

**Commentary on 2nd Corinthians chapters 3 and 4,
by Chuck Smith 11.5.23**

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November memory verse [Isaiah 7:14 \(NKJV\)](#) Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

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CHAPTER 3

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles [letters] of commendation from you? ([2Cr 3:1](#))

These people coming in and presenting their letters of authority, which were many times falsified. Paul said, "Look, do I need to have letters of commendation when I come to you, or do I need to seek letters of commendation from you when I go elsewhere?"

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men ([2Cr 3:2](#)):

"Your faith in Jesus Christ, your existence as a church is all of the recommendation that I need. You are proof of my apostleship. You are proof of the validity of my ministry. The very fact of your existence is all that is necessary to prove the authenticity of my calling." Now, the person who doesn't have that kind of proof needs all kinds of phoned up documents to tell how great they are.

And so Paul said, "You are my letters of commendation. The fact that you exist, that's all that's necessary. That's all the proof I need of my calling of God."

For as much 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 fleshly tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward ([2Cr 3:3-4](#)):

So, Paul just sort of lets it rest there.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God ([2Cr 3:5](#));

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Now, Paul in the last of the last chapter, you remember, cried out, "And who is sufficient for these things?" ([II Corinthians 2:16](#)) There have been so many times when I have faced the issues of the ministry and I said, "Oh, Lord, who is sufficient for these things? Who's able to do this?" And Paul asked the question, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And now he answers his own question: "Not that we think that we have any sufficiency within ourselves, or not that we are sufficient within ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God."

I believe that God deliberately allows us to come to the end of our own capacities and abilities in order that we might learn to trust in Him. In order that we might draw from that all-sufficiency from Him.

Who also hath made us able ministers of the [new covenant or] new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life ([2Cr 3:6](#)).

Now, this is one passage of scripture that, unfortunately, is often quoted out of context, especially by those who are looking for a more experiential relationship with God. Who are looking for more exciting experiences in the things of God. So often you'll hear them say, "Oh, but the scripture says, 'The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.'" As though the word of God or the teaching of the word of God will kill you, but the Spirit or the moving of the Spirit and the experiences of the Spirit brings life. That is a gross misquotation, because it is taking the scripture totally out of its context.

The Bible tells us concerning the word of God that it is alive and powerful, and it is sharper than a two-edged sword, and it's able to divide between the soul and the spirit, the bone and the marrow ([Hebrews 4:12](#)). The word of God, does not kill. It's alive. It's powerful, and it brings life.

And now he goes on to talk about,

But if the ministration of death [under the law], [which was] written and engraven in stones, [it] 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 [passing away] ([2Cr 3:7](#)):

Now, there is a misunderstanding, many times, as the purpose of the veil. When Moses came down with the tables of stone, having met with God there on the mount, having been privileged to see the afterglow of God, God said to Moses, "What do you desire?" And he said, "Lord, show me Thyself." And God said, "You can't look at Me and live, but you stay there in the rock, I'll pass by, and then you can see the afterglow." And it was so glorious that Moses' face shone for days after he came down from the mount with the tables of law for the people.

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But he put a veil over his face, not because they couldn't look at the glory on the face, but because the glow was beginning to fade, and they didn't want them to see the fading glow.

But this ministration of the law was glorious so that they could not steadfastly look at the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance which was fading away.

How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? ([2Cr 3:8](#))

Or even more glorious. If the old covenant which condemn man to death was so glorious and given in such a glorious way, how much more this new covenant of life through Jesus Christ is glorious to those who have received it?

For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excellesh ([2Cr 3:9-10](#)).

In other words, there is really no way to compare the glory of the old covenant with the exceeding glory of the new covenant. That new relationship that we have to God through Jesus Christ excels in glory. Brings us into such glory.

You see, the old covenant was predicated upon man's faithfulness and man's obedience. The purpose of the covenant is always to bring man into a relationship with God. That's the primary purpose. The old covenant failed. Not because it wasn't good, but because man was weak and man failed. It was predicated upon man's obedience, man's faithfulness.

Now, this new covenant cannot fail, because it's predicated upon God's faithfulness to His word. A covenant predicated upon my faithfulness to the word of God failed; I couldn't be faithful. But we know that God is faithful to His word, and thus, this new covenant whereby we stand tonight is certain, is sure. That's why we can say with such assurance, "I know in Whom I have believed, and I'm persuaded that He is able to keep that which I committed" ([II Timothy 1:12](#)). And I've committed my life and my future to Him, and I'm confident that He shall bring me into the fullness of His glory, because He is faithful to His word. His word cannot fail. He will not fail.

