



SECOND CORINTHIANS

The Comfort of God FOR and THROUGH His People



Part 16 — “Ministers of a New Covenant” (2 Cor. 3:1-6) — 18 February 2024

Introduction: On Overview of 2 Corinthians

Content: “...deals primarily with Paul’s tenuous relationship with the Corinthian church and in the process touching on several other matters as well (Paul’s ministry, the collection for the poor in Jerusalem, and some [opponents] who have invaded the church.”

—Fee & Stewart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*

Theme: *God has comforted His people through Christ (Messiah) and so they can now comfort one another by the work of the Spirit in and through them.*

2 Cor. 1:3-4—³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Paul has addressed the implied criticism by opponents and exhorted the believers in Corinth to forgive and restore the repentant sinner in their midst. Although he awaited word from Corinth, he continued to minister the gospel and entrust himself to the Lord. Through Paul and his companions, Christ was being victoriously proclaimed even if their lives and circumstances seemed to evidence weakness and defeat.

Main Point: The work of salvation that Christ has done _____ His people by the power of the Holy Spirit makes them sufficient vessels _____ whom He can work in the lives of others.

The New Covenant Work of Messiah - 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

- Paul asks the Corinthians a question related to some implied criticism from his opponents. (3:1)

Observations:

1. It seems that he was being critiqued for never presenting to the Corinthians a _____ of recommendation.
2. This question was intended to get their attention and to cause them to _____ back on his ministry among them.

“Paul does not disdain letters of recommendation. They were an essential part of initiating and fostering friendship in the ancient world. Letters were the usual means to introduce fellow Christians to one another as they traveled...” —David Garland

Key Point: While a third-party recommendation can be helpful, it is not necessary to _____ the work of God.

- Paul goes on to explain why the answer to his question is an implied “No!” (3:2-3)

Observations:

1. The Corinthian _____ are themselves Paul’s letter of recommendation.
“written” — γράφω (graphō)—to inscribe characters on a surface, to write.
“on our hearts”
 ⇒ The evidence of God’s work in the lives of the Corinthians could be both _____ and _____ as such.
“known” *“read”*
2. That there is a church in Corinth is evidence of the work of _____ in them and through Paul.
“a letter from Christ” *delivered by us”*

“Within a metaphor of letter writing (as here) where an author and scribe are envisaged, Paul describes a “living letter” dictated by Christ and “inscribed” in the Corinthians’ hearts through his preaching of the gospel.” —Colin Kruse

3. Paul makes multiple OT allusions in this passage.

Exod. 31:18 (LXX)—And he gave Moses, when he stopped speaking to him on the mountain, Sinai, the two tablets of witness, stone tablets written by the finger of God.

Jer. 31:34 (LXX)—this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. Giving I will give my laws in their mind, and I will write them on their hearts,

Ezek. 36:26-27a (LXX)—And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will give in you, and I will remove the stone heart from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will give my spirit in you and will act so that you walk in my statutes...

Key Point: The Spirit of the living God is the One who has brought _____ to all who believe just as He promised that He would in the Old Testament.

“God prefers living hearts to dead stones because they can better communicate what the purposes of the living God are for humanity and what the presence of the life of the Spirit can do.” —David Garland

- Paul’s sufficiency for ministry comes therefore from Christ and the work He is doing, not from anything within himself. (3:4-6)

Observations:

1. In the face of criticism, Paul remains _____ through Christ.

“toward God”

2. Paul then elaborates on a question he asked in 2:16.

“sufficient”

3. It is God alone who can qualify someone to _____ with Him in the work that He is doing in the world.

“made us sufficient”

4. The content of the ministry is related to the New Covenant.

“ministers”—δύακονος (*diakonos*)—one who serves as an intermediary in a transaction; an agent, intermediary, minister

5. Contrasts between the “old” and new covenants are highlighted.

The “Old” Covenant: “of the letter” (Rom. 2:27)

“kills” (Gal. 3:10-12)

“‘Letter’ refers to the concrete demands of the of the Old Testament law which God’s people were duty bound to obey but which in fact resulted in bondage to sin and death. The ‘letter’ denotes what is merely written...[and]...the law pronounces a curse on all who fail to obey it. Since no one is able to obey it in every respect, all stand under this curse.” —David Garland. arland

The New Covenant: “of the Spirit” (Gal. 3:13-14)

“gives life” (Rom. 7:6)

“The Spirit’s power to direct the Christian’s conduct from within not only has replaced all feeble and vain attempts to heed the laws of the Torah on our own but it also has resulted in righteousness and life instead of condemnation and death.”—David Garland

Key Point: No one but God Himself is sufficient to give _____ to those who are under a sentence of _____.

Concluding Thoughts

- What is “_____” and “_____” by others through our lives?
- Are we aware that our _____ for all that God called us to is found in _____ and made readily available to us by His _____?



