to undermine the work that had taken place through Paul, trying to bring people under a yoke of legalism. and Of course we find Paul dealing with this in the book of Romans, in Galatians, here in 2nd Cor; they were just like dogs on his trail. But you can’t have it both ways; it’s either Christ for righteousness, or the law for righteousness. But you can’t mix and mingle the 2, because if righteousness comes by the law, or legal do’s and don’ts then Christ died in vain, right? If you can be made right by the law, why did Jesus even come?

But these guys were major opponents and thorns in the side of Paul the apostle, and they were real “intellectual” made a good case argument. and Then they tried to make Paul look like an idiot. “Who is this guy anyway? Did the church in Jerusalem send him? Did he have any letters to commend him? How do you know you can even trust him?” Same story right? and Paul was beginning to deal this in Vs 17 of Ch 2 when he mentioned his motives in ministry as opposed to other self seeking individuals, and here he continues in Ch 3 combating those there who would challenge the legitimacy of his ministry.

Vs1-3

Now in all fairness letters of commendation were a common thing in that day. If you were stopping in to share at a church in a given city, how were they to know who you were or what you stood for? and So many times people would carry these letters that would commend them as trustworthy individuals so that a particular place would take them in. and We find Paul in multiple places giving these types of endorsements to those he would send to someone. He would commend Titus to a particular group, or encourage them to receive Timothy as they would him. Letters of commendation weren't uncommon or even out of line in a church's requesting of them, it was wise, and generally the safest approach. That way someone couldn't just step in and go, “Yeah, the apostle Paul sent me so when do I preach and where are you putting me up?” “Do you have any proof that Paul sent you?” “Well, no...” “Then get outa here, we're not listening to a word you say.” But with Paul it didn't work that way, this was a guy who charted new territory, before he came to Corinth there *was no church* there, he was the one who planted it! You don't go up to a group of pagans who worship no telling what false god and go, “Hey I have this letter here that says you can trust me to teach you about the true God, so when do you guys meet so I can get started?” They'd just beat you senseless and escort you out of their city, that's an insult to them. You go in, you get a place, you start charting out the city and sharing the love of Jesus with people, planting seeds, leading people to Christ, a church is planted/established and then it carries on from there. But these guys have come in and said, “Well, did he show you his credentials? Did he have a letter of commendation?” and They're all, “You know I don't recall him showing us anything like that, maybe we've been duped...”

and Paul is saying, “You want a letter that commends my ministry as legit, look around you, your life changed by the person of Jesus Christ is all the validation or commendation that I need.” He says, “You are our epistle written in our hearts, (notice) *known* and *read* by all men.” Now this brings out an important point, you've heard the phrase something to the extent that people may not read their bibles but you can be sure they'll read your life from cover to cover. That whole principle stems from what Paul says right here. People are watching your life, the way you act, the things that you say, the way that you say them, how you respond to situations, and in that you're sending them a message. The question is what is the message that I send, what's the letter of your life saying to them? Someone once wrote, “You're writing a Gospel, a chapter each day, by the deeds that you do and the words that you say. Men read what you write whether faithful or true. Just *what is* the Gospel according to you?”

That pretty much sums up the principle Paul is pointing out here, our lives are known and read by all men. A Christian leads a high profile life whether he likes it or not. So when people are watching me, reading me are they getting the idea that God is mad at them? Some people present the Lord that way, “The wages of sin are death; all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire.” Are they getting the idea that God is weird, or eccentric? Perhaps that all God cares about is money, or making people rich, or that He holds people at fault for being sick, in a scolding type of way because they don’t have enough faith. Do they see God at all? Is there a notable difference in my life from the life of a non-believer, why would they be drawn to a God who can’t make a difference in their lives? Or do they see a God of grace, a God of mercy, who deals with sin, yet forgives the sinner, who welcomes the repentant, and changes lives, who offers peace, joy, contentment, rest in a restless world, who wants to make all things new in their lives? We’re sending out a message that much is for sure, but how critical it is the message we send.

