

## 2 Corinthians 3:1-18

Before we set to work, can I commend to you brothers and sisters the discipline of Bible memory

The God we worship is a remembering God

He remembers us; humanity, his people and so remembers his promises most particularly the gift of his son

Like him and in response he calls us to remember him

Who he is and what he has done as he reveals himself in his Word

So that's what the Psalmist did...

'I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you' Psalm 119:11

And it's what Jesus did throughout his ministry as he recited scripture in conversation

Even on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

Over the past weeks I've been working hard to internalize today's chapter with two strategies

First of all, I used the voice recorder on my phone to record myself reading this passage and just replayed all 3 minutes' worth as the opportunity and inclination presented itself

You'd be surprised how many spare '3 minutes' worth' you have in a day

Secondly, I wrote out the first letter of each word with punctuation and practised filling in the blanks

Here's the first 2 verses from today's passage

1. A w b t c o a? O d w n, l s, l o r t y o f y?

2. Y y a o l, w o o h, k a r b e.

The discipline has enriched my meditation of God's Word, blessed my family in our conversations and God willing, will benefit you through this talk today

No matter your circumstances you have the time and space to treasure God's Word in your heart

So why not have a go, pick a verse or passage and share with another your journey to remember the God who remembers you

Pray

To whom it may concern,

I write most gladly to provide a reference for Travis Moroney

I've known Travis for over 23 years, first through Christian Union at La Trobe University, then as a brother in Christ at the same church

Our families have spent time in each other's homes

We served as pastors in neighbouring Presbyterian Churches for a time, and in the last few years Travis and his family have attended and been members at Bundoora Presbyterian Church, where I now pastor

Travis and his family are serving within the congregation.

I know him to be a man of genuine Christian faith, a mature believer, with a servant-heart

He is a person of integrity, thoughtfulness, and kindness

He knows and loves God's word, is a hard-worker, faithful and skilled with his hands.

Travis would be an asset to your school and a blessing to staff and students there.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor CL

Well, you guessed it that was a reference I needed for a job opportunity back in 2020  
Commending ourselves or better, others commending us, is essential in order to stand out  
and land a job

To have not only yourself, but someone of relevant prominence spouting off about your  
credentials, your experience, your character is a sure recipe for success

Success whether that be getting a job

Subscriptions to your channel

Likes

Selling a book

Or even buying into your philosophy or religious flavour

There were many, 'peddling', to use Paul's word, for the Corinthians

And there are many 'peddling' for you today

Selling some worldview, some lifestyle, some self-help philosophy, to profit from your  
allegiance

Take for example the religion and spiritual section at Savers in Greensborough

With such titles, as...

The cloud of Unknowing: Element Classics of World Spirituality

The Quran

The Lost Year of Jesus: Documentary Evidence of Jesus' 17-year journey to the East

Here I Stand John Shelby Spong

The Dalai Lama: The Art of Happiness

The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success: A practical guide to the fulfillment of your dreams

Joyce Meyer: Battlefield of the Mind

Light Magic for Dark Times: More than 100 spells, rituals and practises for Coping in a Crisis

Why Buddhism is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation and Enlightenment

The Power of Soul: The way to heal, rejuvenate, transform and enlighten all life

The encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer

Cosmic Trends: Astrology Connects the Dots

Angel Messengers: the complete book of celestial answers to your every question

You might be thinking of other popular influential flavours, religious and irreligious...

Jordan Peterson

Taylor Swift

Joe Rogan

Donald Trump

Elon Musk

Mr Beast

And for many Pope Leo

Here's a question the Corinthian Christians were wondering; some Jews, but mostly from  
polytheistic religions

Perhaps it's a question you may wonder at times or one you might find others wondering

Is Paul's message any different?

Does this aroma of Christ smell any different than the synagogue or the local temple?

Any different than what the rest of the world is selling?

Is Paul's message any different?

Let's explore today's chapter in 3 chunks as we ponder together

Verses 1-6 God-given New Covenant Adequacy

Glorious New Covenant Hope verses 7-11

And verses 12-18 Great New Covenant Boldness

I'll finish each point with a brief prayer before moving to the next

There's outlines and transcripts in the foyer

Or if you're watching online, you can download those from the website

Please keep your Bible's open so that you can test what you hear

## 1. God-given New Covenant Adequacy

You can see it for yourself in verse 5

<sup>5</sup> It is not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.

Unlike other self-empowered, self-directed, self-promoting peddlers, then and now, Paul's purpose, proclamation and persistence come from outside himself

His adequacy, competency and confidence as a minister come from God

As he says in verse 6

<sup>6</sup> He, that is God, has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit.

