

June 9, 2024

“Bold Ministers”
Lesson 2

2 Corinthians 3:5-18

Intro

Paul wrote this letter from jail in about AD 57. He had established this church during his second missionary journey, which lasted from 52-54 AD. The tone and words of this letter show that Paul had kept in touch with this church, despite not being with them in over three years. Both Corinthian letters address troubles they were experiencing. One that he addressed in both letters, and the focus of today’s study, is Paul’s apostolic authority, which was questioned and criticized by some in the church.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:5-18

1. vs. 5: Paul begins his defense here by stating that God is the reason for his success in ministry
Paul knows he is competent to preach and teach, but that competence comes from God
He gives “credit where credit is due”
This shows he is not seeking to glorify himself, making his message accurate
2. vs. 6: Paul describes himself here as a “minister”, a preacher of the Word
He says he is a minister of “the new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit”
Paul preaches that Jesus was the Messiah, who sacrificed His life to atone for sins
The Law of Moses—the “letter”—could not do what Jesus did
Following the Law allowed someone to learn God’s ways
However, following the law could not bring about salvation
It brought death, because it showed the people that they were lawbreakers
The new covenant—the Spirit—brings life
It reminds us that our salvation is found in Jesus’s work on the cross, not in Law
3. vs. 7-8: Over the next five verses, Paul introduces several “if-then” statements
The first statement is generally agreed to be true by all
The second statement is a greater truth, based on the first, lesser, truth
If the first one is true, then the second one must also be true
Here, Paul’s first statement is about the Old Testament Law
He says that though it brought death (vs.6), it also “came with glory”
It was engraved in stone, showing its importance
But though it came from God (containing glory), it could not produce salvation
Paul’s second statement is about the Spirit and glory
If the Spirit brings life (vs.6) and not death, isn’t it better than the Law?
If the Law had glory, and it is a lesser thing than the Spirit, won’t the Spirit also
have glory to an even greater degree?
Paul’s questions are designed to teach an understanding of the value of the new covenant
If it produces better results, it is superior to the old way
If the old way had a glory connected to it, the new way must have even greater glory

4. vs. 9-10: Here is the second of Paul's "if-then" proposals

He makes a similar point to what he said in vs. 7-8

The previous ministry brought condemnation, the new ministry brings righteousness

These can be equated to the "death" and "life" ideas of the previous two verses

However, this new equation introduces an important spiritual concept

Under the first covenant, people realized they were condemned because of their actions

Under the new covenant, people receive Christ's righteousness as their own

They are no longer condemned, though they have indeed sinned

Christ's sacrifice and forgiveness bring life and righteousness

5. vs. 11: Here is the final "if-then" statement

Paul notes that the old covenant was "transitory"—it didn't last

However, despite being temporary, it still came with God's glory

The new covenant, however, does last—it won't fade away or change

This is because Christ lives forever, so what He accomplished doesn't change

He overcame death and sin forever—they no longer have power over us in Christ

This is a greater glory because of the fact that salvation doesn't change

6. vs. 12: Paul expresses his confidence in what will happen with the word "hope"

This doesn't refer to possibility, like "I hope my friends show up on time"

This is talking about a confidence in what God will do

This hope creates and comes from a certainty, a surety

Because Paul knows God's promises, and that God is faithful, he has hope always

This hope allows him to be bold, despite any negative circumstances

7. vs. 13: Throughout this passage, Paul is showing how the new covenant is superior to the old

The old covenant has Moses as its primary model and representative

In Ex. 32-34, Moses has an encounter with God which causes his face to shine brightly

The people cannot handle the brightness, so they have him put a veil over his face

After some time, the shine fades away—Moses hasn't been in God's presence

But he keeps the veil on anyways

Paul says he kept the veil there to "prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away"

The connection is that the first covenant was temporary—it was going to come to an end

8. vs. 14-15: Paul here is referring to people who still follow the old covenant, the Law of Moses

The veil he mentioned Moses wearing is something that separates

When Christ died, the veil in front of the Holy of Holies was ripped

This showed that there was nothing now to separate God from man

As Paul notes, "only in Christ is it taken away"

But many act as if the veil was still in place—that it had not been taken away

The veil represents a spiritual insensitivity, a lack of perceiving the truth

Paul's opponents refuse to hear the truth about Jesus and the New Covenant

9. vs. 16: Here is how the veil is lifted

Paul says it happens when a person “turns to the Lord”

They have turned away from sin—that’s the start, but it’s not enough

They must also turn to God in repentance, from the heart

When that happens, Paul says they will understand what they previously didn’t

10. vs. 17: This verse tells us an important quality of God—the Holy Spirit is God as well

“The Lord is the Spirit” says Paul, equating the Holy Spirit with God

This is shown in Matt. 3:16 at Jesus’ baptism

God the Father speaks, and the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus

All three parts of the Godhead are present at this moment

This quality is important, because the Spirit is the One who is constantly with us

Paul says “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom”

Where God’s Spirit abides, we are free

This freedom has many applications, but one Paul is seeing here connects to the veil

The Spirit frees us to understand spiritual life and truth in a way the Law couldn’t

The Spirit frees us from the need to have a veil, as Moses did

The glory of the Spirit never wears off

11. vs. 18: In the OT, the glory of the old covenant was only given to Moses

Paul here notes that “we all...contemplate the Lord’s glory”

This glory is available to all in Christ, not just to one, like for Moses

As we continue to walk with Christ, we grow into “ever-increasing glory”

Application: The veil is still present today in those who misunderstand the salvation message. There are many who think they will get into heaven because they are basically “a good person.” Whether they realize it or not, this attitude comes from a salvation-by-works mentality. They think they’ve done enough good things to deserve going to heaven. Frequently, they also compare themselves to others who have done something “way worse than anything I’ve done”. But that is not how salvation works in God’s economy. Only Christ is good and perfect, and only He, because of His sacrifice on the cross, can remove both the sin and the penalty for sin. Only He can remove the veil from people’s eyes so they can see the truth.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for Your Word, which guides us into understanding and truth. Help us to rely on Your Word to counter the thinking that says we can earn salvation by being good enough. Help us not to put veils over our own eyes; we ask that the Holy Spirit guide us into truth in all areas of our lives. Help us to (gently) remove the veil from another’s eyes in the coming days. We pray these things in the name of Jesus, Amen.