Paul is here saying, “If you want a stick to measure my ministry by, check out the lives that have been changed all around you.” Today someone might say, “Are you ordained?” and They’re seeking out your credentials. and Though there’s a certain value to ordination that I wouldn’t want to take away from, it doesn’t serve as any man’s credentials. Keep your certificate I want to see souls being saved, people being challenged and changed by the grace of God and the power of His Spirit flowing through your life. and While it’s true you can’t *always* measure a man’s ministry by the impact it seems to have or not have, as a general rule where God is moving people are going to be being impacted, people will be coming to Christ, those who know Christ will be growing in Christ, maturing and being made more like Christ. There will be an equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry.

So Paul’s letter is found in human lives that bear witness to what God is doing through his life. It’s not an epistle written by man, with ink on a tablet of stone, but it’s a letter written by the Spirit of the living God on tablets of flesh, that is, inscribed upon the hearts of men.

Vs4-5

Last week Paul asked the question there in Vs 16 of Ch 2, “And who is sufficient for such things.” Who is worthy to bear the responsibility of bringing to people the message of the gospel? Who is adequate, or competent to minister in such a way as to make an eternal impact in people’s lives? None of us are; Jesus was real clear, “*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*” John 15:5 and Paul is real sober minded about that; he says, “Our sufficiency, our competency is from God.” To the Philippians he put it like this, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” Phil 4:13 We don’t think of anything as being from ourselves, our sufficiency, our competency and ability is from God.

Now I want to take a quick moment here to encourage you with that. Because there are those of you no doubt who would like to serve the Lord, feel perhaps that one day you might even step out to be used by the Lord in some way but not right now because you’re just not ready yet. You’re not sufficient for the task just yet, need more training, some higher education, or perhaps a greater grip on something 1st.

Let me just tell you that if you're waiting to serve the Lord until the day you feel qualified, or sufficient for the task you're going to be waiting a long time. Because there's no one who's serving the Lord who is sufficient for such things. God chooses the weak, the base, the insufficient things of this world to be busy about His business. You see if you're worthy, or somehow qualified, then your sufficiency isn't from God, it's from yourself. **and If you want to operate on your own merit, or your own qualifications I suppose that's entirely up to you, as for me I'll take the sufficiency that comes from God. That way my life will count for eternity, it'll be about something other than me, and God will get the glory. Our sufficiency is from God.**

Vs 6

See now he's starting to get at the core issue with respect to the law Vs grace, the old covenant Vs the new. He says, "We're ministers of the *new covenant*, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Now there are a couple of different things here that we want to address. One being the fact that when he mentions the letter Vs the Spirit, he's not referencing God's Word Vs God's Spirit. **Our Pentecostal friends often times like to reference this Vs saying that you're just quenching the Spirit when you go through the word because the letter kills, it's the Spirit that gives life! and That's what happens when you remove a Vs from its context, Paul *never* even sort of alluded to the fact that God's Word somehow squelches or limits what God wants to do. God holds His Word in the highest regard.**

The Psalmist said, "*For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.*" Ps 138:2 It's the Word of God that helps us to discern that which is from the Spirit of God, because God's Spirit will never contradict God's Word. So this was never meant to be a justification for a free for all.

What's meant by the phrase, "The letter," is specifically the old covenant of the law. and Paul is making a point that Christ is the end of the law for all who believe because the law was never meant to make a man righteous. It's not a ministry of salvation, it's a ministry of condemnation, *not* because there's anything wrong with the law, the law is holy and righteous and good. But because there's something wrong with me. The law doesn't help me in any way because it tells me what I need to do and leaves me with no ability to do it. It *can't* make me righteous, it can only display the righteous standard thereby demonstrating to me that I'm *not* righteous and deserving of God's judgment. It doesn't *commend* me to God, it *condemns* me before God. It's intent is to drive me to my knees before God as it shows me my need for a Savior because if this is the standard I'm cooked.