In and of himself, Paul and his colleagues are inadequate for the task God has entrusted to them

Paul lacks the resources needed

The ability, the desire, the energy, the wisdom, the words needed to be a gospel preacher, evangelist, church planter and missionary to the Gentile and Jewish world

Unlike other peddlers and like any new covenant ministry worker today, Paul recognises his ministry doesn't centre around, doesn't rest on himself

Who is adequate to be the aroma of Christ? Those God makes adequate by his life-giving Spirit

From the Damascus Road where it all started till the present, Paul's confidence is through Christ before God, verse 4

To ponder, not his achievements, but what God has done through him by the working of the Spirit is so different

Paul has no need to commend himself before the Corinthians like others

Sure, he's happy to provide a reference for Phoebe or Timothy when needed

But as spiritual father of the church in Corinth for a year and a half (check out Acts chapter 18) Paul's claim is that... they are his letter

Walking, talking evidence of his credentials

Inscribed on the heart

An open book in the city

And not just Corinth, but through Paul's bragging, to the whole church, even us today  
In fact, because it's God's work by his Spirit, ultimately, they're Christ's letter, verse 3  
Delivered by Paul and Timothy  
Not in ink, but written by the Spirit of the God that gives and sustains their life with him  
Not on stone, like the 10 commandments, but on the inside, human hearts, so different  
Just like God promised...

<sup>19</sup> I will give them integrity of heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove their heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh, <sup>20</sup> so that they will follow my statutes, keep my ordinances, and practice them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

And again...

<sup>33</sup> "Instead, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days" — the Lord's declaration. "I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

The Corinthian Christians, as God's handiwork, commend Christ and Paul  
"Do you mean the Corinthians, Travis, that were divisive, proud, sexually immoral, publicly fighting, dismissive of the weak, super-spiritual, drunk at the Lord's supper, unloving with each other and ungenerous with the poor?"  
Yes, even those far from perfect Corinthians are proof of the ongoing work of the Spirit of the living God, you should have seen where they came from!  
Every Christian, you and I, are Christ's reference letter to the world  
I've eaten a lot of pudding!  
It's true, the proof of the pudding is in the eating  
So, take a good look at what any peddler is producing in their followers  
The Corinthians themselves are proof enough that what Paul's giving away is different  
The Corinthian Christians evidence Paul's God-given New Covenant adequacy

I suspect many of you are both, new covenant ministry workers in some capacity and the fruit of others new covenant ministry efforts  
As ministry workers resting in your God-given, Spirit-empowered adequacy is a must  
It'll guard you against pride; thinking you're something special or indispensable  
It can rescue you from being a people pleaser; longing for others approval  
It can provide confidence when you've lost heart or feel disillusioned, that God is still working  
It will deepen your dependence as you look to God each day for the resources to go on and so protect you from overspending  
Resting in your God-given adequacy as all ministry worker ought to do, will keep you on your knees in thankfulness and praise to the God who brings life  
As the fruit of others ministry, I wonder also if you realise that by persisting to live the Spirit-empowered, Christ-honouring life you are a reference letter for the person or persons that introduced you to Jesus  
Keep on encouraging them  
Not just them, but you tell other Australians about Jesus by the way you live

What you say or don't say  
Whether you love to listen  
How you spend your money  
What you do with your time  
Your work ethic  
The degree of charity in your views  
Your desire to overlook a shortcoming  
The proof of the pudding is in the eating  
And even the Corinthians taste of Christ  
There's something very different at work with what Paul is up to  
Let's pray

Father, son, and Spirit  
Thank you that you made Paul and his co-workers, adequate, competent and confident ministers of the new covenant  
Thank you that the Corinthian believers themselves are proof enough of Paul's God-given adequacy  
Help ministry workers today in this church and abroad to rest, not in themselves or others, but you to make them adequate  
Thanks for the reminder also that our transformed lives as Christians, is proof that you continue to be working through them  
We are Christ's letter to the world  
By the working of the Holy Spirit, help us to act like it! Amen

## 2. Glorious New Covenant Hope verses 7-11

<sup>12</sup> Since, then, we have such a hope

That's Paul's summary of verses 7 to 11  
Paul's adequacy, as a minister of the new covenant, prompts him to flesh out further the hope of the New Covenant  
That's a good question for other peddlers, what do you hope in?  
Much like a new prime minister, Paul ministers under a new package, a deal struck according to Jesus' words at the last supper, on the payment of his death  
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood"  
Paul unpacks this new package deal by comparing it, lesser/ Old to greater, New  
He contrasts Moses' ministry back in Exodus 34 which you heard read earlier with ministry like his own  
The package under which Moses ministered, condemned the Israelites to death  
They were unable to stick to their part of the deal even before the stone tablets came down the mountain!  
The old package came with, a degree, of God's radiant glory  
Such that they couldn't bear to look at Moses glowing face after he met with God on the mountain, even though the glory was fading  
Surely then, argues Paul, this new package  
The age of the indwelling Holy Spirit, that brings a person to life by declaring them right before God based on Jesus' performance and not their own, will be even more glorious?

