

PM Exodus 34:29-35 & 2 Corinthians 2:12-3:18 The Difference the Holy Spirit makes

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Date: 23 April 2023

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[0 : 00] Chapter 34. We shall read a short section of the chapter from verse 29. Exodus chapter 34 verse 29.

The context of the passage is that the Israelites have recently escaped from slavery in Egypt and they have reached Mount Sinai in the wilderness.

And there God has met with Moses and given him his law. The law God wants his redeemed people to follow as they live in fellowship with him.

Exodus 34 verse 29. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.

Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses and beheld the skin of his face shone. And they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him and Moses talked with them.

[1 : 36] Afterwards, all the people of Israel came near and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with them in Mount Sinai.

And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with them, he would remove the veil until he came out.

And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses and the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again until he went in to speak with him.

Amen. And may God bless to us that reading from his word. And to his name be the praise. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

Second Corinthians chapter 2. Second Corinthians chapter 2.

[2 : 49] And we shall begin to read at verse 12. Second Corinthians chapter 2 verse 12. Paul writes, When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest, because I did not find my brother Titus there.

So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession.

And through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God, among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

To one a fragrance from death to death. To the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

For we are not like so many peddlers of God's word. But as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

[4 : 11] Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all.

And you show that you are a letter from Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. Not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts.

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us.

But our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit.

For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 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.

[5 : 34] Will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory.

Indeed, in this case, what once had glory, has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold. Not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face, so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.

But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.

Yes, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the freedom of the Lord is, there is freedom.

[7 : 01] And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another.

For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. Amen. And may God bless to us that further reading from His Word.

Shall we pray? In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians chapter 3.

I'd like to look with you at this passage for a few minutes this evening, under the title, The Difference the Holy Spirit Makes.

The Difference the Holy Spirit Makes. They said it could not be done.

[8 : 02] Only a few days before it happened, a newspaper editor had said it would take at least a million years.

But on 17th December 1903, two brothers, Wilbur and Orville Wright, managed to get the machine they had built to fly.

They proved it was possible to overcome the force of gravity. And the world hasn't been the same since.

Nowadays, we take air travel for granted. And we forget how different life was, not all that long ago. Here in chapter 3 of 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul outlines the huge difference the coming of the Holy Spirit has made.

[9 : 06] as he contrasts the old covenant with the old. He's having to defend himself and his ministry against attacks made on him by some people in Corinth.

They question whether Paul is a genuine apostle. Some of their accusations relate to Paul as a person.

They see him as weak, as unimpressive. They argue that his life is so marred by suffering that there's no way he can be an apostle of the risen Christ.

But some of their complaints have to do with the content of his message. In the final verse of chapter 2, Paul writes, We are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word.

But as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God, we speak in Christ. Paul makes the point that he's not using his ministry for financial gain.

[10 : 27] His motives are sincere. What he preaches is in line with a God-given commission. And he speaks openly in the full knowledge that he's accountable to God.

He then begins chapter 3 with two questions. Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you?

Or from you? The answer he expects to both questions is no. Paul doesn't need to brag.

He doesn't need to blow his own trumpet. Nor does he need to provide the Corinthians with references from other people. He doesn't need external accreditation.

Because the Corinthian believers are themselves living proof that Paul's ministry is authentic and has God's seal of approval.

[11 : 40] It seems that at least some of Paul's critics had arrived in Corinth with letters of recommendation. These letters attested to their standing as Christian believers.

And they served to introduce them to the Christian community in their new home city. But Paul doesn't need letters like that.

No, the Corinthian believers are for him as good as a letter of recommendation. You yourselves, he writes in verse 2, are our letter of recommendation written on our hearts to be known and read by all.

You see, Paul had founded and built up the church in Corinth. he loved it. And its very existence in this pagan city and its vibrancy bore eloquent testimony to the effectiveness of Paul's ministry. Paul presses home the point in verse 3, you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

[13 : 10] The changed lives of the Corinthian believers demonstrated that Christ had impacted their hearts by his spirit through the ministry of the apostle.

