

Bold Ministers

“Have you lost weight?” Ronelle asked Sebastian.

“No.” Sebastian smiled.

“Well, it’s something. What is it?” queried Ronelle.

“You’re looking better and better every time I see you.”

Sebastian zipped his guitar case and looked up at the praise and worship team member.

“It’s the glory of the Lord,” said Music Minister Kenton, seated at the keyboard.

Sebastian smiled and dipped his head as he rose to his feet. The 31-year-old was grateful for this church where he had been a member for the past two years. He was happy to have found a church that loved God, loved people, and didn’t major on a bunch of rules and regulations. They were passionate about following the Lord and the Spirit’s lead.

Sebastian had become passionate about following as well. His spiritual walk had taken on a new depth since coming to this church. It was evident in his worship, his music, and his life. Sebastian had become captivated by doing the will of the Lord, and yet he had never felt such freedom in the Lord. It was a wonderful paradox.

“Thank you, Minister Kenton,” said Sebastian. “I continually seek God’s face. And I’m grateful for the love, grace, forgiveness, and glory of God.”

“Well, brother,” said Ronelle. “The glory of the Lord is all over you. At our next rehearsal, I’ll have on some sunglasses.”

1. *What is the difference between legalism and God’s grace and freedom?*

2. *How do people limit God’s love, grace, and joy today?*

3. *Why is it important to focus on the Spirit’s freedom, rather than rules that condemn?*

Ministers of a New Covenant

2 Corinthians 3:5-11, KJV

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

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

7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

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 excelleth.

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

2 Corinthians 3:5-11, NIV

⁵Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶He 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.

⁷Now 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, ⁸will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? ⁹If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! ¹⁰For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. ¹¹And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Paul asserted that he and his colleagues proclaimed the Gospel in a sincere and authoritative manner (2 Cor. 2:17).

It may be that Paul's detractors were accusing him of self-promotion and the pursuit of money. If so, he countered that neither he nor his associates were bragging about themselves. Likewise, they did not require "letters of recommendation" endorsing them to others (2 Cor. 3:1).

The Father enabled Paul's "competence" (vs. 5) in witnessing to the lost. God made Paul worthy as a servant of the "new covenant" (vs. 6) of Jeremiah 31. This agreement is not based on a written code, one which condemns sinners and consigns them to death (or eternal separation from the Creator). Rather, the compact comes from the Spirit who brings "life" to all God's regenerate children (2 Cor. 3:6).

Paul contrasted the new covenant of grace with the old covenant of the law (Exod. 34:29-35). The Ten Commandments etched in stone communicated God's "glory" (2 Cor. 3:7). At the time, Moses' face shone so brightly that his peers could not fix their gaze on him.

But Paul reasoned that the Gospel ministry empowered by the Spirit was even more "glorious" (vs. 8). The law produced "condemnation" (vs. 9), resulting in a death sentence for everyone. But the good news about Christ resulted in "righteousness" for all who trusted in Him. The believers' right standing before God is an outcome so wonderful and everlasting that it makes the glory which shone from the face of Moses seem dim by comparison.

God knew that the law by itself could not accomplish His purpose of redemption, that someday the fullness of His plan would be revealed. The law demonstrates our need for a Savior. Christ has come, and the glory of the new covenant shines brightly throughout eternity (vs. 11).

4. *Who made Paul qualified to be in ministry?*

5. *What was the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant?*

6. *What critique did Paul make of the law?*

7. *What argument did Paul make for the "ministry of the Spirit" (vs. 8)?*

The Ministry of the Spirit

2 Corinthians 3:12-18, KJV

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

13 And not as Moses, which put a veil 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.

2 Corinthians 3:12-18, NIV

¹²Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³We 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. ¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And 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.

Paul contrasted the old covenant of the law with the new covenant of grace. Once more, Paul drew attention to the fading glory coming from Moses' face. To prevent God's people from seeing this radiance, the lawgiver placed a "veil" (vs. 13) over himself. Likewise, Paul surmised that the law was being surpassed by the Father's

saving plan to redeem the lost through His Son. The glory of the new covenant would not fade.