Overflowing with glory in fact  
Think about it...  
The Old deal said,  
“If you do this and this and this and this and this and this and this and this and this and this, that’s 10, then you can live in peace with God”  
The New, Jesus said,  
“I paid your debt out and I did it all on your behalf, rest in me and you can live in peace with God”, so different from every peddler  
The Old  
‘Anyone who does not put the words of this law into practice is cursed.’ Deuteronomy 27:26  
The New  
Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us... Galatians 3:13  
The old show cases the disease  
The new, the cure  
The old, you did it  
The new, Jesus did it for you  
And continues by his indwelling life-giving Spirit to write the righteous requirements of the law inside on the tablet of our hearts so that we might please God  
Now, says Paul, compared to the new deal the old doesn’t even seem glorious  
The old package was for a time, transient and now obsolete and barely glorious  
The new, enduring until the end, permeant and overflowingly radiant with God’s glory  
What a glorious new covenant hope Paul and the Corinthian Christians and all, like us, who find themselves living, ministering under this new package deal have  
The hope of life with God  
The hope of not only no condemnation, but a secure and steady relationship with God that doesn’t rest on anything about us, so different than what everyone else is pushing  
The hope that only Jesus offers  
The hope of the gift of God’s Spirit

Picture the moon and stars that God set in place to rule over the night  
The sky is clear, they’re sparkling, twinkling, radiant, beautiful, glorious  
Now what happens at the rising of the sun?  
It’s brilliance, the sheer magnificence of the light, overshadows everything about them  
They are utterly eclipsed by its all-consuming glory and become invisible  
Such is the glorious new covenant hope we now enjoy

What Paul’s giving away is out of this world, compared to all other philosophies and religions  
How could you possibly want to buy into anything else with your life  
Not even the old covenant compares to the glorious hope of the new?  
And yet for the Corinthians and many today a righteousness before God that rests on what you do is so enticing  
It says, “You’re not that bad”, “you’re better than others”, “you can be good enough for God”  
“Just do this, dig deeper, try harder”  
“You don’t need anyone’s help”  
There were and still are many selling the Old package deal, in and outside the church  
I hate being sold an old superseded and outdated model for my TV, let alone my soul  
Start your day, brothers and sisters, friends, by sending that old hopeless deal packing

“Lord, I can’t save myself, only you have in Christ”

“Forgive me for trying”

“Today, all day and every day forward, I cling to Christ alone for my thumbs up” you might pray

That’s what Paul wants the Corinthians to do, and you and me

How could we possibly think the old is better?

One has a little glory, ours, surpassing

One is hopeless, the other hope filled

Perhaps like Paul you’ll be busy passing on the new deal to others with your words and acts of love

With such a glorious hope don’t lose heart when you feel little progress

Our hope, Paul’s hope, rests on God, his Son and His Spirit

There’s something very different at work with what Paul is up to

Father, son, and Spirit

Thank you for the glorious hope we have in the new covenant

Praise you, Lord, that it’s out with the old and in with the new

At one point in time, we had no hope but now, because of Jesus, we have a glorious hope

Thank you that we are no longer facing death and condemnation because of our sin

Thank you that we’ve been declared right with you forevermore

Thank you for the gift of your Spirit which brings us life

Keep us from being enticed by any version of depending on ourselves for your thumbs up

Jesus is our only hope, Amen

### 3. Great New Covenant Boldness

There it is in verse 12

<sup>12</sup> Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness.