Christ had been at work through Paul in the hearts of the Corinthian Christians as his spirit had changed them from the inside out.

The gospel Paul preached had revolutionized their lives. faith but Paul is careful not to attribute anything to his own ability or competence.

Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us he writes but our sufficiency our competence is from God who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant not of the letter but of the spirit for the letter kills but the spirit gives life.

Paul describes himself as minister of a new covenant he identifies that covenant with the life giving ministry of the Holy Spirit.

[14 : 30] The old covenant to which he refers is the covenant which was made by God with the Israelites at Mount Sinai shortly after they had escaped from slavery in Egypt and had been safely delivered through the waters of the Red Sea.

I'd like to explore with you this evening how in the remainder of this chapter Paul develops the difference between these two covenants the old and the new covenant.

as he explains what is distinctive about the spirit's ministry. Let's look first of all at verses 7 to 11 under the heading the spirit's ministry brings righteousness.

The spirit's ministry brings righteousness. righteousness. Integral to the old covenant God made with the people of Israel was the law and at the heart of the law were the ten commandments which were written by God's finger on two tablets of stone.

The law was a glorious expression of God's will. It was a reflection of his character. It showed the people of Israel how they were to live in fellowship with their God.

[16 : 09] It showed them how they were to live as his redeemed people. He had saved them from slavery in Egypt and he now wanted them to live in the freedom of the children of God.

God you shall have no other gods before me. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery. These were just some of the commandments in God's law. But in their subsequent history the Israelites repeatedly failed to live up to God's standards.

It wasn't a problem with the law as such. The problem was rather the human heart. An external legal code could not counteract the innate bias to sin of the human heart.

In fact as Paul points out elsewhere the law aggravated the problem. I am sure you know what it is like to see a sign on a beautifully cut lawn which says please keep off the grass.

[17 : 32] There is something in all of us that wants to do the opposite. That is why Paul describes the old covenant as the ministry of death and the ministry of condemnation.

It turned the spotlight of God's holiness on people's sin. It showed up their flaws and imperfections. It condemned.

It pronounced God's just judgment on sin. The soul that sins shall die. But it could not in itself effect change in people's lives.

It could not in itself give spiritual life to the spiritually dead. God's sin. The old covenant had limitations.

But hundreds of years before Christ came into the world, the prophet Jeremiah spoke about a new covenant. Behold, he says, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

[18 : 48] Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them up out of the land of Egypt. My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. Lord, I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin, no more. That's what Jeremiah wrote, and the prophet Ezekiel spoke in similar terms about what God was going to do.

I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh, a heart that would be responsive, and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules.

[20 : 15] This new covenant, of which Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke, promised a new heart, a new disposition.

It held out the prospect of change from the inside out. new covenant people would know the Lord personally. They would be empowered to live in accordance with his standards, because his spirit would indwell them.

That covenant was finally ratified by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. In his death, he dealt effectively with sin once for all.

He took our sin upon himself. He bore God's judgment on our behalf. For our sake, writes Paul, God made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The reformer Martin Luther called this the great exchange. Jesus takes our sin and in exchange we receive his righteousness.

[21 : 44] Jesus' righteousness is credited to the account of all who put their trust in him. and there's more. Through his death, the Lord Jesus secured the gift of the Holy Spirit for his people.

It's the Holy Spirit who applies salvation to us. It's he who applies the salvation Jesus has won. He brings us to faith.

He imparts spiritual life. He indwells us and changes us. We still need the guidance of God's moral law and scripture.

But the law is no longer just out there. It's now written on our hearts in that we have a new desire to obey it, to meet its demands and we have a new dynamic by which we may begin to do so.

We now have the potential to grow in godliness by God's grace. God's love. No wonder Paul describes new covenant ministry, ministry by the Spirit as the ministry of righteousness.

[23 : 05] The Spirit's ministry brings righteousness. righteousness. Now Paul accepts that the old covenant was glorious in its own way.

