

***“Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians —
Grace Is Revealed When the Spirit Writes on Human Hearts”***

Review: “Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians — Grace Triumphs Even Over Our Humanity”

- ***God's Super-Abundant Grace Is Available Even In the Hardest of Times***
- ***Grace Rules Today and True Forgiveness Reaches Even Lowly Sinners***
- ***We Are Triumphing For It Is God Who Is Working In Spite Of Our Humanity***

- ***God's Super-Abundant Grace Is Available Even In the Hardest of Times***

2 Cor. 2:3-4

3 And I wrote this [letter] unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all.

4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.

- ***Paul is concerned for their best always and as circumstances have changed since when his first letter was written and it is now time to write again for some serious issues continue in the Corinthian church. But the apostle was concerned that his letter might not be well received and that there could be unintended consequences.***

But what is the risk that Paul senses exists here? For they might be grieved by the letter with unintended consequences?

- ***Grace Rules Today and True Forgiveness Reaches Even Lowly Sinners***

2 Cor. 2:6-9

6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.

7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

- ***Paul is concerned not that there may be general grieving due to the directness of his letter sent before this one which we do not have a copy of today for it has been lost. No, his concern is rather that the***

one responsible for the crisis in the first place may be overwhelmed in his sorrow not due to his full repentance but due to the believers in Corinth with possibly a continuing condition of unforgiveness towards the sinner, now repentant.

- ***There are two more details here that are important:***

2 Cor. 2:6-9

10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;

11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

- ***A second detail is that they were concerned whether the apostle would himself be willing to forgive the repentant sinner if they themselves were.***
- ***Thirdly, there is another thought here also critically important for the spiritual understanding of this letter. For Paul addresses their former concerns as misguided, writing: “whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.”***

He announces here that there was an always present work of God under grace that must be understood. In other words, he most powerfully states that there will be no such division possible between him and the Corinthians for if the forgiveness of Paul is truly “in the person of Christ”, then, since we are all in him and in him is an essential unity, then your forgiveness of the repentant brother will suffice for me and I will forgive him as well. And that settles it.

- ***We Are Triumphant For It Is God Who Is Working In Spite Of Our Humanity***

2 Cor. 2:12-13

12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord,

13 I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.

- *These confessions were stark reminders of Paul's humanity (and remember the others, for example when Paul was let down the city wall in a basket in Antioch), but nevertheless with much boldness he reminds them here of his humanity, yes, but more, that it was not concerning his humanity alone (though he is detailed in that description) but of how the Lord God had worked through his weaknesses to reveal his riches through the glory of his grace. And it is that transforming message of abundant and triumphing grace in the lives of sinners that he here asks his hearers to take to heart. These are his chapter closing words:*

2 Cor. 2:14-17

14 Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.

15 For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:

16 To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?

17 For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.

- *So Paul's testimony of God's abundant grace was indeed what could only be accounted for in such words as these: "And who is sufficient for these things?": **Indeed. But he is not finished:***
- *"For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ": **His confession is humble yet bold, both at the same time. But how could it be otherwise if Paul was indeed from God, in the sight of God, speaking these words "in Christ".***

Our Outline Today: Grace Revealed As the Spirit Writes on Human Hearts

- *In Spite of Our Humanity, the Spirit of God Has Written in Our Hearts*
- *Paul Was Made A Servant of A New Covenant, Not of Letters but of Spirit*
- *Our Great Hope Is Secured, Because We All Possess Eternally the Spirit*

I. In Spite of Our Humanity, the Spirit of God Has Written in Our Hearts:

[READ] 2 Cor. 3:1-6

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

2 Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

4 And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward:

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

6 Who [God] also hath made us able ministers of the [a] new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

- *What a remarkable introduction to a chapter we have here. Paul writes here that he does not need any letters of introduction or “commendation” like other teachers might and in particular the false gnostic teachers who apparently had such references in abundance, perhaps from Athens or even Jerusalem. Why not? Because, he boldly writes here, the Corinthian believers were themselves individually his letters of authentication, and that those letters were written on the heart and “known and read by all”!*
- *Verse 3 gives the entire teaching on this which will become a central theme of the entire chapter: “Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart”: **So not ink as in the writing on a page but the spirit of the living God himself was the “instrument” in this “scribal work”.** An amazing and wonderful analogy this is. Is it transforming to us who have cast all of our hope and trust in him and his super-abundant grace.*

II. Paul Was Made A Servant of A New Covenant, Not of Letters but of Spirit:

[READ] 2 Cor. 3:7-11

7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: [along with the old covenant itself]

8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excellet **[hyperbole, Gk.]**.

