

SESSION 3

I AM A MINISTER

The Point

God works through us to make a difference.

The Passage

2 Corinthians 3:4-12

The Bible Meets Life

While we can be thankful for the work of our pastors and church leaders, ministry is not just for a select few. Some people are set apart for specific offices and ministries within the church, but we are all given the privilege of doing the work of a minister. The call to follow Christ is a call to serve Him, and we serve Him through the opportunities He gives us to serve others.

The Setting

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians while he was in Macedonia after the Corinthians had first questioned his ministry and authority, then warmly reaffirmed both. We can thank God that Paul went through such an experience with the Corinthians because it led to rich reflections on ministry. In 2 Corinthians, we discover essentials of ministry as servants of Christ. As we do, we can personally minister with greater adequacy, purpose, and boldness for God's glory.

What does the Bible say?

New Covenant (v. 6)—A covenant is a commitment between parties. God established a covenant with His people at Sinai (Exodus 19:5-6) and a new covenant in Christ (Luke 22:20).

Letter (v. 6)—This term refers to the written law (Romans 7:6) that sets forth commands and penalties without imparting the power that people need to keep the commands.

2 Corinthians 3:4-12 (CSB)

⁴ Such is the confidence we have through Christ before God.

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

⁶ He 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.

⁷ Now if the ministry that brought death, chiseled in letters on stones, came with glory, so that the Israelites were not able to gaze steadily at Moses's face because of its glory, which was set aside,

⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?

⁹ For if the ministry that brought condemnation had glory, the ministry that brings righteousness overflows with even more glory.

¹⁰ In fact, what had been glorious is not glorious now by comparison because of the glory that surpasses it.

¹¹ For if what was set aside was glorious, what endures will be even more glorious.

¹² Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness.

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Invite your group members to discuss **Question #1** on page 93 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): **“What’s a chore you’d love to ‘outsource’ to someone else?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 94):

I hate working in the yard! Maybe it’s because when I was growing up, I had to spend a portion of each weekend cutting grass, pulling weeds, trimming bushes,

and blowing away the clippings—and all while my body was being cooked under the hot west Texas sun. Or maybe I dislike it because yard work is time-consuming and inconvenient, and I don’t want to miss out on other things in my life because of it. The solution to my dilemma is simple: I just don’t do yard work! I now “outsource” this job to other people. A crew of five guys shows up, and with each of them doing different tasks, the yard work is completed in twenty minutes—and it looks great!

SAY: “For Christ-followers, there is one aspect of life we can’t outsource: ministry. God has called every believer to be a minister.”

GUIDE: Call attention to **The Point** on page 94 of the PSG: **“God works through us to make a difference.”**

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Divide your group into smaller groups of three or four people each. Provide sticky notes and pens to each subgroup and display a large poster with the word “Minister.” Ask “What words or phrases describe a minister? What does a minister do?” Instruct subgroups to write their responses on their sticky notes and place them on the poster. Discuss the responses aloud. Share that today’s study will focus on what God’s Word says about His people.

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer.

TIP: Encourage your group members to be connecting with and praying for one another throughout the week. Write names on index cards and have each group member draw a name of someone they’ll pray for during the week.

PLAYLIST PICK:
“Salt & Light”
 By Lauren Daigle

2 Corinthians 3:4-6 Commentary

Verse 4: Because God empowers us, remarkable things can happen in the lives of other people through our ministries. Remarkable things happened in the Corinthians' lives through the ministries of Paul and his missionary team. In fact, the Corinthians' lives were like recommendation letters validating Paul's ministry (2 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Verse 5: Paul knew all of the true and lasting good in the Corinthians' lives was God's work. His confidence in ministry was strong because it was "through Christ before God." Paul was confident in God's commitment to work through him. Our confidence can be strong as well! What need is God unable to meet for us through Christ? God has no lack. Paul's confidence was also a humble confidence. Some teachers who had been in Corinth apparently presented themselves as personally impressive (2 Corinthians 11:5). Paul and his partners did not do that. They knew that they were not "competent" on their own. Paul did not depend upon himself. Difficult trials had taught Paul not to do so (1:9). He had learned the lesson well. Though we are not competent in ourselves, we can be effective ministers because "our adequacy is from God." This was true for Moses (Exodus 3:12,20; 4:12) and Joshua (Joshua 1:9) and the same can be true for us.

Verse 6: God makes us competent for a purpose. It is for us to be "ministers of a new covenant." This reference to a "new" covenant implies an old covenant. God established the old covenant at Sinai (Exodus 19:5-6). The old covenant was "of the letter." God chiseled commandments in letters on stone tablets (2 Corinthians 3:7). But God revealed through Jeremiah that a "new covenant" was coming. The new covenant would involve God writing His teaching on His people's hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-33). The internal work of the Spirit on the human heart was to supersede external writing on stone tablets. Jesus Himself announced the inauguration of the new covenant when He established the Lord's Supper. He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20).

In saying that the letter kills, Paul did not mean that written revelation is bad or destructive. Paul believed that "all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable" (2 Timothy 3:16). The letter of the law kills in the sense that it sets forth commands and obligations without empowering people inwardly to meet them. The law exposes people's unrighteousness and announces the penalties that loom over them. "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" (1 Corinthians 15:56). By contrast, the Spirit gives life. The Spirit has renewed us and given us life so that we are new creations for whom the old has passed away and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 7:6). Further, by our ministries "the Spirit gives life" to others. The Spirit brings people to faith in Christ and changes them increasingly into the image of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:7-10 Commentary

Verse 7: Ministry that brings righteousness is a glorious thing! The ministry Moses had under the old covenant “came with glory.” The glory of Moses’ ministry was great enough that “the Israelites were not able to gaze steadily at Moses’s face because of its glory.” When Moses spoke with the Lord, his face shone (Exodus 34:29-35). Seeing the radiance, the Israelites were afraid. Between the times that Moses went in to speak with the Lord, Moses would put a veil over his face. Therefore, the ministry did have a distinct glory about it.

