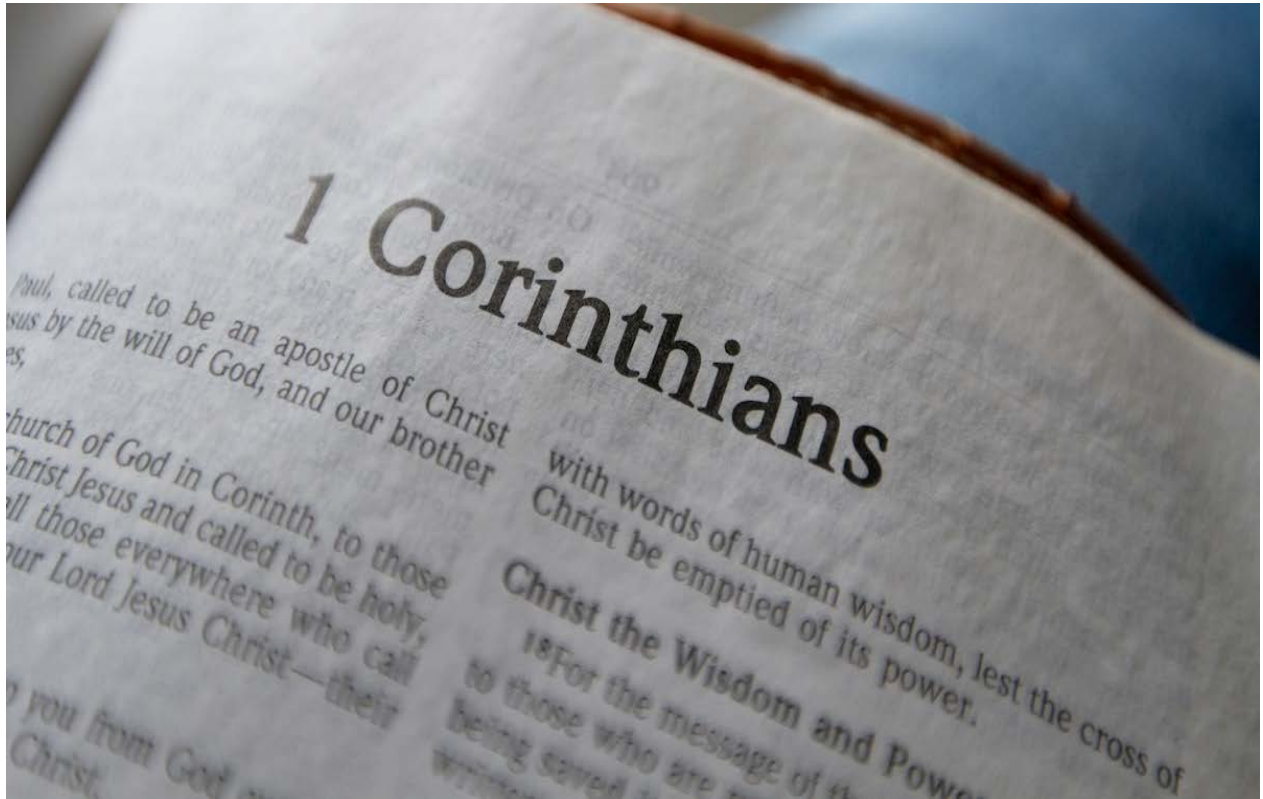


What a Difference!

2 Corinthians 3

1 and 2 Corinthians Part 20



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

What a Difference!: 2 Corinthians 3
1 and 2 Corinthians Part 20
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Introduction to *2 Corinthians 3*

What a difference! In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul addressed his readers as babes in Christ, schismatics who had lost sight of the fact that they were God's temple, the work of His indwelling Spirit. Here, in 2 Corinthians 3, Paul saw something else. He addressed the Corinthians as an "epistle of Christ" whose hearts were unveiled before the glory of God in the face of Jesus so that they were being transformed from glory to glory into His image.

It's impossible to underestimate the joy and gratification Paul knew after hearing Titus' report. The Corinthians had heard Paul's hard words, and they were amending their ways, putting things right, and rediscovering the Lord's true purpose for them.

This is the work of the Spirit of God.

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We hope you find this study instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 The Right Credentials

Pray Psalm 48.1-3.

Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God,
In His holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation,
The joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north,
The city of the great King.
God *is* in her palaces;
He is known as her refuge.

Sing Psalm 48.1-3.