— SECOND — CORINTHIANS



The Comfort of God FOR and THROUGH His People

Part 16 — “Ministers of a New Covenant” (2 Cor. 3:1-6) — 18 February 2024

Introduction: An Overview of 2 Corinthians

Content: “...deals primarily with Paul’s tenuous relationship with the Corinthian church and in the process touching on several other matters as well (Paul’s ministry, the collection for the poor in Jerusalem, and some [opponents] who have invaded the church.”

—Fee & Stewart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*

Theme: *God has comforted His people through Christ (Messiah) and so they can now comfort one another by the work of the Spirit in and through them.*

2 Cor. 1:3-4—³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Paul has addressed the implied criticism by opponents and exhorted the believers in Corinth to forgive and restore the repentant sinner in their midst. Although he awaited word from Corinth, he continued to minister the gospel and entrust himself to the Lord. Through Paul and his companions, Christ was being victoriously proclaimed even if their lives and circumstances seemed to evidence weakness and defeat.

Main Point: The work of salvation that Christ has done in His people by the power of the Holy Spirit makes them sufficient vessels through whom He can work in the lives of others.

The New Covenant Work of Messiah - 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

- Paul asks the Corinthians a question related to some implied criticism from his opponents. (3:1)

Observations:

1. It seems that he was being critiqued for never presenting to the Corinthians a letter of recommendation.
2. This question was intended to get their attention and to cause them to reflect back on his ministry among them.

“Paul does not disdain letters of recommendation. They were an essential part of initiating and fostering friendship in the ancient world. Letters were the usual means to introduce fellow Christians to one another as they traveled...” —David Garland

Key Point: While a third-party recommendation can be helpful, it is not necessary to authenticate the work of God.

- Paul goes on to explain why the answer to his question is an implied “No!” (3:2-3)

Observations:

1. The Corinthian believers are themselves Paul’s letter of recommendation.
“written” — γράφω (graphō)—to inscribe characters on a surface, to write.
“on our hearts”
 ⇒ The evidence of God’s work in the lives of the Corinthians could be both observed and understood as such.
“known” *“read”*
2. That there is a church in Corinth at all is evidence of the work of Messiah in them and through Paul.
“a letter from Christ” *delivered by us”*

“Within a metaphor of letter writing (as here) where an author and scribe are envisaged, Paul describes a “living letter” dictated by Christ and “inscribed” in the Corinthians’ hearts through his preaching of the gospel.” —Colin Kruse

3. Paul makes multiple OT allusions in this passage.

Exod. 31:18 (LXX)—And he gave Moses, when he stopped speaking to him on the mountain, Sinai, the two tablets of witness, stone tablets written by the finger of God.

Jer. 31:34 (LXX)—this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. Giving I will give my laws in their mind, and I will write them on their hearts,

Ezek. 36:26-27a (LXX)—And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will give in you, and I will remove the stone heart from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will give my spirit in you and will act so that you walk in my statutes...

Key Point: The Spirit of the living God is the One who has brought salvation to all who believe just as He promised that He would in the Old Testament.

“God prefers living hearts to dead stones because they can better communicate what the purposes of the living God are for humanity and what the presence of the life of the Spirit can do.” —David Garland

- Paul’s sufficiency for ministry comes therefore from Christ and the work He is doing, not from anything within himself. (3:4-6)

Observations:

1. In the face of criticism, Paul remains confident through Christ.

“toward God”

2. Paul then elaborates on a question he asked in 2:16.

“sufficient”

3. It is God alone who can qualify someone to participate with Him in the work that He is doing in the world.

“made us sufficient”

4. The content of the ministry is related to the New Covenant.

“ministers”—διάκονος (*diakonos*)—one who serves as an intermediary in a transaction; an agent, intermediary, minister

5. Contrasts between the “old” and new covenants are highlighted.

The “Old” Covenant: *“of the letter”* (Rom. 2:27)

“kills” (Gal. 3:10-12)

“‘Letter’ refers to the concrete demands of the of the Old Testament law which God’s people were duty bound to obey but which in fact resulted in bondage to sin and death. The ‘letter’ denotes what is merely written...[and]...the law pronounces a curse on all who fail to obey it. Since no one is able to obey it in every respect, all stand under this curse.” —David Garland. arland

The New Covenant: *“of the Spirit”* (Gal. 3:13-14)

“gives life” (Rom. 7:6)

“The Spirit’s power to direct the Christian’s conduct from within not only has replaced all feeble and vain attempts to heed the laws of the Torah on our own but it also has resulted in righteousness and life instead of condemnation and death.”—David Garland

Key Point: No one but God Himself is sufficient to give life to those who are under a sentence of death.

Concluding Thoughts

- What is known” and “read” by others through our lives?
- Are we aware that our sufficiency for all that God called us to is found in Christ and made readily available to us by His Spirit?