Made adequate by God, emboldened by a glorious hope, that means Paul and the team and us today can now act with great boldness in the way we go about new covenant ministry

We are nothing like Moses in Exodus 34

See, when Moses met with God in the cloud on Mount Sinai his face was uncovered

Unveiled access to God

But when before the Israelites his face was covered

Veiled access to God

Moses couldn’t act boldly in his ministry, instead he had to conceal God’s glory

From Exodus, it’s clear the Israelites were afraid of God’s radiant glory reflected in Moses’ face because of their sinfulness

In Paul’s words, their minds were hardened by disobedience

But deeper still, Paul sees in Moses’ covering an attempt to hide the transient nature of the whole Old Covenant package

In fact, says Paul, right up until the present day, a figurative veil remains over all the Israelites hearts, whenever Moses is read

Their vision is obscured to see that the old package is now obsolete and superseded by a new package

But, Paul adds, when any person turns to God through the Lord Jesus in faith and repentance, God opens their eyes, enlightens their hearts and softens their minds by his Spirit

Just like on the road to Emmaus

All the road to Damascus

Just like what happened in Corinth or here in Bundoora

Only a person who comes to God through Christ and receives forgiveness and God's justification

Only a person, Jew or Gentile, who has received the Lord's life-giving Spirit has the freedom to access God unveiled, not in a cloud, nor just his back

New covenant ministry like Paul's is one of great boldness before God and in turn others

Unlike Moses, we minister always before God's glory as seen in the face of Jesus Christ

Unlike Moses, we don't have to hide God's glory because of sin, or because our ministry is fading

No, says Paul, we all, verse 18, as Christians, Jews and Gentiles, Corinthians and Melburnians, men and women, have unveiled faces

And bask, as if gazing into a mirror, while we reflect the Lord's glory in the person of Jesus

We are gradually throughout this life being transformed by God into Christ's image, who is the exact image of God, with an ever-increasing degree of glory, so different, you won't find that anywhere else

And in case the message hasn't sunk in, Paul drives it home once more

It's not you that does any of this! Boldness, transformation, is entirely a work of God

This is from the Lord, the Spirit

I'm thinking of someone I know that's recently come back to God

They occasionally went to church, now they love God's people in their small group

They responded in kind to harsh words, now they absorb them and respond gently

Their Bible once collected dust, now I'm hearing deep Bible questions

I ask you: What brings about such deep and lasting change from the inside out?

More than the Moses who glowed could ever imagine

The Christian with eyes transfixed on Jesus, becomes more and more like the one that was gloriously transfigured by the indwelling Holy Spirit

If you've come to Jesus already and as you come to Jesus each day and behold the glorious image of God in his face, then you reflect his glory wherever you go

And God is transforming you to be ever more glorious as the years go on in your character, your desires, your thinking, your loves

More and more like your saviour

More and more like your heavenly father

God is preparing you, Christian, for an incomparable eternal weight of glory

Old covenant ministry as the best of all other inferior packages, is timid compared to Paul's and ours great New Covenant boldness

Then it was just Moses that reflected God's glory, now it's every believer

Then it was just his face, now it's your whole person

Then it was at best God's back in passing, now it's the reflection of God's face in Christ

Then it was hindered by sin, now sin's been dealt with, it's free access

Then God's glory was diminishing, now in the new it lasts with an ever-increasing degree



So then act, like Paul, with great boldness in your ministry  
Whether at home or work, you reflect God's glory as you gaze steadily at Jesus  
We live lives of progressive transformation by God's Spirit unlike other popular philosophies  
God is doing it through Christ by his Spirit in you, among us and he will do it to others as you introduce them to Jesus too  
Don't be discouraged by your own lack of growth or a persistent struggle with some sin  
God is and will continue to change you and prepare you for his glorious presence, face to face  
Don't be shy or shrink back when sharing the good news of Jesus with others  
Do so, with the confidence that God, by his life-giving, life-transforming Spirit can change people by the powerful good news of his Son  
Don't lose heart if others around you drop off or give up through your ministry, God will not let go of those that are his  
Ministry under the package of the new covenant  
Ministry because of God's spirit is one of great boldness because we have a glorious hope  
God promises to continue to transform people into the likeness of Jesus  
God promises in the person of Jesus who mirrors God's glory to us to transform people to be more and more like him  
Amidst all of the peddlers out there that promise so much, but deliver so little  
That promise life, but deliver death  
That promise freedom, but deliver slavery  
That promise transformation, but deliver conform-ation  
Paul is saying something entirely different  
There's something very different at work with what Paul is up to, do you know it?  
A God-given new covenant adequacy  
A Glorious new covenant hope  
A Great new covenant boldness

Father, Son, and Spirit

Thank you for the great boldness we now enjoy because of our glorious hope in Jesus  
Help us act with boldness like Paul and not be ashamed of the gospel, which is your power to bring transformation to hardened minds and blind hearts  
Remind and encourage us that, as we look to Jesus, you are transforming us to reflect your glory, more and more every day  
We give thanks for the gift of your life-giving, life-empowering, and life-transforming Spirit  
Amen