Verses 8-10: It stands to reason that the ministry of the Spirit under the new and greater covenant would be even more glorious. After all, the ministry under the old covenant brought condemnation. It could not do otherwise. The law gave commands and set forth standards. It did not renew rebellious hearts and give power to love and obey God from the heart.

On the other hand, the ministry of the new covenant brings righteousness. How does the ministry of the new covenant bring righteousness? We’ll explore two ways. First, it brings righteousness in the sense of bringing right standing with God. If we believe in Christ for salvation, God declares us righteous based on our faith. By telling us of the good news of salvation, someone brought righteousness in Christ to us. We bring the righteousness of God into view for people when we tell them the good news about Jesus. When you share this news, you are engaging in the ministry that brings righteousness. Second, the ministry of the new covenant brings righteousness by leading to good and righteous works in the lives of believers. The Spirit produces the fruit of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). Indeed, the Spirit works to produce the attitude and actions of love that truly fulfill the whole law (v. 14). Because of the work of the Spirit, believers grow in living righteously for God’s glory. Aren’t our words and deeds dramatically different than they would be without God’s Spirit working in our lives? Our attitudes are different. Our actions are different because of the Spirit’s influence and power. When we live for Christ, we are engaging in the ministry of bringing righteousness to others.

Therefore, “the ministry that brings righteousness overflows with even more glory” than did the ministry that shone on Moses’ face. The old covenant displayed God’s glory and was rightly awe-inspiring for its time. There is, however, a “glory that surpasses it.” The glory of new covenant ministry is in more than chronological “newness.” The glory is in the power to bring righteousness to people. When we serve God by presenting His righteousness to others in word and deed, the glory shows. When other’s lives are changed, in part, through our ministries, God receives glory. When we reach eternity and see the effects of our ministries, that will be glorious indeed!

2 Corinthians 3:11-12 Commentary

Verses 11-12: Paul acknowledged that even “what was set aside was glorious.” When God revealed Himself to Moses and Israel at Sinai, He did so with fire, smoke, earthquake, thunder, lightning, and the sound of a trumpet (Exodus 19:18; 20:18). Moses’ face shone. All these phenomena testify that there was a glorious quality to the old covenant. The old was, however, set aside for a fuller and enduring revelation of righteousness and salvation. If what was set aside had its glory, “what endures will be even more glorious.” The new covenant endures in the sense that its terms remain in effect. Nothing will supersede the covenant of redemption by grace through faith in Christ. The gospel basis on which we minister is an everlasting gospel. The apostle John testified that the praise of heaven goes to the exalted Lamb, Christ Himself, who was slain to purchase people for God by His blood (Revelation 5:9). The covenant of redemption established by His blood stands firm in heaven. Heaven is populated based on it.

Ministry under the new covenant is glorious because it leads to people experiencing heaven’s glory. Paul had personally encountered the glorified Christ (Acts 9:1-9). He knew that every believer has experienced the light of God’s glory in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). He also knew that a greater experience of God’s glory in Christ is coming for believers. In heaven, we will look directly and fully upon the glorious Lord Jesus. Ministry under the new covenant is also glorious because it leads to glory for God. If we are saved, we have no reason to boast in ourselves, because salvation is God’s work (1 Corinthians 1:31; Ephesians 2:8-9). Our redemption is based on the work of Christ on the cross (1:7), applied by the Spirit to our hearts, and for the purpose that God’s glorious grace will be praised (vv. 6,12,14). Further, the good works we do as believers in Jesus are for God’s glory.

Having “such a hope” gives us great boldness for ministry. We have boldness because of our personal eternal hope in Christ. People may resist or even persecute us, but why would we fear them or be deterred? Whom should we fear other than the God who is Lord over eternity (Matthew 10:28)? If God has promised us final and eternal victory in heaven as His people and ministers, we can minister here and now boldly.

We also have boldness because we know that the ministry of bringing Christ’s righteousness to others is necessary to their eternal hope. If we don’t proclaim Christ, how will they hear and call upon Him and be saved (Romans 10:13-15)? As ambassadors of Christ we are authorized by and responsible to God, for He is “making his appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20).



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): If you used the optional activity at the beginning of the session, refer to that poster again. Write the phrase “Equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit” on the poster. Explain that this truth should fill us with confidence that God works through us, so we have nothing to fear.



SAY: “What can you do this week to live out the truth of this passage?”

GUIDE: Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 100 of the PSG.

- » **Seek God first.** Pray and ask God to give you a fresh dose of confidence so you can boldly minister to those around you for His glory.
- » **Put your faith into action.** Look for an opportunity this week to share Jesus with someone you know. God has empowered you and equipped you for this opportunity and He is ever-present in your life. Go in confidence and trust the Lord with the results.
- » **Dig deeper.** The Holy Spirit empowers us to minister. Make it your goal to learn more about this member of the Trinity by reading through the Book of Acts in your personal devotional time. If you read one chapter per day, you’ll finish this incredible book in 28 days.

Wrap It Up

SAY: “As Christ-followers, we’re equipped with all we need to complete any task God has for us. **In fact, God Himself works through us. Because of this truth, serving others is one thing you won’t want to outsource to anyone else.**”



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