(Cwm Rhonda: *Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah!*)

Great is God, now greatly praise Him in the city of the LORD!
Holy she, His lovely mountain, great and glorious by His Word!
God her King is great within her, He, her Stronghold ever sure!
He, her Stronghold ever sure!

Read and meditate on 2 Corinthians 3.1-3.

Preparation

1. What did Paul not require?
2. Why did he not require this?

Meditation

Apparently, the false apostles who slithered into Corinth after Paul left insisted they should be heard because they had “credentials.” They were properly trained. Could produce some certification. Had a letter of recommendation from puffed-up theologians back in the old country.

Well, yes, not only did Paul not have such credentials, but everywhere he preached and taught the “credentialed” crowd tried to stop him. He didn’t have the appropriate paperwork (No seminary degree? Oh, my). And he refused to seek it (v. 1). But he had a better letter authenticating his teaching and work.

Paul described the Corinthians as an epistle of Christ, written on his heart and on the hearts of those who ministered with him (v. 2). All men knew and read that epistle, because they heard Paul boasting in the Lord about the Corinthians and their faith, and they saw the Corinthians themselves, like a broadside published for all to read and note.

The content of this epistle was Christ, of Whom they were a fragrance, and Whom Paul sought to form in them individually and as a community. The ink with which he wrote was the Spirit of God, working with God's Word. He and his colleagues “ministered” this epistle (v. 3), relying on the Spirit and His Presence, power, and Word to liberate the Corinthians from their former corruption into the glory of the Lord and the image of Jesus Christ (vv. 12-18). His “writing” of this epistle was from and for his heart, to and for theirs, to refocus and nurture their love for God and one another. And now he saw that this was happening.

This is the work of the Spirit and the substance of the New Covenant. This is where the glory of God is encountered and how it is displayed. This love, the love of Christ, begotten, borne, and brimming in the power of the Spirit, is our commendation to the world, the proof we bear concerning the truth of the Gospel,

and the credentials by which we carry on our ministry for the Lord.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

God works from the inside out. He starts His work inside us, then moves it gradually from us to our family, then to our fellow Christians, then out into the world. Work needing the Right Credentials.

Imagine the joy of any parent who can say these same words about their children: “You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 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” (2 Cor. 3.2, 3)! That is the goal for all Christian parents; it is why God blesses us with children.

But as God’s people working in His Kingdom, we have this same goal, that we may say these same words regarding those we love and care for in our Personal Mission Field. Those in our next step beyond parents, spouse, and children. “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1.8). From the inside out.

When we truly understand that we are an epistle, known and read by all, then we will understand the importance of following God’s Law and being exemplary pieces of writing by Him. We long to declare the beauty, grace, love, mercy, goodness, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through our well-written and well-lived lives.

“Let not mercy and truth forsake you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart,
and so find favor and high esteem
in the sight of God and man.
Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge Him,
and He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3.3-6).

Write that on your heart—own it, live it—be conferred with the Right Credentials for Kingdom work.

For reflection

1. What “epistle” are you writing for the people you will meet today?
2. What “credentials” do you possess for speaking with authority about Christ and His Kingdom?
3. Whom will you encourage today by telling them they are an epistle of Jesus to the world?

Nothing is more delightful to faithful ministers, or more to their praise, than the success of their ministry, as shown in the spirits and lives of those among whom they labor. The law of Christ was written in their hearts, and the love of Christ shed abroad there. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3.1-3

Pray Psalm 48.9-14.

Praise and thank the Lord that He loves His Church and is working to beautify her for Himself every day. Ask Him how you can share in that great work.

Sing Psalm 48.9-14.

(Cwm Rhonda: *Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*)

For Your grace and lovingkindness we proclaim Your matchless worth!

What a Difference!: 2 Corinthians 3

As Your Name is, great and boundless, let Your praise fill all the earth.
Let Your people sing rejoicing for the judgment of Your truth;
for the judgment of Your truth.

Walk about the blessed city, see her beauty, see her power.
Count her ramparts, filled with glory, look on every mighty tower.
Tell her glory to the nations: God will guide her evermore;
God will guide her evermore!

2 Ministers of the Spirit

Pray Psalm 104.24-30.

O LORD, how manifold are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all.
The earth is full of Your possessions—
This great and wide sea,
In which *are* innumerable teeming things,
Living things both small and great.
There the ships sail about;
There is that Leviathan
Which You have made to play there.
These all wait for You,
That You may give *them* their food in due season.
What You give them they gather in;
You open Your hand, they are filled with good.
You hide Your face, they are troubled;
You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;
And You renew the face of the earth.