So, the new covenant excels in glory, because it's based upon God and His faithfulness.

For if that which is done away [that is, the old covenant under the law] was glorious [was made glorious] ([2Cr 3:11](#)),

For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excels. Nothing to compare with.

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For if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great [boldness or] plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end [or to the phasing out or the fading] of that which is abolished ([2Cr 3:11-13](#)):

You see, here it declares that it was because it beginning to fade away and they didn't want them to see this thing fading out.

But their minds were blinded: for until this day [there] remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ ([2Cr 3:14](#)).

So "blindness has happened to Israel in part, until the fullness of the Gentiles is come in" ([Romans 11:25](#)). Even when they read the law, there is a veil over their faces, that they don't really understand the law. A very sad thing has taken place among the Jewish people. For though they still verbally hold to the law, they do not practice or follow the law in establishing a righteous standing before God.

Under the law, under the old covenant, it was necessary that there be a death of a substitutionary animal to atone for their sins. You would bring the animal to the priest. You would lay your hands upon its head. You would confess your sins over the animal, and then the priest would slay the animal and offer it as a sacrifice, a sin offering for you. And thus, your sins would be covered, and you would then be able to approach the holy God.

Now today, the veil is over their faces, for they are endeavoring to approach God through their own good works, ignoring the fact that God required the sacrifice of an animal. "For the wages of sin is death" ([Romans 6:23](#)). "And without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" ([Hebrews 9:22](#)). But their minds were blinded. For until this day, there remains the same veil that's not taken away. Their minds blinded to the truth. Israel is blind in part.

Now, this veil is really done away in Christ. When you see Jesus Christ as our perfect substitute for our sins, our sacrifice, we come to an understanding of the righteousness of God being satisfied through the death of Jesus Christ.

But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart ([2Cr 3:15](#)).

They are just blinded to the truth.

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty ([2Cr 3:17](#)).

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass [or as in a mirror] the glory of the Lord, are changing into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord ([2Cr 3:18](#)).

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The work of God's Spirit within our heart is to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ. When God first made man, He made man in His image. God said, "Let us make man after our image, and after our likeness" ([Genesis 1:26](#)). And so was man created in the image of God.

CHAPTER 4

Therefore seeing we have this ministry ([2Cr 4:1](#)),

What ministry? Pointing people to Jesus Christ.

as we have received mercy, we faint not; But [we] have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, 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 ([2Cr 4:1-2](#)).

Paul said, "Look, I am not seeking to be crafty. I'm not seeking to give some kind of a hype." Get people all hyped up emotionally and all. Handling the word of God in a crafty manner or deceitfully. But "by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

This is what Paul is saying of his own ministry. "I was straightforward with you. I didn't try and give some hype. I didn't try and use the word of God deceitfully. I renounced those hidden things of dishonesty. I didn't walk in craftiness." And believe me, there's a lot of crafty fellows out there. They've existed from the time of the beginning of the church and, unfortunately, they still exist today.

Paul said, "We have renounced these hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, or handling the word of God deceitfully, but by the demonstrating of the truth commending ourselves in every man's conscience in the sight of God."

Now, there were those who were saying that Paul was preaching mysteries that you could not understand. The gospel that Paul preaches is hid. And so Paul answered them in a very clever way.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost ([2Cr 4:3](#)):

They're the ones that can't see it.

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them ([2Cr 4:4](#)).

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A very interesting passage of scripture, and one that we'd like to spend just a little time with you tonight. Because I think it's a key that's going to help in your praying for your loved ones who are not saved.

Now why is it that someone doesn't believe in Jesus Christ? Because their mind has been blinded by Satan to the truth. They doesn't really see the truth of this glorious salvation that God is offering. Satan has prejudiced and poisoned his mind against God. Satan is holding him in a spell. Now, though God respects our choices, Satan doesn't. He could care less that you have the power of choice. If he has the opportunity, he's going to hold you, and he will blind your mind to the truth. And he will fill your mind with poison and prejudice against God and the things of God so that it is impossible for you to think rationally about your relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Paul, writing to Timothy said, "That we might take them from the captivity of the enemy, who is holding them captive against their will" ([II Timothy 2:26](#)). He doesn't respect choice. The god of this world has blinded their minds.