11 For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

- ***Letters on a page or carved in stone [writing] are being compared here with spirit. There is of course no real comparison that may be made except the one, that the true author is God, God Almighty in both cases, of course, but the place of writing is do very different:***
 - ***“... that was glorious [the Law], much more that which remained [the revelation of grace through Paul] is glorious”: The one has ended, the other continues with its inestimable glories upon glories!***
 - ***The contrasts in the language here between the two workings of Almighty God are so important and we must take this teaching to heart:***
 - ***“ministration of death”, “ministration of condemnation”, “ministration of spirit”, “ministration of righteousness”***
- ***We must conclude, therefore, that there is a great gulf between the covenant Paul was made a minister or servant of and the Mosaic — and it is insurmountable though many would like to deny this and seem always to want to place the saints of God back under a legal standard of good works. That conflicts directly with the working of God’s abundant grace.***

Yes, the early one was glorious, no doubt. But the new one (new in quality) is so much more glorious that there is not even a means of comparison between them (“that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth”). The one was on dead stone or papyrus, while the new one is in human hearts! This analogy is so powerful and the contrast is so absolute, for the one covenant was written on what was inherently dead while the other on what was dead but has now been made alive by the power of Almighty God. Amen.

- ***So the writings stand in the analogy for the two covenants. The one was terminated while the other continues on and on, he writes here, and it is under the terms of and under the power of the latter where we dwell today, under grace.***

We need to apply this to our lives. The consequences of this teachings are extensive and relevant to every aspect of living today. Have we fully received it for ourselves?

III. Our Great Hope Is Secured Because We All Possess Eternally the Spirit:

[READ] 2 Cor. 3:12-18

12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

13 And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.

16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.

17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

- ***“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech”: Transparency, as it were, face to face as is mentioned in our final verse today where he used the words “with open face”. In other words, without any deception at all. This is in strict contrast to Moses coming down from his meeting with the Lord on Mt. Sinai. Moses and Paul are contrasted here in their ministry of the word, for the one, the word of the Law, and for the other, the word of grace.***
- ***“And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face ...”: This is a most amazing and insightful reference to Exodus chapter 34. Let’s read those words:***

[READ] Ex. 34:27-35

27 And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.

28 And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

29 And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.

30 And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him.

31 And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them.

32 And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in mount Sinai.

33 And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face.

34 But when Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the vail off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded.

35 And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

- *Did Moses have another reason other than the one implied here for wearing a mask after being in the presence of the Lord? Was it something more than that the people were afraid to come near due to the shining of his face? Paul indicates in our verses that there was another and more important reason, perhaps not even known to Moses, but in the plan of Almighty God:*
- “And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished”: **For if they saw that the the glory on Moses's face diminished quickly they might have concluded that the law was only temporary and perhaps not worthy of their total submission.**
 - **“... That which is abolished”, or, “that which has been rendered ineffective or inoperative”: So through Paul we may understand this critically important truth and it is a fundamental one indeed for us under grace and its dominion rather than under the Mosaic Law and its dominion. For death vs life, condemnation vs righteousness are his contrasts here as revealed in the words of the law versus the words of grace through Paul. The Mosaic covenant therefore was not what so many have made it to be, a blessing equivalent in many ways to what we have under grace with its many blessings. It was a burden even for those who were believers, probably even more so than those who were not. Paul along makes this clear in words such as those before us here.**
- “But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ” **[meaning when this was written, in the first century A.D.] and then even more:** “... even unto this day when Moses is read, the vail

is upon their heart”: ***This is about the Jews and also, by implication, the elect nation of Israel prophetically speaking. Note that is made clear with these words*** “Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away”: ***But in great contrast to that, Paul then reveals the difference, since he personally now stands in the place of Moses, as it were. Moses brought the Law. Paul brings the abundance of grace. Paul does not have his face covered and is face to face, as it were, bearing the word of grace...***

- ***This is a transforming message indeed, isn't it? Praise God for his abundant grace. Amen.***

Application / Conclusions:

- ***Let's reread those final words:***

2 Cor. 3:12-18

12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

13 And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

...

17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

- ***Praise God for his ever abundant grace. May his grace and peace so capture your hearts and minds that you also may be shining with his glory to all that they may also come in God's good timing into his abundance and salvation through grace. Amen.***