Sing Psalm 104.24-30.

(Creation: *The Spacious Firmament Above*)

How many are Your works, O LORD, which You have created by Your Word!
The earth and sea with creatures teem—they look to You to care and feed.
You give to them, they gather all; You hide Your face, they fail and fall.
You take their breath, they gasp and die; You send Your Spirit, they revive.

Read 2 Corinthians 3.1-6; meditate on verses 4-6.

Preparation

1. Where did Paul find his sufficiency?
2. What kind of minister was he?

Meditation

True ministers of the new covenant—and remember, all believers are to be equipped for ministry (Eph. 4.11, 12)—are distinguished by the fact that theirs is a ministry of the Spirit, and not merely the letter. Only God can call us to such a ministry, and only God is sufficient to use our ministries to bring His life-giving Spirit and grace to others (vv. 4, 5; cf. v. 3).

Those who minister the letter traffic in information and seek outward conformity to doctrines and traditions (v. 6). Those who minister the Spirit focus on inward transformation, on bringing people beyond the veil of our fleshly and material lives into the very Presence of Christ and His glory. There the Spirit works transformation within the soul, so that we increase in the image of Christ, and bear the fruit of eternal life that comes from His growing Presence in us.

True ministers of the new covenant recognize that all life depends on the Spirit, and that only by sowing to the Spirit, exposing the soul in all its parts to His searching, convicting, teaching, and transforming power, can we expect to see those rivers of living water issue from within the souls of those we serve, so that they glorify God and bear witness to Christ in all they do (Jn. 7.37-39).

As Paul was a minister of the Spirit, seeking transformation and not merely information, let us also be the same, that the grace of God may reach and transform those to whom He sends us each day.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

We can say with Paul, that our goal is to seek transformation in ourselves, and “that the grace of God may reach and transform those to whom He sends us each day.”

“Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, that I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you?” (Prov. 22.20, 21).

We learn, then we pass it on, so others can learn, and pass it on. It is the way that we became an epistle of Christ, and then others became our epistle, “written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God” (2 Cor. 3.3).

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4.3).
God wants us to become holy and free from sin (1 Pet. 1.16).

He wants us to grow up in Him, to go from being baby Christians to adults.

It is the cycle of life—both human and spiritual.

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5.12-14).

And the only way to grow up in Christ is to feed on His Word daily, to pray, and to practice the things we learn through His Word and prayer; and to take up our cross daily, and follow Him (Ps. 1.1-3; Lk. 9.23).

There is no other way to grow. Babies, without milk and care, experience failure to thrive.

Toddlers without food and milk don’t grow strong and healthy teeth and bones.

Adults without nourishment perish.

Why do we think we can grow spiritually without the proper care and “nutrition”?

Food left on the table and never consumed does no good; nor do Bibles left on the table and rarely read.

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Pet. 2.1-3).

Growing into our Kingdom work as ministers of the Spirit.

For reflection

1. Who are the people to whom God sends you daily as a minister of the Spirit?
2. How do you prepare each day to fulfill that calling?
3. In what ways do you need to grow more in the grace and knowledge of the Lord?

The letter killeth: the letter of the law is the ministration of death; and if we rest only in the letter of the gospel, we shall not be the better for so doing; but the Holy Spirit gives life spiritual, and life eternal. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3.4-6

What a Difference!: 2 Corinthians 3

Pray Psalm 104.1-5, 31-35.

Praise and bless the Lord for the full and abundant life He provides for us in Jesus Christ.

Sing Psalm 104.1-5, 31-35.

(Creation: *The Spacious Firmament Above*)

Bless God, my soul! How great are You, LORD, with majesty and splendor adorned.

The heav'ns He stretches like a tent, and lays His chambers in the firmament.

He rides the wings of winds on high and makes His messengers flaming fly.

The earth on its foundation stands, established forever by His hands.

LORD, let Your glory long endure! Rejoice! His works are ever sure!

He looks on earth, it quails and quakes, as we our songs of praises make.

LORD, let our meditation rise and bring great pleasure in Your eyes.

Consumed shall sinners ever be; O, bless and praise the LORD with me!

3 Glory Then, Glory Now

Pray Psalm 27.1-3.

The LORD *is* my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The LORD *is* the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?
When the wicked came against me
To eat up my flesh,
My enemies and foes,
They stumbled and fell.
Though an army may encamp against me,
My heart shall not fear;
Though war may rise against me,
In this I *will be* confident.