So Jesus said, "Whatsoever things you bind on earth will be bound in heaven: and whatsoever things you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" ([Matthew 16:19](#)). So, the way to pray for your loved ones who are not saved is to pray that God will bind that work of Satan that has blinded their mind and is holding them captive. That God will bind Satan's work in their life that have prejudiced and poisoned their minds against the Gospel, in order that they may be able to consider the truth of God without this ungodly pressure from Satan.

You can't just say, "O Lord, save him." God will not save them against their will. There has to come the change of will and that desire in their heart and that asking of God for salvation. And "whosoever comes unto me," Jesus said, "I will in no wise cast out" ([John 6:37](#)). So, our prayers are to set them free so that they can see the truth.

Paul said,

For we preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake ([2Cr 4:5](#)).

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness ([2Cr 4:6](#)),

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" ([Genesis 1:1-4](#)). By His divine quiet, God called light into existence, and God saw the light that it was good. And God divided the light.

hath shined in our hearts ([2Cr 4:6](#)),

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Which were once blinded by Satan. Hearts that were in darkness, alienated from God, but now the God who called the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts.

to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ([2Cr 4:6](#)).

"We, with open faces beholding the glory of the Lord." And this glory is in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us ([2Cr 4:7](#)).

God has taken one of the most glorious treasures that any man can possess. The light of the knowledge and the understanding of Jesus Christ is the most glorious treasure any of you could ever have. Because that's eternal life. That's the treasure of eternal life. The most valuable thing that any man can possess, that eternal life through Jesus Christ.

This glorious treasure, the light of the gospel, dwelling in these clay pots. God takes the most valuable thing and puts it in the cheapest thing, a clay pot. What's more common than a clay pot, in those days especially?

Isn't it stupid for man to glory in himself? To glory in the clay pot rather than in the contents? This earthen vessel. There's no value in the vessel at all. The value is in the contents being held by the vessel. And as I pour forth the contents, I must be careful that the contents do not taste of me. That I don't get a lot of my personality into the teaching, into the contents that come forth. But that I bring forth the contents in as pure a form as I possibly can.

So, as Paul declared, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ." And that should be the theme of every minister, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ." And we seek to draw men to Christ, and we seek to bring men the contents, the value and the treasure in Jesus Christ, rather than bringing to them the old clay pot.

We are troubled on every side ([2Cr 4:8](#)),

Now Paul's talking about the ministry. "Troubled on every side." God doesn't promise you immunity from trouble. In fact, He sort of promises you trouble. "In this world you're going to have tribulation" ([John 16:33](#)). "They that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" ([II Timothy 3:12](#)).

yet [we're] not distressed ([2Cr 4:8](#));

You see, as a servant of God, as a child of God, you can be facing, and you will face a lot of trouble, but you should never be distressed.

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we are perplexed ([2Cr 4:8](#)),

And a lot of times we don't know what to do. A lot of times we are perplexed by the situation. We don't know what the solution or the answer is, but we don't despair.

And there's a big difference between being perplexed and despairing. Despairing is when you throw up your hands, "Oh, I think it's the end of... how will I ever get out of this?" And you just give up. "Now we're perplexed. I don't know how God's going to work this thing out. This is interesting to see what God is going to do now. Man, I don't know where God can go at this point. I don't know what He can possibly do. But I'm sure excited on just waiting to see what He's going to do." You see, I'm perplexed,

but [I'm] not in despair ([2Cr 4:8](#)).

[We are] persecuted, but [we are] not forsaken ([2Cr 4:9](#));

The Lord stands by us in every trial.

[we are] cast down, but [we're] not destroyed ([2Cr 4:9](#));

So, the things which we have, but the things which we don't have. Trouble, yes. But not distress. Perplexity, oh yes. But not despair. Persecution, oh yes. But never forsaken. Cast down, yes. But never destroyed.

Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body ([2Cr 4:10](#)).

Now you remember at the beginning of the letter, Paul was apologizing to the Corinthians because he didn't come, and he said, "It wasn't fickleness on my part." But he hinted to some real physical problems that he had had. He had gone through some heavy persecution where he actually figured it was the end. He didn't see any way out. He thought that this was it, and he despaired of life. He figured, "Well, you know, I'm never going to get out of this." And having gone through this severe persecutions, it probably had a physical effect upon him and left him extremely weak.

