

Week 4, 2 Corinthians 3

Hook



Main Point: Believers are confident because of what Jesus has done for us.

Current Event: A 2016 survey sought to determine which employees felt the most confident. Nearly 400,000 U.S. employees were questioned between June of 2014 and June of 2016 to respond how strongly they agree that “I am the top performer at my company for jobs similar to mine.” The results ranked the following as the most confident job titles¹:

7. Chef and Head Cook
6. Plant and System Operators
5. Floral Designer
4. Airfield Operations Specialist
3. Art Director
2. Chief Executive
1. Cook, Private Household

Why do you think the people who hold these job titles are so confident?

Would you describe yourself as a generally confident person?

How has Christ increased your confidence?

¹ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kathryndill/2016/09/02/the-10-most-confident-job-titles/#47ba1ab27206>

Week 4, 2 Corinthians 3

Book

Main Point: Believers are confident because of what Jesus has done for us.

Text Summary: 2 Corinthians 3 Paul wants to establish confidence in the hearts of the believers in Corinth. He does this on two levels. First, he wants to establish confidence in his ministry and the ministry of the apostles. Secondly, Paul shows that believers have confidence in their relationship with God through Jesus.

2 Corinthians 3:1–11 [Read]

Sub-Point: The believer's confidence comes from Christ, not others.

Verses 1–6 Paul begins chapter 3 with a message of confidence. While the false apostles questioned Paul's ministry, he certainly did not and neither should the Corinthians. But how could the Corinthian believer be sure of Paul's credentials? The apostle uses a well-known example to explain.

Letters of recommendation were not uncommon in Paul's day. They were given when travelers entered a new town in order for those in the town to show hospitality and care.²

However, the apostle doesn't need a letter from anyone to provide the Corinthians support of his authenticity. Why? The work of Christ in the Corinthians' hearts is that letter (vv. 2–3). This letter is not written by human hands but sealed by Christ himself. Kruse notes that the very presence of the church was Paul's letter of recommendation.³

It's an exhausting effort to try and prove oneself. Paul begins to show here that is not the life of the Christian. The Christian doesn't seek to earn or prove legitimacy. Rather, Christ has already done that by the working of the Spirit in hearts. No one but the Lord has produced this letter for Paul.⁴

This is Paul's point in verse 3. His ministry was made effective not by his own hands and his own efforts, but by the work of the Spirit. The reason for Paul's confidence is the very fact that he rests on the movement of the Spirit to produce results, not his own strength. Paul's confidence rests in the fact that God makes His servants competent for the work He assigns them (vv. 5–

² Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans – Galatians*. [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008], p. 458.

³ Colin Kruse. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: 2 Corinthians*. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987], p. 90.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

6).⁵ To be divinely commissioned is to be divinely equipped.⁶

Regarding this supernatural equipping, Lowery comments on verse 6:

Reliance on human rather than divine authority in letters of commendation was shortsighted and dangerous (2 Cor. 3:1–3). Even more so was the attempt to fulfill God’s righteousness apart from divine enablement. Those who did so found that the letter kills (cf. Rom. 7:10–11). But those who trust in Christ find that the Spirit gives life (cf. Rom. 8:2).⁷

According to verse 2, what does Paul mean by saying the Corinthians are the “letter of recommendation”?

Paul makes a comparison between the old covenant and the new covenant in verse 3. How does he do it? Why is the new covenant better than the old? Why is Paul’s letter of recommendation better than his opponents’?

Verses 7–11 Paul is a minister of the new covenant. In these verses, he brings to center stage the differences between the old and new covenant, finding the new to be superior. In verses 7–9, and the remainder of the chapter, Paul comments on the story found in Exodus 34:29–35.

The ministry of death in verse 7 refers to the old covenant. Paul says the written code kills because when it is used improperly, i.e., as a set of rules to be observed in order to establish one’s own righteousness, it kills us.⁸ The law leads to death because we cannot satisfy its demands.

However, both the new and the old covenants are glorious. Moses was so impacted by the glory that accompanied the giving of the Law that his appearance was altered—his face shone and caused the Israelites to avert their eyes.⁹ And yet the glory of the new covenant is greater for several reasons:

- The old covenant is a ministry of death, the new covenant is a ministry of the Spirit (vv. 7–8)
- The old covenant results in condemnation, the new covenant results in righteousness (v. 9)

⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁶ Longman III & Garland, *Romans – Galatians*, p. 459.

⁷ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 561.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2227.

- The old covenant was temporary, the new covenant is permanent (v. 11)¹⁰

Paul is not saying that God's law does not apply anymore. Instead, the works of man no longer attempt to fulfill the law, but the law is completely fulfilled by the work of the Spirit.¹¹ The believer walks in confidence because his salvation is a result of Christ's work, not his own.

