

False brothers had risen up, and Paul's gospel scared them. They were trying to tear Paul apart. They believed that Jesus wasn't enough to save you. They waited until Paul had been teaching in an area, then moved in. Their message was, "Jesus is not enough." They tried to bring the saved churches back under the law. You can read about this all in the book of Galatians.

4 And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), 5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. (Galatians 2:4-5).

3 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? 2 You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 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 Corinthians 3:1-3).

These are some of the most beautiful words that a pastor could say about his congregation. Paul, in essence, is saying, "I have no need to pat myself on the back, and I don't need any endorsements. You, my precious church, are the very proof of my ministry. You are the letter that is written in the transcripts of my heart." These false brothers or Judaizers were bringing all kinds of nonsensical accusations against Paul when what they were really after was the message that he spoke. They tried to discredit Paul so they could discredit the gospel. The Corinthian church was a more beautiful letter than any letter of recommendation itself. The sufficiency of ministry doesn't come out of our credentials. It comes from our faithfulness to the calling of God and the fruit of a person's ministry. We are all in ministry. If you're a man here, your first ministry is your wife and children, if you have them. Our fruit testifies to the legitimacy of our ministry.

The Spirit, Not the Letter

4 And we have such trust through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, 6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:4-6).

Paul has his confidence in God, and in Him alone, to make him the minister he is supposed to be. I and others who minister must never put our trust in ourselves. Paul isn't going into defense mode. Rather, he is finding his sufficiency in God. When I am attacked, I can easily go into defense mode. It is wonderful to see Paul being attacked yet loving people and ministering to them. Verse 6 tells what makes us sufficient in the New Covenant. It's not the letter of the Law but the Spirit that makes it work. Rules and regulations kill. The Holy Spirit and the ministry thereof is the only way to go.

Glory of the New Covenant

7 But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? (2 Corinthians 3:7-8).

Paul now contrasts that Holy Spirit-led life with the Law, which he calls the ministry of death and condemnation. The Law is good and glorious. But it exposed clearly the sin in people's lives. In that way it was a ministry of death. He contrasts a life of freedom in Christ with the Law, which is just chiseled in stone and not on our hearts. Even in the beautiful 10 Commandments we find the beauty of the Spirit. Where was the Spirit? It was shining on Moses' face. That was called the *Shekinah Glory*. Perhaps some reading this aren't aware of, or have forgotten, what happened when Moses came down from the mountaintop.



29 Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. **30** So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him...**33** And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. **34** But whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out; and he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever he had been commanded. **35** And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him. (Exodus 34:29-30; 33-35).

There is absolutely nothing that can compare with living the Christian life in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. If you've ever lived in a legalistic kind of Christian community, it is suffocating and overwhelming. Paul is saying that freedom in Christ is more dazzling than any kind of following or rule keeping. If the ministry of death was glorious, think how much more the glory will be walking with Christ in grace.

9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. 10 For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. 11 For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious. (2 Corinthians 3:9-11).

How is the ministry of righteousness glorious? I was thinking about this, and I've come up with some ideas:

- Firstly, the Christian life offers us joy, love, and peace. These are ours for the taking. They can be ours when we "walk in the Spirit." I will remind the congregation of Pastor Darrell's definition of walking in the Spirit. It is merely when we "let God have His way with us." When we do this, the Holy Spirit gives us power to have joy in all

circumstances, peace that the world cannot understand, and love that would be impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit. Those are inheritances given to every believer.

- Secondly, piggy-backing on what we learned last week about forgiveness, the Christian life offers us freedom from our past. I am talking about healing. Many of us have gone through drama and trauma. When we truly contemplate all for which we have been forgiven, we are able to forgive others. Freedom comes with forgiveness. When we lean on Him, we are able to forgive ourselves and others of any and all wrongs done. This doesn't mean that others will get a free pass from the consequences of what they have done, but we will be free of the burden of carrying angst in our hearts towards others. It is through the Holy Spirit that we can tell others "I'm sorry" when we are wrong. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are able to say, "Will you please forgive me?"
- Legalism is all about rule keeping. It says, "I don't drink, and I don't chew, and I don't go with girls that do." We laugh about such sayings, but the bottom line is that we can and should be free of a list of things to check off to feel more righteous. It is only Jesus who can give us righteousness and make us feel righteous. This doesn't mean we don't exercise disciplines to stay in sweet fellowship with the Lord. I think it comes through prayer and meditating on His word and how it applies to our lives. Legalism is about being a slave to rule-keeping. We must always remember that we have been saved by grace and we remain saved by grace. It is such a relief when you realize that you are not God. God loves you, and He wants the best for you. He is working out His purposes in you.

12 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech— 13 unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. 14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. 15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 16 Nevertheless, when one 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 liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:12-18).

Last week, young Matthew prayed that we would be imitators of Christ. That's what this is talking about. When we turn to the Lord, a veil is lifted between God and us. We move from being distanced to being close and intimate. We are able to enter into a face-to-face, personal and living relationship with Almighty God. Nothing is left to separate us from His presence and His love. And like Moses whose face shone when he had been in God's presence, so we can shine with His glory. As we imitate Him, we become more and more like Him, with our lives becoming brighter and brighter to a dark and dying world.

Chapter 4 - The Light of Christ's Gospel

4 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:1-6).

Paul says that we are to present the Gospel boldly and openly. It is only veiled to those who are perishing. When a person understands God's love for them and the power of the Gospel, the veil is removed. The "god of this age" (Satan) has blinded many to the Gospel. They remain in darkness as the light of Christ has not reached them. Let's just keep preaching Christ as Lord to all with whom we come into contact. We are commanded to let the light of Christ shine in us and through us on a dark and dying world.

Cast Down but Unconquered

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death is working in us, but life in you. (2 Corinthians 4:7-12).



We all know the song which comes from these verses. "I'm trading my sorrows." We are merely earthen vessels. We are "Jars of Clay," as rendered in some translations. We go through life, and we sustain all kinds of cracks in our jars. Perhaps some of those cracks are there to let the light shine through.

13 And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, 14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 4:13-15).

Paul says that his faith is put into action. Because of what he believes, he speaks. He has the assurance that God will raise each of us up, as He did with Jesus. Because of this grace we should give glory to God.

Seeing the Invisible

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

So, believer, because of these great truths, let's not lose heart. What truths am I talking about? I'm talking about the promises of God, the goodness of grace, the glory of living a Christian life instead of being bound up in legalism. We are privileged to be fragile jars of clay. Paul says this because it is very easy to lose heart. It is especially difficult as we see these old bodies of ours failing in so many ways, yet we should take hope because as our outward man is dying, our inner man can be stronger each and every day.

These things that we go through test us daily. They are temporary. As weighty and ominous as they appear, they will be a blip in eternity. We can't see the whole picture at present, but the picture is slowly and steadily coming into focus. This is all temporary, but an eternity is coming, and every believer will be a part of it. Let's choose today to put our fears and doubts aside. Give them to Jesus. It is such a relief when you and I realize that we are not God. He is working his purposes out, and we each will experience an eternal weight of glory.

⁹ But as it is written:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

Nor have entered into the heart of man

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.