And so, he speaks about bearing about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ. That suffering that he had experienced for the cause of Christ. The persecutions, the beatings, the stonings, "bearing in my body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."

For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore [we] speak; Knowing that he

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which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you ([2Cr 4:11-14](#)).

So, that same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead is going to raise us up and present us to you.

For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace through the thanksgiving of many may redound to the glory of God ([2Cr 4:15](#)).

So, the suffering that Paul mentioned in the lesson last week, the afflictions, the sufferings, the persecutions. As Paul said, "They are for your sakes, that I might comfort you with the comfort that I received, that I may be able to comfort you in your sufferings, in your trials, in your testings. I experience these things for your sake." And so again, "My sufferings, my weaknesses, they're for your sake."

Some people from which I draw the most are those people who have had a lot of suffering in their lives, for I find in them an interesting depth that excels anything I've ever seen. And I can receive from them and I can draw from them, because of the richness that has been developed through suffering.

And so, Paul looks at his own suffering as for the benefit of the people. That it was "for your sake that the abundant grace through the thanksgiving might redound to the glory of God."

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish ([2Cr 4:16](#)),

The old outward man, hey, he's been through it: beaten, kicked, stoned, the whole bit.

yet the inward man is renewed day by day ([2Cr 4:16](#)).

We've been through an awful lot, but oh, the strength of character that it has built within the inward man. The old man on the outside, hey, he's going downhill fast. But the inward man being renewed day by day with the strength of the Lord.

For our light affliction ([2Cr 4:17](#)),

And now, notice the contrast here, and they're beautiful. "Our light affliction,"

which is but for a moment ([2Cr 4:17](#)),

Now, that's not the way it appears. Whenever I am suffering, it seems like eternity. I mean, hours drag. Ever been really sick at night? Have you ever realized how long a night is? You know, when you're feeling well and you're tired and you're going to sleep, it's amazing how short a night is. "Morning already? Oh, I can't believe it, you know." But if you're sick, night can spread on for almost eternity. You look at the clock, "Only ten

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minutes since the last time I looked? I can't believe it! When is it going to be morning, you know." Suffering has a way of expanding time.

worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ([2Cr 4:17](#));

The eternal weight of glory compared with this light affliction, which is, but for a moment. Now, what we need to do is to get our eyes upon the eternal. Our problem is that we are looking so often at the temporal. We are looking at these afflictions, and we are getting so involved in the present material surroundings that I lose sight of the eternal. The light affliction is only for a moment. But God has an eternity planned for you.

While we look not at the things which are seen ([2Cr 4:18](#)),

Read what Paul endured for the gospel of Jesus Christ, and yet he says, "These light afflictions." "In stripes above measure." That is, stripes laid on my back. "Frequently in prison, faced death many times. Of the Jews, five times I received forty stripes save one. Three times I was beaten with sticks, once I was stoned, three times I suffered shipwreck. I spent a night and a day floating out in the ocean. I journeyed often, I was in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that come upon me daily, the care of all of the churches" ([2 Corinthians 11:23-28](#)). "The light affliction which is but for a moment."

But Paul's key, his secret, "Hey, we don't look at these things which we can see, because they're only temporal."

but the things which are not seen are eternal ([2Cr 4:18](#)).

What do you have your eyes on? The temporal passing things? Where do you place your values? In the temporal passing things? God help us that we might begin to look at the eternal and place our value in the eternal things. "Looking unto Jesus," keeping our eyes on Him, "the author and the finisher of our faith" ([Hebrews 12:2](#)), who will bring us who trust in Him unto that eternal glory.

Father, we thank You for Your word tonight and the guidance that we receive, the encouragement that we have, the wisdom that is there. Help us, O Lord, to get our eyes off of ourselves, off of our circumstances, off of our weaknesses, off of our failures, off of our disappointments. And help us, Lord, to get our eyes upon You. May we endure suffering as good soldiers as we look forward, Lord, to the glorious eternal weight of glory that shall be revealed in Jesus Christ. Let Thy word now be planted in our hearts, Lord. May there not be a veil over our hearts as we read, but may Your Spirit give light and understanding in Your truth. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.