Perhaps with deep misgivings, Paul asserted that the “minds” (vs. 14) of his unbelieving Jewish peers were closed. Even as they attentively listened to the Scriptures being read in synagogue services, a “veil” prevented them from understanding the truth. The covering can only be removed by the Spirit of God.

Paul declared that those who trusted in Christ for salvation have the “veil” lifted from their eyes (vs. 16). In turn, the Spirit renews their minds and transforms their hearts after the “image” (vs. 18) of the Son. The Spirit enables them to understand that the Son came to fulfill the Scriptures.

Paul identified the “Lord” with the “Spirit.” As the third person of the Trinity, the Spirit removes the spiritual “veil” (vs. 16) and brings “life” (vs. 6) and “freedom” (vs. 17) to believers. The Spirit can offer freedom from slavery to the written rules that humans were unable to keep. Those in Christ receive the Father’s grace. This is the new covenant inaugurated by the Son.

Furthermore, the Spirit enables God’s children to behold and reflect His “glory” (vs. 18). In this new redeemed order, there is no place for covering the “ever-increasing” radiance the Spirit produces in the lives of Christians. The Spirit changes them to outwardly reflect the likeness of Christ, as ambassadors of God’s grace and love for the world. This path to true holiness, which specialists called sanctification, originates with the “Lord,” whom Paul declared was the “Spirit.”

8. *What “veil” did Paul say the Jews had when they heard the Scriptures (vs. 13)?*

9. *How is the veil lifted?*

10. *What was the basis for the believers’ “freedom” (vs. 17)?*

His Word on Our Hearts

God gave commandments in tablets of stone to His people at Mount Sinai, but His plan all along was to write His law on their hearts, so His people would know Him (Jer. 31:31-34). All people are offered a personal relationship with the living God.

God's new covenant agreement—an offer of grace through Jesus' death and resurrection—provided a way for imperfect people to keep the covenant. Paul placed his trust in God's strength alone. Any confidence in our ability to hold up our end of the covenant relationship is found through faith and trust in Jesus alone for righteousness before God.

Paul contrasted the old covenant of the law with the new covenant of grace in order to show the role of the Spirit. When we trust Jesus and have faith that He is God's Messiah, the Spirit transforms our hearts and minds. The veil is lifted, and we are able to behold and to reflect God's glory in our lives—with the Spirit's help.

Because Jesus came, God is not hidden from us. We must not hide the work of Christ either. Jesus emphasized we are not to cover or hide (as with a veil) God's work in our lives (Matt. 5:14-16). Rather, as we accept God's gift of grace and a life of freedom in the Spirit, we are to reflect Christ and His love to those around us. People who claim to be followers of the Lord without submitting to His will are only fooling themselves. Those who truly belong to the Lord are transformed so others will see Christ at work in their lives.

11. *What does our covenant relationship with God look like?*

12. *Why might some people still live under a shadow of condemnation?*

13. *What does it mean to reflect God's glory in our lives?*

Living in Freedom

Believers' lives become a letter from Christ. The Spirit of the living God writes His Word on our hearts. We enter into a new covenant with God through a personal relationship with Jesus. God gives us glimpses of His everlasting glory through His Word, resulting in a bold hope that we will share in that glory in the future. As we become more and more transformed into His image, the Spirit of the Lord gives us freedom in our daily lives.

► *How can you live in the Spirit's freedom this week? On this page or on an index card, complete this statement:*

*"This week I will live in the Spirit's freedom by _____
_____."*

KEY VERSE

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. —2 Corinthians 3:18, KJV

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 3:18, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 10 through June 16

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Luke 22:25-30—Servant Leadership.

Tues. Acts 1:1-11—You Shall Receive Power.

Wed. Isaiah 61—Anointed by God.

Thurs. Psalms 133-134—How Pleasant to Live in Unity.

Fri. Ephesians 4:1-7—Bear with One Another in Love.

Sat. Philippians 2:1-13—Embrace the Mind of Christ.

Sun. Romans 15:1-13—Prayer for Hope, Joy, and Peace.