How is the old covenant different from the new covenant?

Why is the old covenant described as a "ministry of death"?

What are the benefits of living under the new covenant?

2 Corinthians 3:12–18 [Read]

Sub-point: Because of Christ, we have access to God and freedom in Him.

Verses 12–18 Because of Christ, we are bold (v. 12). There is no veil separating us anymore from God; Jesus has shown us the Father. We can come boldly and confidently before God because of Christ, not because of what we've done.

For the majority of Jews in Paul's day, the same veil existed for them that existed for the Israelites in Exodus 34. When Moses addressed Israel, he did so with a veiled face so that the people would not see the radiance (which was a result of Moses' meetings with God) fade away (v. 13). The cloth separating the people from Moses' glory is a picture to help explain the spiritual veil that remains for the unbelieving Jews of Paul's day; whether unwilling or unable to comprehend, the majority of the Israelites in Paul's day did not see the end of the old covenant and the start of the new that began with Christ.¹²

Only through Christ can we see God, hence in verse 14, Paul says only Christ removes the veil. Paul further explains this in verses 15–16.

The Spirit brings freedom from the obedience required by the law (v. 17). Those who walk with the Spirit, under the blood of Christ, have freedom from the condemnation against our own disobedience. Through the Lord's Spirit, God "sets a person free from bondage to sin, to death, and to the law as a means of acquiring righteousness."¹³ Jesus brings us access to God without fear.

¹⁰ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹² Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, p. 98.

¹³ Longman III & Garland, *Romans – Galatians*, p. 464.

The Gospel changes us. And when it does, the Spirit begins to work and transform us into the likeness of Jesus. Paul says in verse 18 it is the Spirit that transforms us, not our works of perceived righteousness. We don't get to God by our work, we get access to God by His work.

The Greek verb used for "are being transformed" is in the present, meaning a continuous process, a continual nature of change.¹⁴ As we behold God through Jesus, the Spirit changes us. This is sanctification.

What type of freedom is Paul referring to in verse 17?

What does it mean to behold the glory of the Lord?

Consider your own sanctification process; what has the Lord been teaching you in the last year?

What is the believer's responsibility in the sanctification process?

¹⁴ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, p. 101.

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Took



Main Point: Believers are confident because of what Jesus has done for us.

Discussion: Hiroo Onoda, born in 1922, was 18 years old when he was enlisted in the Imperial Japanese Army Infantry; in 1944 he was sent to Lubang Island in the Philippines with the mission of hampering enemy attacks on the island. The last order that Onoda received was in early 1945: stay and fight. The Allies won the war, defeating Japan, and yet Hiroo Onoda continued to remain faithful to his orders. He believed that the news of Japan's defeat was propaganda and so he continued to fight—for 29 years. A Japanese student went searching for the holdout in 1974 and successfully located him. Despite the student's pleas to return to Japan, it wasn't until Onoda's former commanding officer traveled to Lubang Island and officially relieved him of duty that the soldier surrendered.¹⁵

In what ways is a believer who so focuses on works living like Onoda?

What benefits does the new covenant bring?

Lesson Conclusion: It's easy to boast in our strengths and minimize our weaknesses. It's easy for us to think we have the power to change and we have the power to bring change to others. Paul explains to the Christians in Corinth that it's not our resumes or our personalities or our talents that create Gospel change in people. It's the work of the Spirit alone. The Spirit, written on our hearts through the work of Christ, empowers us and propels us into Gospel mission. It is this same Spirit in which we have confidence for our access to God. No more must righteousness be chased after through our own works. Rather, righteousness is available through the work of Christ on our behalf and applied to us through the gracious work of the Spirit. This is our freedom. This is our confidence.

Challenge

Rest in what Christ says. We consume ourselves with what others think of us. This is the foundation behind much of the current social media culture, even though clinical studies show

¹⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/18/world/asia/hiroo-onoda-imperial-japanese-army-officer-dies-at-91.html>

that depression rates are higher for those who spend more time on social media. It's because we care what others think. We compare too much. Instead of drowning in what the world thinks about you, inhale the fresh air that comes with what God says about you in Jesus. Rest in the Gospel. Don't labor and strive for the approval of others. You already have it in Jesus.

Walk in grace. God's grace should keep us moving. Because of the Gospel, we don't have to try to work for our salvation. Your work is not what saves you. Jesus' work is what saves you. This means the Christian can walk forward knowing God's grace will sustain him or her. God's grace is what earns you salvation, not your tireless, inefficient efforts at self-help.

Experience freedom. Walking in grace gives the child of God great freedom. You aren't chained anymore by performance and trying to earn righteousness. Christ came to set us free, not so that we would return to the slavery and false hope that is outward righteousness. Christ set us free from the law of sin and death; now walk in that freedom.