

2 Corinthians 3

(New International Version)

¹ Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? ² You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. ³ You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

4 Such confidence we have through Christ before God. 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant **◆not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

7 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9 If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. 15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord **◆s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.**

2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-3

Some false teachers had started carrying forged letters of recommendation to authenticate their authority. In no uncertain terms, Paul stated that he needed no such letters. The believers to whom Paul and his companions had preached were enough of a recommendation. Paul did use letters of introduction, however, many times. He wrote them on behalf of Phoebe (Romans 16:1, 2) and Timothy (1 Corinthians 16:10, 11). These letters helped Paul **◆**s trusted companions and friends find a welcome in various churches.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:3

Paul uses powerful imagery from famous Old Testament passages predicting the promised day of new hearts and new beginnings for God's people (see Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26). No human being can take credit for this process of conversion. It is the work of God's Spirit. We do not become believers by following some manual or using some technique. Our conversion is a result of God's implanting his Spirit in our heart, giving us new power to live for him.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:4, 5

Paul was not boasting; he gave God the credit for all his accomplishments. While the false teachers boasted of their own power and success, Paul expressed his humility before God. No one can claim to be adequate without God's help. No one is competent to carry out the responsibilities of God's calling in his or her own strength. Without the Holy Spirit's enabling, our natural talent can carry us only so far. As Christ's witnesses, we need the character and special strength that only God gives.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:6

◆The old way ends in death; in the new way, the Holy Spirit gives life◆ means that trying to be saved by keeping the Old Testament laws will end in death. Only by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ can a person receive eternal life through the Holy Spirit. No one but Jesus has ever fulfilled the law perfectly; thus, the whole world is condemned to death. The law makes people realize their sin, but it cannot give life. Under the new covenant, which means promise or agreement, eternal life comes from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives new life to all who believe in Christ. The moral law (Ten Commandments) still points out sin and shows us how to obey God, but forgiveness comes only through the grace and mercy of Christ (see Romans 7:10◆8:2).

2 CORINTHIANS 3:7-11

Paul contrasts the glory of the Ten Commandments with the glory of the new covenant. If the law that leads to death was glorious, how much more glorious is God's plan, which gives us life through his Spirit! The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is far superior to the Old Testament system of sacrifice (see Hebrews 8; 10). Christianity is superior to the Judaism of the Old Testament and to any other religion on earth. Because God's plan is far superior by comparison to any other, we dare not reject it or treat it casually.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:9

Paul is saying that if the old covenant had its glory (and certainly it did), just imagine how glorious the new covenant is. The law was wonderful because, although it condemned us, it pointed us to Christ. But in the new covenant, the law and the promise are fulfilled. Christ has come; by faith we can be made right with God!

2 CORINTHIANS 3:13-18

When Moses came down Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, his face glowed from being in God's presence (Exodus 34:29-35). Moses had to put on a veil to keep the people from being terrified by the brightness of his face and from seeing the radiance fade away. This veil illustrates the fading of the old system and the veiling of the people's minds because of their pride, hardness of heart, and refusal to repent. The veil kept them from understanding references to Christ in the Scriptures. When anyone becomes a Christian, the veil is stripped off (3:16), giving eternal life and freedom from bondage. That person can then be like a mirror reflecting God's glory.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:17

Those who were trying to be saved by keeping the Old Testament law were soon tied up in rules and ceremonies. But now, through the Holy Spirit, God provides freedom from sin and condemnation (Romans 8:1). When we trust Christ to save us, he removes our heavy burden of trying to please him and our guilt for failing to do so. By trusting Christ we are loved, accepted, forgiven, and freed to live for him. ♦Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, he gives freedom.♦

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

The glory that the Spirit imparts to the believer is more excellent and lasts longer than the glory that Moses experienced. By gazing at the nature of God with unveiled minds, we can be more like him. In the Good News, we see the truth about Christ, and it transforms us morally as we understand and apply it.

Through learning about Christ's life, we can understand how wonderful God is and what he is really like. As our knowledge deepens, the Holy Spirit helps us to change. Becoming Christlike is a progressive experience (see Romans 8:29; Galatians 4:19; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2). The more closely we follow Christ, the more we will be like him.