

Being an Effective Christian

(2 Corinthians 3:1-11)

As Paul continues to defend his apostolic authority, he knows whatever he writes will be perverted by the false teachers who have invaded the church at Corinth. However, he also knows he must defend himself because he is the apostle God used to establish the church and teach them the truth of the Gospel. If the false teachers succeed in discrediting Paul, the church will be cut off from divine truth and will follow doctrines of demons. Paul loves the Corinthians too much to let this happen. In this passage, he gives us three principles for being an effective Christian.

1. Realize your life is an "open book" (3:1-3).

Godly teachers don't need recommendations for people who know them well. Along with his associates, Silas and Timothy, Paul established this church. It came into existence because of Paul's Spirit-empowered preaching and teaching. Therefore, Paul writes, *Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?* (3:1).

People today use resumes to introduce themselves to prospective employers. In Paul's day, traveling preachers, teachers, and Christian workers would use *letters of recommendation* from other churches or recognized church leaders (Rom. 16:1).

However, Paul doesn't need such a recommendation because he writes that the people themselves are his *letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all* (3:2). The Corinthians' changed lives are Paul's *letter of recommendation* for his apostleship. The believers in Corinth know Paul well. What do we know about his ministry there (Acts 18:11)?

The letters of *recommendation*, Paul writes, are *written on our hearts*. Because of Paul's great love for the Corinthians, he and his associates carried them in their hearts, and everyone knew about them.

Paul next writes, *And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us* (3:3a). However, how was this letter written, according to 3:3b?

As Paul and his co-workers ministered to the Corinthians, *the Spirit of the living God* produced this *letter from Christ* in these believers.

Referring to the Ten Commandments, Paul continues, *not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts* (3:3c). Paul's point is that the manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is far superior to any kind of writing. This is a reminder of the prophecy God speaks through Ezekiel: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you* (Ezek. 36:26a). What do we read in the rest of that verse (36:26b)?

Paul's life was an "open book" for all who knew him. So is your life and mine. We are the only gospel some people will ever read. Therefore, we need to remember this poem that has several adaptations and is attributed to several authors:

"You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do and the words that you say.
Men read what you write-distorted or true;
What is the gospel according to you?"

To be an effective Christian, **realize your life is an "open book"** and ...

2. Utilize God's power (3:4-6).

Next, Paul states his *confidence* comes from God *through Christ* (3:4). To emphasize he is not boasting, Paul writes he is not *sufficient* within himself to maintain anything; his *sufficiency* is from God (3:5). None of us are *sufficient* in ourselves to be effective Christians, much less effective teachers or preachers. Any *sufficiency* comes from God working in and through us. What does Paul write in Philippians 2:13?

Paul's confidence is not based on human abilities but on God's power. He continues that God *has made him competent* to be a minister of a *new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit* (3:6a-b). The wonderful news of the *new covenant* is we don't have to come to God through Judaism. This *new covenant* is based solely on Christ's death and resurrection. As Jesus transforms the Passover into the Lord's Supper, He says "*the new covenant*" is in His "*blood*" (Luke 22:20b).

The *new covenant* is not based on the letter of the Law but on the *blood of Jesus* through the work of the Holy Spirit. That's why Paul writes, *For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life* (3:6c). The Law of Moses was never designed to provide eternal life, but false teachers in the early church were teaching this falsehood. Trusting in the Law (or *the letter*) *kills*, which means it leads to eternal death. However, *the Spirit gives life*. In other words, the conviction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit is the only way to eternal life. What does Paul write in Galatians 6:8?

To be an effective Christian, **realize your life is an "open book," utilize God's power,** and ...

3. Emphasize the glory of the new covenant (3:7-11).

Now, Paul elaborates on the difference between the old and new covenants. He writes, *Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?* (3:7-8).

Paul uses the giving of the Ten Commandments to contrast the old and new covenants. After Moses receives the Ten Commandments from God, he comes down from Mount Sinai with the stone tablets on which they are written. Although Moses is unaware of it, his face is shining, or radiant, because he has been talking to God (Ex 34:29). So, Aaron and the Israelites are afraid to approach him.

The Law came with *glory* (3:7). The word translated *glory* (DOXA, dox'-ah) is the word from which we get our word "doxology." Do you know what the word "doxology" means? "Glory words." The word translated *glory* refers to the indescribable power and presence of God. It does involve brightness or radiance, but it also refers to the manifestation of the majesty, splendor, and awesomeness of God. The Jews called it the Shekinah glory of God, though the word "Shekinah" is not in the Bible.

How does Jesus describe this glory in His high priestly prayer (John 17:5)?

Paul's point, in verses 7-8, is God's *glory* was revealed when He gave the Ten Commandments, which lead to death if they are trusted for salvation.

How much more *glory* then does God receive in His plan to give life through the blood of Jesus and the power of the Spirit!

Paul continues, *For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory* (3:9). The Law doesn't forgive sin; it reveals our sin. How does Paul state this truth in Romans 3:20?

The old covenant brings *knowledge of sin*, but by the new covenant, we are *justified*, or saved, which means all our sins are forgiven. The old covenant brings God's judgment and *condemnation*.

Yet, the new covenant brings God's righteousness, which is why Paul calls it the *ministry of righteousness*. Therefore, which deserves the most glory - what reveals our sin or what takes away our sin?

That's why Paul writes in reference to the coming of the Law, *what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it* (3:10). Paul is not discounting the glory of the old covenant. He is saying it has *no glory* when compared to the new covenant. Then, he writes, *For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory* (3:11).

The old covenant came with more *glory* than Moses' shining face. When Moses was receiving the Law on Mount Sinai, we read the mountain was covered with smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke rose up from it like a furnace (Ex 19:18a-c). What else do we read in Exodus 19:18d?

However, **changed lives** are far more glorious than miraculous *fire, smoke, and a trembling mountain*. Therefore, the *glory* of the *new covenant* far exceeds that of the old. Think about how the light of the sun makes the light of a candle or flashlight useless. So, it is with the light of God's Son. The *glory of the new covenant* so eclipses the *glory* of the old covenant that it has *no glory*.

To be an effective Christian, realize your life is an "open book," utilize God's power, and emphasize the glory of the new covenant.