Sing Psalm 27.1-3.

(St. Denio: *Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise*)

LORD, You are our Light and our Savior most dear!
You guard us with might; therefore, whom shall we fear?
Though evil surround us, our enemies fall;
no harm shall confound us when on You we call.

Read 2 Corinthians 3.1-9; meditate on verses 7-9.

Preparation

1. Why could the Israelites not look on the face of Moses?
2. What does the ministry of the Spirit promise?

Meditation

The “ministry of death” to which Paul referred is the Law of God. Not that the Law kills, but that it reveals our sin and thus condemns us to death before the holy God (Rom. 7.7). When the Law was given through Moses, God sought to remind His people to look through the Law to Him, for the grace which motivated the Law, the Law which He knew they would never be able to fulfill. The glory that appeared on Moses’ face as he came down the mountain from the Presence of God was a token and reminder of the glory of God (Ex. 34.29-35). But even as slight as that glory was, the people could not look upon it, and Moses had to veil his face.

But the glory on Moses’ face would pass away, because it was not the abiding glory God reserved for those who would come to Him, not through the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ. Moses was a type of Jesus, in that he mediated between God and the people, veiling the glory of God in his face, just as Jesus, our Mediator, veiled the glory of God in His incarnate flesh.

But the glory Jesus came to reveal is far greater than the glory of the Old Testament Law. Because He sends His Spirit to live in us, to make Himself and His glory known to and through us, even in the everyday activities and details of our lives. And there are so many more of us than just Moses; and the more we carry out our ministry in the Spirit in our Personal Mission Fields, the more the glory of Jesus breaks out from our soul, through the veil of our words and works, to show Jesus and His glory to the world. Thus the knowledge of the glory of the Lord becomes known over all the earth, as the waters covers the sea (Hab. 2.14).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory,
the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more *in* glory” (2 Cor. 3.9).

The Law *had* glory, Jesus’ work of salvation places us *in* glory. His glory.
“For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation,
but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification.
For if by one man’s offense death reigned through the one,
much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness
will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5.16, 17).

And in this we rejoice.

And that rejoicing—caused by the undeserved free gift of salvation—should emanate from our faces and lives as a glow of glory based solely on His touch of grace upon our lives. “We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom. 5.11).

The Law, which illuminates our sin and need for a Savior, is also the means by which light shines in the darkness of the world when we keep it through the Holy Spirit’s power. The laws, testimonies, statutes, commandments, and judgments of the LORD, when kept, bring a “great reward” (Ps. 19.7-11).

“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life...” (Phil. 2.14-16).

Keeping the Law, after salvation, brings great reward for others and for us, and causes us to shine, maybe just a little bit like Moses—emanating God’s glory—that does not fade. “But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4.18).

For reflection

1. How does keeping the Law of God glorify Him?
2. We don’t keep the Law to *be* saved. Why do we keep it?
3. How can believers encourage and assist one another in glorifying the Lord through obedience to His Law?

The gospel so much exceeds the law in glory, that it eclipses the glory of the legal dispensation. But even the New Testament will be a killing letter, if shown as a mere system or form, and without dependence on God the Holy Spirit, to give it a quickening power. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3.1-11*

Pray Psalm 27.4-13.

Call on the Lord to show you the beauty of His glory and to glorify Himself in you as you serve Him this day.

Sing Psalm 27.4-13.

(St. Denio: *Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise*)

One thing we request but to dwell with You, LORD.
Your beauty to test and to think on Your Word.
In trouble You hide us secure in Your grace;
no foe may o’erride us: We sing of Your praise.

Hear, LORD, when we cry and be gracious, we pray!
LORD, do not deny us Your favor this day!

What a Difference!: 2 Corinthians 3

Our help, our salvation, though others may fall,
preserve our good station when on You we call.

LORD, teach us; LORD, lead us because of our foes!
Hear, LORD, when we plead for release from their woes.
Had we not believed all Your goodness to see,
our heart sorely grieved and in turmoil would be.

4 A Problem of Desire

Pray Psalm 27.11-13.

Teach me Your way, O LORD,
And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies.
Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries;
For false witnesses have risen against me,
And such as breathe out violence.
I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the LORD
In the land of the living.

Sing Psalm 27.11-13.

(St. Denio: *Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise*)
LORD, teach us; LORD, lead us because of our foes!
Hear, LORD, when we plead for release from their woes.
Had we not believed all Your goodness to see,
our heart sorely grieved and in turmoil would be.