He says in verse 7 that it came with glory. He illustrates that by referring back to the incident we read about in Exodus chapter 34.

When Moses came down from meeting with God on Mount Sinai, his face shone. It shone with reflected glory.

So much so that the Israelites couldn't bear to look directly at Moses. Even though the old covenant didn't change people's hearts in the radical way the gospel does, that covenant was still ordained by God.

the sacrificial system it introduced, made provision for people's sin, and allowed the devout worshipper to live in fellowship with God.

[24 : 16] It was glorious, but it was provisional. It wasn't meant to last. The shine on Moses' face highlighted that.

It was a bit like a summer suntan. It faded. it was only external. By contrast, the ministry of the Spirit brings the life of God into the souls of men and women.

And that glory will never fade. So Paul can say in verse 10, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all because of the glory that surpasses it.

for if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. Paul's critics set great store by the old covenant.

They didn't think much of the new covenant, but actually they were like people who on a sunny day close the curtains, switch on the light and sit around admiring the electric bulb when the sun is shining in all its strength and glory outside.

[25 : 50] wide. These people needed to open the curtains wide and let the sunshine stream into the room because the spirit's ministry brings righteousness.

I wonder if we really appreciate that. We are not caught up with the old covenant as Paul's critics were, but I wonder if we have a clear grasp of the righteousness the Holy Spirit brings.

Do we see that in Jesus we have full and free forgiveness? His righteousness is credited to us if we put our trust in him.

Have we done that? Have we put our faith in him as the one who died the just for the unjust to bring us to God? And if we have, are we walking in step with the Spirit?

We can begin to die to sin and live for righteousness if we work out our salvation with his help and by his grace.

[27 : 14] The Spirit's ministry brings righteousness. Secondly, in verses 12 to 17, the Spirit's ministry brings freedom.

The Spirit's ministry brings freedom. Paul writes in verse 12, Since we have such a hope, we are very bold. I think the hope that Paul has in mind here is the hope of glory.

Not only is the ministry of the Spirit glorious, but it holds out the prospect of glory for those who embrace it. God's people will one day share in his glory.

That's the confidence Paul has as he preaches the gospel. and so he is very bold. The limitations of the old covenant have gone.

Things are so much clearer. Paul knows that there is freedom from condemnation. He knows that there is freedom to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

[28 : 28] Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. freedom. In verses 13 and 14, Paul writes that Moses would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end, but their minds were hardened.

These verses are difficult to understand, but it seems that one reason Moses veiled his face was to prevent the Israelites from seeing that the glory was fading.

Paul takes that as a picture of how the Israelites failed to appreciate that the old covenant was only temporary and pointed forward to something better.

the reason for this failure was the hardness of their hearts. They did not appreciate God's gracious dealings with them and rescuing them from Egypt, and so God did not let them understand fully the promises made under the Mosaic covenant which would be fulfilled in Christ.

Paul goes on to say that this hardness of heart continued to characterize the Jews of his own day. For to this day he writes when you read the old covenant that same veil remains unlifted because only through Christ is it taken away.

[30 : 14] Yes to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. Metaphorically speaking there was a veil over Jewish hearts.

Although Jesus was the fulfillment of all to which the old covenant pointed, most Jews refused to acknowledge him as their Messiah.

They were blind to God's revelation of himself in Jesus. It was only by turning to Jesus and trusting in him that this blindness could be taken away.

When one turns to the Lord Paul says the veil is removed. And Paul knew what he was talking about. He knew what it was like to have a veil over his heart.

After all he had been a zealous adherent of Judaism and been openly hostile to Jesus and his followers. Until that day he met with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus.

[31 : 26] On that day he was confronted with the demands of Jesus' lordship and he bowed the knee to his Savior.

Now Paul had peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Now he was adopted into God's family. He could call God his father.

Now he was able to understand God's purposes. Now he was free from the petty restrictions of the old covenant.

The Spirit's ministry brings freedom. If we are Christians are we enjoying the freedom of which Paul speaks?

