

## 2 CORINTHIANS 3

# Our God and His Gospel

Student Guides

### Daily Bible Reading

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*A.W. Tozer once said, "The message of the gospel... is the message of a new creation in the midst of an old, the message of the invasion of our human nature by the eternal life of God and the displacing of the old by the new." Chapter three is special. At no other juncture in Paul's writings does he clearly state what Tozer meant by the Gospel being an "invasion" into our human nature, transforming us, freeing us from our old lives and giving us new lives than in 2 Corinthians 3. Paul declares Christians to be "the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God" (v. 4). Imagine it! Believers are letters written by the Spirit of God!*

### 1. The Giving of the Gospel (vv. 1-6)

Paul opens chapter three with thoughts which are actually a continuation of chapter two (2:17). Paul's concern clearly focused on *how the Gospel is to be spoken*. After distancing himself from those who "corrupt the word of God," he maintained the church of Jesus Christ must embrace the Gospel with "sincerity." Hence, for Paul, there were two ways to speak the Gospel.

The first way was to speak the Gospel with *impurity*. Impure preaching is corrupted preaching. The term "corrupt" comes from a Greek word, the root of which means "huckster." Preachers who water down the Word of God to make the Christian life wither more appealing or "easier" to accept are sending souls to hell!

The second way to speak the Gospel is with sincerity. The term "sincerity" is the English translation of the Greek word *eilikrineia*; it literally means "clearness" and denotes exactly the opposite of corrupt—purity. The term often described the results of being examined under the intense light of the sun. No Gospel preacher may please the Lord Jesus who lacks purity in heart when he stands with the Word of God in his hand. No Gospel preacher may please the Lord Jesus who lacks purity in heart when he stands with the Word of God in his hand.

After focusing on how the Gospel is given, Paul focuses next on where the Gospel is given (vv. 1-3). the Apostle queries whether the Corinthians needed recommendations from other people for his ministry among them. Think about it for a moment: it was pretty ridiculous for them—a church he planted and served as pastor for almost two years—to request letters of approval!

Paul takes their absurd expectation as an occasion to reveal a fundamental truth concerning the Gospel he preached: the Gospel preached in sincerity and accepted in truth is written upon the heart of the recipient who believes. And, what exactly does this mean? It means two things in particular.

First, it means an *inward* change takes place as a result of the Gospel written on our hearts through faith. Recall Paul's metaphor of an "epistle" which was, at the moment of conversion, "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." Whenever a person receives Christ as Savior and Lord, his or her life becomes a recording of the Spirit.

Second, it means an *outward* credibility takes place as a result of the Gospel written on our hearts through faith. Paul said the person converted to Christ becomes a letter of the Spirit "read and known of all men" (v. 2). No Christian lives a private life, void of public scrutiny. Moreover, the single way outward credibility is maintained, is through the inward change that is a result of the Gospel written on one's life by the Spirit of God.

After focusing on how the Gospel is given and where the Gospel is given, Paul now focuses on why the Gospel is given (vv.4-6). In the last chapter, Paul inquired who was sufficient to live the Christian life (2:16). His answer to the question is now clear; God is our sufficiency (v. 5). We are but instruments, or as Paul says, “able ministers.”

## 2. The Glory of the Gospel (vv. 7-18)

Elsewhere, Paul described the Gospel as “the glorious gospel” (1 Tim. 1:11). When we speak of a person’s salvation experience, we call it a glorious experience. Why? The answer must be because salvation is from beginning to end a salvation by God’s marvelous grace. The second half of chapter three describes precisely why the Gospel is glorious.

First, the glory of the Gospel is a *transcending glory* (vv. 7-11). For Paul, the Gospel of grace was in every way superior to the law. He speaks of the law as a “ministration of death” which was “engraven in stones.” And, while he does not deny the giving of the law was “glorious” (cp. Ex. 34), in comparison to the Gospel, the law was but a fading reality. The difference between law and Gospel is the difference between moon and sun.

Using three contrasts, Paul explains why the Gospel’s glory is superior. The first contrast is between *death* and *life* (vv. 7-8). While the law is an undertaker, which deals with corpses, the Gospel is a birthing center, which deals with newborns. The second contrast is between *condemnation* and *justification* (v. 9). The former leads to eternal death and separation from God forever. The latter—*justification*—leads to eternal life and heaven with God forever. The third contrast is between *passing* and *enduring* (vv. 10-11). Paul spoke of the present as something “to be done away” (v. 7).

Second, the glory of the Gospel is a *transforming glory* (vv. 12-17). The transforming glory the Gospel brings to the believer begins in salvation (vv. 12- 17). Paul references Moses’ dealings with Israel when he descended from the mount (Ex. 34). The presence of God changed his countenance so radically, he wore a veil. However, according to Paul, the veil was to cover the fading glory rather than glory’s brightness.

Similarly, the veil is still covering people’s hearts today. In other words, their “minds” are “blinded” (v. 14). The result is callousness, a loss of understanding. Unbelievers cannot see the glory of Jesus Christ. Only the Spirit of the living God can remove the veil for people to see the wonder and glory of the cross and the salvation Jesus gives through it. Moses went into the presence of God and the veil was removed (v. 16). The same is true today. When a person comes to Christ, the veil is taken away.

The transforming glory *continues in sanctification* (v. 18). The glory was reflected on Moses’ face. However, the glory was only skin-deep, so to speak. The glory of Jesus Christ—the glory written by the Spirit on the human heart—is an inner glory, a glory displayed in character. When a believer is saved, a new capability of understanding is written on the heart.

## Wrap Up

*The Gospel of Jesus Christ is glorious! It possesses a transcending glory, a transforming glory. In addition, the glory is one which is eternal. It never fades away. The greatest thing of all is, the glorious Gospel which we find in Scripture is a Gospel of grace, a Gospel given to us by God Himself. We cannot earn its blessings or gain, in our own efforts, its glory. Instead it is a glorious Gospel of grace. God gives the Gospel and all the blessings it bestows on the one who believes. Will you today believe the Gospel? Will you turn from your sin and trust Christ?*