Read 2 Corinthians 3.1-11; meditate on verses 10, 11.

Preparation

1. How did Paul describe the glory that was “passing away”?
2. How did he describe the glory that “remains”?

Meditation

In his collection of essays, *The Weight of Glory*, C. S. Lewis identified what I consider to be perhaps the greatest problem in the Christian world today: “Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Not only is our faith “shrunk”, as David Wells put it, but our *desires* are shrunk as well. God offers us glory in knowing Him, a weight of glory that crushes our natural sinfulness and lifts us to heights of joy and hope where we overcome and grow through every trial. God offers us glory that remains, not like the passing glory on Moses’ face; glory beyond the mere letter of the Law; glory of the indwelling Spirit, stretching out and transforming us into the likeness of Christ; glory in all the minutiae of our quotidian lives; glory that makes the Presence of God real and thrilling and emboldening and full of rejoicing; glory that makes the Kingdom of God a daily reality; glory that makes us increasingly like Jesus day by day; glory that excites us here and now with the unimaginable prospect of what awaits us then and there.

God offers us no passing glory but glory that remains and grows and expands in all directions to fill our world with knowledge of God’s glory and the reality of Jesus, risen and reigning and returning soon.

God offers us glory. Do we desire it? Do we long to experience our great salvation exceedingly and abundantly beyond all that we’ve ever dared to ask or think?

Or will we just keep fooling around with our mud-pie faith, all the while thinking “This is as good as it gets”?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“But let him who glories glory in this,
that he understands and knows Me,
that I AM the LORD, exercising lovingkindness,
judgment, and righteousness in the earth.
For in these I delight,’ says the LORD” (Jer. 9.24).

“For if what was passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious” (2 Cor. 3.11).

The Law is not the means to salvation; it is the result.
The glorious knowledge of God which leads us to obedience.
And in that, He delights.

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way” (Ps. 37.23).
“Those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the LORD,
but the blameless in their ways are His delight” (Prov. 11.20).
“Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight” (Prov. 12.22).
“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
but the prayer of the upright is His delight” (Prov. 15.8).

By and through obedience, we shine the light of God’s glory into our Personal Mission Field.
“You are the light of the world. . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5.14, 16).

When we glory in His righteousness, when we allow His glory to shine through us, we bring delight to the LORD. And by bringing Him delight, we delight.
“And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love” (Ps. 119.47).
“I long for Your salvation, O LORD, and Your law is my delight” (Ps. 119.174).

God remains, always and forever, in His glorious glory.
“Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!” (Ps. 87.3).

And we have hope now, and forever, for a much more glorious day.
“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3.20, 21).

We know and understand that He is the LORD, and we glory and delight in that!

For reflection

1. What does it mean to desire the glory of God? How do you know when you are desiring His glory?
2. Why do you suppose we settle for “good enough” when God says there is always more glory to know?
3. How can believers encourage one another to escape from a merely “good enough” approach to faith?

As the moon and stars, though in themselves they are not merely luminous, but diffuse their light over the whole earth, do, nevertheless, disappear before the brightness of the sun; so, however glorious the law was in itself, it has, nevertheless, no glory in comparison with the excellence of the gospel. Hence it follows, that we cannot sufficiently prize, or hold in sufficient esteem the glory of Christ, which shines forth in the gospel, like the splendor of the sun when beaming forth. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3.10, 11

What a Difference!: 2 Corinthians 3

Pray Psalm 27.1-10.

Pray that the Lord Who dwells in you will make His glory known *to* you, *within* you, and *through* you throughout the day.

Sing Psalm 27.1-10.

(St. Denio: *Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise*)

LORD, You are our Light and our Savior most dear!
You guard us with might; therefore, whom shall we fear?
Though evil surround us, our enemies fall;
no harm shall confound us when on You we call.

One thing we request but to dwell with You, LORD.
Your beauty to test and to think on Your Word.
In trouble You hide us secure in Your grace;
no foe may o'erride us: We sing of Your praise.

Hear, LORD, when we cry and be gracious, we pray!
LORD, do not deny us Your favor this day!
Our help, our salvation, though others may fall,
preserve our good station when on You we call.

5 A Veil on Their Hearts

Pray Psalm 30.1-3.

I will extol You, O LORD, for You have lifted me up,
And have not let my foes rejoice over me.
O LORD my God, I cried out to You,
And You healed me.
O LORD, You brought my soul up from the grave;
You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.

Sing Psalm 30.1-3.