Are we thankful for the freedom Jesus has secured? Do we rejoice in the hope of glory? Or are our lives characterized by duty rather than privilege?

[32 : 27] Sin can mar our grasp of spiritual things just as hardness of heart obscured the Israelites' appreciation of the old covenant promises.

We need to ask the Holy Spirit to make real in our experience the new covenant blessings things and help us live in the good of them.

For the Spirit's ministry brings freedom. Thirdly and finally, in verse 18, we see how the Spirit's ministry brings transformation.

The Spirit's ministry brings righteousness, righteousness, the Spirit's ministry brings freedom, the Spirit's ministry brings transformation. Look at what Paul says in verse 18.

We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another.

[33 : 39] for this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. Like Moses, Christians have the privilege of beholding and in turn reflecting the glory of the Lord.

Just as Moses didn't have a veil over his face when he went into God's presence on Mount Sinai, so Christians have direct access to the Lord, and see his glory with unveiled faces.

How is this possible? Initially, it's when we turn to the Lord, when we are converted, as we put our trust in Christ, our eyes are open to see and appreciate something of God's glory.

Paul writes in chapter 4 of this letter, God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

It's in the face of Jesus Christ we encounter the life transforming glory of God. God's love of God's glory of God's glory of God's glory of God's glory of God's glory of God's glory of God's glory of God's glory of the Lord should be an ongoing activity throughout our Christian lives.

[35 : 21] The shine on Moses' face faded, God's glory of God's glory of God's glory of God's glory of God's glory of glory of another.

The transformation is ever increasing and it lasts. At the beginning believers see the Lord's glory with their mind as they understand the gospel and turn to him.

At the end they see that glory with their eyes as face to face they see the Lord as he is. Then the process of transformation will be complete.

We know that when he appears writes the Apostle John we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

Three brief points in conclusion. Point one Paul has all Christians in mind.

[36 : 28] We all he says are being transformed. This isn't an experience exclusive to a spiritual elite. It's something which should be true of all Christians.

Point two it's a process. We are being transformed. It's not a once for all experience. it's not instantaneous.

Over the years there have been various teachings regarding second blessings but there's no biblical support for any definitive experience that automatically translates us to a higher level of Christian experience.

blessings. I like the illustration that a minister I had some years ago used to use. He said there's no such thing as a definitive second blessing but there may be particular blessings which we enjoy at different times in our lives.

Blessings which enable us to make significant forward moves. and he compared it to surgery on a small baby.

[37 : 52] Young babies can have a problem with their digestive tract. It's a serious problem and it requires surgery to have the blockage removed.

unless it's removed the baby will not grow normally but the surgery allows for continued growth.

That doesn't mean that the baby who has surgery one day becomes a six foot man the next day. It simply means that the blockage at that particular time is sorted out and future growth is possible.

And it's the same with us as Christians. There's no definitive experience that sorts us out as it were once for all. This is a process which goes on as long as we live.

And point three is this. The work of transformation is accomplished only by the power of the Holy Spirit. This comes says Paul from the Lord who is the Spirit.

[39 : 16] Ultimately only the Spirit can produce in us what the Bible calls elsewhere the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

the Spirit's ministry brings transformation. What difference has the Holy Spirit's ministry made?

It brings righteousness, it brings freedom, it brings transformation. There's a world of difference between the old covenant and the new, between the before and the after.

Now that Jesus has died and the Spirit has been given, the Spirit's ministry achieves what previously appeared impossible.

They said it couldn't be done, but in 1903 it was done and in a similar way the Spirit's ministry makes possible what under the old covenant was impossible.

[40 : 47] Shall we pray? Amen. Oh Lord, we pray for the help of your Holy Spirit.

We pray that he would apply to us the salvation which Jesus has secured through his death once and for all.

We pray that we may know that righteousness which the Spirit gives. May we know freedom and may we know transformation by his power at work within us.

Help us for our part to keep in step with the Spirit and may the glory be yours in Christ. Amen.

Amen. We shall conclude this night. Amen.