The Law focuses on what you need to do (which is a drag because you can't do it.) The Spirit focuses on what Christ has already done for you. There's no comparison, the new covenant exceeds exceedingly in glory to the old. The old left me hopeless, the new gives me hope, the old brought death, the new brings life. On the day the law was given (Ex 32:28) 3,000 people were killed because they'd already broken it. On the day the Spirit was given (Acts 2:41) 3,000 people were given life in Christ. The letter kills, the Spirit gives life. Jesus said, "*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*" John 6:63 and It's not that God's standards have changed, it's that He's done for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Paul isn't trying to take away from the glory found in the old covenant; he's simply pointing out that A.) The new covenant (in Christ) exceeds and excels beyond anything that the old covenant could even hope for, there's no comparison. and B.) The Old covenant was never meant to be permanent, it was preparatory, it was pointing us to Christ who came not to do away with the law, but to fulfill it.

Vs7-11

Now there's an awful lot of glory going on in there isn't there? But you get the idea; there was certainly glory in the covenant of the law. and That was demonstrated even practically by the fact that when Moses came down from the Mt, and out of the presence of God having received the law his face was literally glowing, it was shining forth, it was glorious (Ex 34). But that glow, that glory was fading, it was passing, it wasn't permanent, it was something that dealt with the outward man, and it was passing at best. However the ministry of the Spirit is something that deals with the inward man and it's permanent. The other contrast is found in what we mentioned in Vs 6, restated in Vs 9. The ministry of the letter was in reality a ministry of condemnation, it said, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the house of bondage, you shall have no other gods before Me." Well, they'd already blown that with the golden calf thing before Moses ever made it down the Mt. I'm already condemned. "You shall not make any carved image, nor bow down to them for I the Lord your God am a jealous God." Strike 2. "Honor your mother and your father." Need I say more, who's faithfully kept that all their days? and On and on we could go whether it had to do with stealing, or lying, or coveting. It was a ministry of condemnation, yet it was glorious, it had intrinsic within it the holy nature of God. Now, if the ministry of condemnation was glorious how much more is the ministry of salvation, of righteousness by faith in the person of Jesus Christ

If a ministry of condemnation is glorious, surely we concede that the ministry of righteous and salvation exceeds much more in glory. Not to mention the one was passing, and the other is permanent, one deals with the exterior, the other deals with the interior. and So there in Vs 10 Paul is really saying, "It's not right to even really compare the 2, because if you place the ministry of condemnation beside the ministry of righteousness and salvation, of the one passing away beside the one that's permanent, there's no comparison. Comparatively the one has no glory. It's like a clear sky at night with a full moon, man the moon is bright, it's glorious, you could read by it, it seems so big and full. But somehow it's swallowed up in the light of the sunrise and the light of the sun shining in it's strength. One doesn't really compare to the other, that's the glory of the O.C. Vs the glory of the New.

Vs12-13

Vs 12, "Therefore since we have such hope," remember biblical hope isn't wishful thinking, it's guaranteed certainty, and a confident reality. and Paul is saying that since we're assured of the fact, we have a guaranteed certainty and a confident reality that the new covenant is greater in glory than the old in that it's a message of life and not death, of salvation, not condemnation, it's permanent not passing, focuses on what God has done rather than what you need to do, because of these things he says we use great boldness of speech, there's nothing being held back, we put it all out there.

Vs13

Now if you just read that passage there in Ex 34:29-35 you might be left with the impression that the reason Moses covered his face was so that they children of Israel might not be afraid to approach him. But if you read it carefully it tells us that Moses dealt with their fear and then spoke with them and it wasn't until he was finished talking with them that he would cover his face. **So why then did he cover his face? The Holy Spirit tells us right here through Paul the apostle. It's because that glory was fading, it wasn't permanent, it was passing and he didn't want them to see the fact that the glory of this covenant was one that was passing, it didn't produce a glorious change that would last, it was at best temporary.**

There's something else there as well, when he covered his face he covered the glory. Paul is saying we're not about covering the glory, or concealing the glory, we're about revealing the glory, and unlike Moses' glory which only diminished as time went by; the glory of Jesus Christ in you, changing and transforming you only grows brighter everyday. It's nothing to be concealed; it's to be revealed before the world. Remember Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* Matt 5:16 He said, *"You don't light a lamp and then place it under a basket, you put in on a lampstand for all to see, don't conceal the light of Jesus Christ shining in and through you, let it be boldly revealed."*