(Madrid: *Come Christians, Join to Sing*)

We will extol Your Name! You have lifted us, O LORD!
Our foes retreat in shame—You have lifted us, O LORD!
You healed us when we cried; safe shall our souls abide;
hell's claim have You denied—
You have lifted us, O LORD!

Read 2 Corinthians 3.1-15; meditate on verses 12-15.

Preparation

1. What does Paul say about the minds and hearts of those who do not believe?
2. How is that veil removed?

Meditation

The veil that Moses put over his face was to protect the people of God from being overwhelmed by His glory. It was symbolic of the veil in the tabernacle and temple that separated the people as they worshiped from the Holy of Holies and the ark of the covenant—the glory seat of the Lord.

The people, in fact, did not want to see the glory on Moses' face, just as people today are willfully blind to the glory of God that beckons to them all day long. Blind in their minds and veiled in their hearts, they cannot see the radiance of the beauty and goodness and truth and eternal life God offers. Only Jesus can take away that veil and illuminate their minds to the truth of the Gospel.

But where shall they go to find Jesus? To a temple somewhere? Or a holy mountain? We who believe are that temple, that sacred mount. God tore the veil of Jerusalem's temple from the top to the bottom, showing entry to the glory of God to be an act of divine grace deriving from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He rose again to be the way, the truth, and the life that all who believe in Him might be saved.

We are His earthen vessels to bear the grace and Good News of the Gospel to the people in our world. Consider how dark is their blindness, how stifling the veil that shrouds their hearts! Only the Gospel can bring them to light and life, and we are the bearers of that Good News.

Pray, prepare, and go forth eagerly to offer the Light of the world, the Life everlasting, and the Way of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit to all who will hear you.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

“Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons—
because they rebelled against the words of God, and despised the counsel of the Most High,
therefore He brought down their heart with labor; they fell down, and there was none to help.

Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their chains in pieces. Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (Ps. 107.10-15).

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined” (Is. 9.2).

“Consider how dark is their blindness, how stifling the veil that shrouds their hearts!”

They walk in the futility of their minds, “having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart...” (Eph. 4.17, 18).

In the beginning, when the earth was without form, and void and darkness was on the face of the deep—the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen. 1.1-3). God is in the business of bringing light into darkness; both upon the heavens and the earth and into the lives of those He created.

And then in the fullness of time, Zacharias spoke of the work his son, John, would do to prepare the way for the greatest Light to appear: “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Lk. 1.76-79).

The “stifling veil” of darkness is torn asunder as the Breath of Life, Jesus Christ, makes all things fresh and new.

*Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.*

*Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glow with Thy fire divine.
(Edwin Hatch, 1878)*

For reflection

1. What did God do to overcome your blindness and remove the stifling veil on your heart?
2. Whom can you encourage today by sharing your testimony of how God lifted you out of darkness into His glorious light?
3. What can you do in your prayers to focus more on those whose minds are blinded and whose hearts are veiled?

*When any person is converted to God, then the veil of ignorance is taken away. The condition of those who enjoy and believe the gospel is happy, for the heart is set at liberty to run the ways of God’s commandments. Matthew Henry (1662-1714),
Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3.12-18*

Pray Psalm 30.4-12.

Thank and praise the Lord for your salvation. Call on Him to use you as His witness today, that through Jesus the veil that lies over their heart may be removed, and they may be saved.

Sing Psalm 30.4-12.

(Madrid: *Come Christians, Join to Sing*)

LORD, we extol Your Name! You have lifted us, O LORD!
Thanks we with joy proclaim—You have lifted us, O LORD!
Anger shall not prevail; grace will for us avail;
joy frees us from travail—
You have lifted us, O LORD!

Firmly in You we stand—You have lifted us, O LORD!
Kept by Your gracious hand—You have lifted us, O LORD!
LORD, when You hide Your face, I cry to You for grace;
living, I'll sing Your praise—
You have lifted us, O LORD!

LORD, hear our earnest plea—You have lifted us, O LORD!
And our strong Helper be—You have lifted us, O LORD!
You turn our tears to song; praises to You belong.
Thanks is our endless song!
You have lifted us, O LORD!

6 Glory to Glory

Pray Psalm 17.15.

As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness;
I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.

Sing Psalm 17.15.

(Park Street: *All You That Fear Jehovab's Name*)

But as for me, LORD, save and bless! Let me behold Your righteousness.
Your face in glory I would see, and thus forever blessed be,
and thus forever blessed be.

Read 2 Corinthians 3.1-18; meditate on verses 15-18.

Prepare

1. What do we discern as we read the Word (Law) of God?
2. What does the Spirit do with that?

Meditation

What words would you use to describe the glory of God? Majestic? Immense and expansive? Beautiful beyond words? All-embracing, all-sustaining, all-wonderful? Weighty and fearful? Doubtless, these and many more. We look to Jesus as He sojourned among us, loving, teaching, healing, restoring, and we see the glory of God. We see Him suffering on the cross, focused on the joy that was set down before Him. We see Him bursting to life, ascending to the Father, taking His seat to rule the cosmos, making all things new. And when we see Jesus, we see all the glory of God we can bear for now.

The glory of Jesus runs through the whole of God's Word. He is there in every book, chapter, and story, gazing out at us from between the lines of Scripture and beckoning us to enter His Presence and glory. We see Jesus in the mirror of Scripture, or we do not see deeply enough. When we glimpse His glory in the Words of Scripture, He locks onto us and draws us to Himself. As He does, the Spirit takes the glory we have discerned and works it throughout our soul and from there, into our life. The glory we contemplate becomes the glory we live as we are transformed from glory to glory into the image of Jesus Christ.

This is the normal Christian life—normal, in that this is the pattern or norm God has established for us and that He is at work within us to accomplish (Phil. 2.13). One day we will see Jesus face to face, and then we will be like Him. For now, we seek the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ throughout the Word of God (2 Cor. 4.6). As we discern His glory we linger there, gazing upon His beauty (Ps. 27.4) and yielding to His Spirit as He convicts us of sin, points the way into greater righteousness, and empowers us for righteous judgment according to the Word of God (Jn. 16.8-11). This, I say, is normal. It is also, we will agree, a mystery, an unfathomable privilege, and the greatest adventure anyone can know.

Is the glory-to-glory life normal for you?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

The Christian life is a mystery, unsolvable by the human mind, beginning with the perplexing case of God demonstrating His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, He sent His Son Jesus to die for us (Rom. 5.8). A mystery never to be understood, but one to be eternally grateful for and embraced.

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord...” (2 Cor. 3.18).

The world's greatest detective, Hercule Poirot, solved one of his mysteries when he realized he was looking at the problem face on, when in fact, the mystery could only be understood, when looked at in a mirror, backwards, as it were.

That is perhaps what Paul was alluding to here: we can behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, not fully clear, not completely understood, only comprehending what we can see with our human eyes and heart. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13.12: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."

"From glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3.18). Glory obscured to glory clear, evident, certain, obvious, apparent, irrefutable, unmistakable, and conclusive. Here and now glory becoming there and then glory.

"Who is this King of glory?
The LORD strong and mighty,
The LORD mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O you gates!
Lift up, you everlasting doors!
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
He is the King of glory" (Ps. 24.8-10).

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus"! (Jn. 12.21)

And we try to comprehend and "know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn. 3.2).

Glory to Glory. Hallelujah.

For reflection

1. When are you most aware of seeing the glory of Jesus in the Word of God?
2. How do you experience the glory of Jesus as the Spirit works it into your soul and out through your life?
3. What should be our proper response to the Lord as we move from glory to glory day by day?

The condition of those who enjoy and believe the gospel is happy, for the heart is set at liberty to run the ways of God's commandments. They have light, and with open face they behold the glory of the Lord. Christians should prize and improve these privileges. We should not rest contented without knowing the transforming power of the gospel, by the working of the Spirit, bringing us to seek to be like the temper and tendency of the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and into union with Him. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3.12-18

Pray Psalm 17.4-9.

Pray that God will guard your path and uphold your steps today so you may glorify Him in all you do.

Sing Psalm 17.4-9.

(Park Street: *All You That Fear Jehovah's Name*)

As for the deeds of sinful men, I will not walk those paths again.

My feet hold firm from first to last: Help me to walk Your righteous path,
help me to walk Your righteous path!

When I have called, You answered me, LORD; hear now my fervent, seeking word!
Let kindness flow by Your command. Keep and preserve me by Your Right Hand,

What a Difference!: 2 Corinthians 3

keep and preserve me by Your Right Hand.

Treasure me in Your holy eye; shelter me from a troubling sky.
Around me all my enemies eagerly would despoil me,
eagerly would despoil me.

7 What a Difference!

Pray Psalm 71.14-16.

But I will hope continually,
And will praise You yet more and more.
My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness
And Your salvation all the day,
For I do not know their limits.
*I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD;
I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.*

Sing Psalm 71.14-16, 3.