Vs14-15

He's saying that even as Moses placed a veil over his face, that that was like a foreshadowing of the veil that the nation of Israel in general has over their hearts even to this day. **Having rejected Jesus Christ they veiled themselves from the truth, they're still seeking to live under the law not realizing that the law was meant to lead them to Christ. The volume of the book is all about, points to and revolves around Jesus Christ The righteous standards fulfilled in Him, the sacrificial system but a foreshadowing fulfilled in Him, the prophetic word brought to pass by Him, the veil is taken away in Christ.** Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."* John 8:12 The problem is that Israel as a nation didn't follow Him, they're walking in darkness, their hearts are veiled (as is the heart of anyone else who isn't in Christ).

But that's why you can point out Isaiah 53, Ps 22, share the principle of sacrifice as written in the law but how the blood of bulls and goats isn't sufficient to atone for sin and all kinds of scriptures to a Jewish individual and they'll go, "What's your point?" They can't see it; they're blind to the work of Christ. To this day when Moses is read a veil lies on their heart. Is there any hope? Certainly, look at Vs 16.

Vs16

The blinders come off in Christ. When one *turns to the Lord*, the veil is removed. Back to Ex 34, it's true that Moses wore a veil in the presence of the people, but do you know when he took it off? **When he went in to the presence of the Lord, to seek Him, hear from Him, commune with Him, and to this day it holds true that whenever one turns to the Lord, comes to Christ, seeks Him in truth, longs to hear from Him and commune with Him, the veil comes off, and the glory is revealed. It doesn't come off and then you turn to the Lord, it comes off *when* you turn to the Lord. We have to come to Christ by faith, then the veil is taken away.**

Vs17

The Holy Spirit isn't some mystical force, He is a person, He is deity, He is the 3rd person of the Godhead. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. and Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Again not liberty to do any kind of weird, out of line, or unscriptural thing I may want to. It's not license, it's liberty, freedom from sin, freedom from the legalistic do's and don'ts of the law. From the bondage of sin and death, Paul told the Romans, "*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*" Rom 8:2 Jesus said, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.*" John 8:34-36 Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

Vs18

See Paul is saying, "This is something we're trying to cover up, it's something we want the world to see. Let's read Vs 13 and then connect it to Vs 18 and I think you might catch the essence of what's being said here a little better (read).

It's not an external reformation that God is after, but an internal transformation by the work of the Holy Spirit in your life as you behold, that is "gaze intently" "study carefully" as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. The idea being that the more time we spend beholding Him, the more we'll be transformed into the likeness of Him. Now what is the mirror that reflects the image of the Lord to us that we might carefully study Him and gaze intently upon Him? It's the Word of God; as you study God's Word, God's Spirit will transform you from the inside out into the image, that is the likeness of God's Son. and It's to be a continual forward progression, from glory to greater glory, not by the will or the efforts or by the energy of man, but as by the Spirit of the Lord. and It won't be perfected until you see Him for then you will be like Him. But it's a process and a progression that has its instigation here, and continues on until its culmination there. The Spirit of God, working through the Word of God, to take you from glory to glory; transforming you into the image of the Son of God!

Perhaps that process is yet to begin in you, you've not given your heart to Christ. We don't offer a ministry of condemnation, but one of righteousness and salvation by grace through faith in the work of Jesus Christ upon our behalf. and It's not about an exterior appearance or reformation it's about an interior experience of transformation. God wants to give you new life, freedom from sin, not something that's passing, but something that's permanent, salvation is free, but it's found only in Christ, let me just encourage you to take the opportunity (that if you don't know Him) to come to Him today.

Prayer Points:

Father we praise You for the glorious work of transformation that You're doing in each of our lives. Teach us to study Your Word, that by the Work of Your Spirit, we might continue to grow into the image of Your Son. and As people read the letter of our lives may they see You in truth for who You are. Holy, yet compassionate, Righteous, yet rich in mercy, hating sin, but loving the sinner, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. and Be there anyone here who may need to come to repentance today that You might grant them that gift.