(Solid Rock: *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*)
But as for me my voice I raise to sing in hope and constant praise!
With saving grace my voice will swell Your never-ending grace to tell.

Refrain v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

Review 2 Corinthians 3.1-18; meditate on verses 2, 3.

Preparation

1. What did Paul say about the Corinthians?
2. How had they come to be that way?

Meditation

What a difference! In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul addressed his readers as babes in Christ, schismatics who had lost sight of the fact that they were God's temple, the work of His indwelling Spirit. Here, in 2 Corinthians 3, Paul saw something else. He addressed the Corinthians as an "epistle of Christ" whose hearts were unveiled before the glory of God in the face of Jesus so that they were being transformed from glory to glory into His image.

It's impossible to underestimate the joy and gratification Paul knew after hearing Titus' report. The Corinthians had heard Paul's hard words, and they were amending their ways, putting things right, and rediscovering the Lord's true purpose for them.

This is the work of the Spirit of God (vv. 3, 8, 17, 18). When the Spirit of God begins to move among His people, great and astonishing things can happen. People grow in the Lord. They put aside their differences and seek ways of agreeing together in Him. They begin to bear bold and believable witness in their community. And they boast about the Lord and the mercy and grace He provides for all their times of need.

We, too, can be different. Our churches can be different. We don't have to remain stuck in stale patterns of growth, moods of indifference or resentment, or lives of spiritual indolence. We can change. Our churches can change and grow. And we can be witnesses for Jesus and ambassadors of His Kingdom in ways exceedingly and abundantly beyond all we've ever dared to ask or think.

Only the Spirit can do this. We must call on God to fill us with His Spirit daily, and then we must walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh in everything we do. And as we do, people will say of us, "What a difference!"

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“How my heart yearns within me” (Job 19.27) to be different.

To be more like Jesus every moment of every day.

To be filled with His Holy Spirit to become an overcomer.

To bring the glory and grace of God into everything that I think and do.

To live out God’s marvelous work in me:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you;

I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezek. 36.26, 27).

“How my heart yearns within me” to comply.

The Corinthians did—and went from being a trash novel—to become a beautiful epistle of Christ. Written not with ink or on tablets of stone; but on the living tablet of their hearts, pumping the lifeblood of Jesus into every nook and cranny of their being and Kingdom work.

“Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man” (Prov. 3.3, 4).

There is already a difference in us caused by God’s saving and healing and empowering hand upon us. However, our response to His love, by keeping His Law, is the delineating factor in whether Paul would want to claim us as his epistle, known and read by all (2 Cor. 3.2).

Paul’s stamp of approval was gained by those whose difference was glaringly obvious by what they thought and said and did, those whose lives revealed them to be a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own special people, who proclaimed the praises of Him who had called them out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but were now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now had obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2.9, 10).

We, too, want Paul—but most of all God—to look at us and say,
“What a difference following Me has made in My children with a new heart!”

“How my heart yearns within me!”

For reflection

1. What difference have you seen of late in your own walk with and work for the Lord?

2. Would you say that your heart yearns within you to grow in the Lord? In what ways?

3. Whom will you encourage today to press on in becoming more like Jesus?

Their hearts were humbled and softened to receive this impression, by the new-creating power of the Holy Spirit. He ascribes all the glory to God. And remember, as our whole dependence is upon the Lord, so the whole glory belongs to him alone. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3.1-11

Pray Psalm 71.1, 2, 7, 8, 12-13.

Call on the Lord to make you an epistle of His grace and glory to everyone who “reads” you today.

What a Difference!: 2 Corinthians 3

Sing Psalm 71.1, 2, 7, 8, 12, 13.

(Solid Rock: *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*)

In You, O LORD, I refuge claim; O let me never be ashamed.
in righteousness deliver me; incline Your ear and hear my plea.

Refrain v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

While many see in me a sign, I shelter in Your strength will find.

LORD, fill my mouth with endless praise and with Your glory all my days.

Refrain

O God be not too far from me; my ever-present Helper be!

Consume and shame my enemies; let them reproached and humbled be.

Refrain

What a Difference!: 2 Corinthians 3

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What does it mean to be an epistle of Christ to the world?
2. What's the difference between learning "the letter" and learning "the Spirit"?
3. What is the glory of God? Where can we expect to encounter God's glory?
4. How are we transformed "from glory to glory" into the image of Jesus Christ?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

For prayer:

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