

# The Christian Arsenal

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## SECOND CORINTHIANS 2:16-3:18

I'm discovering that the Book of Second Corinthians is really just full of good, practical Bible doctrine.

Last week, we saw that Paul taught us a lesson in walking in victory and I hope you walked in victory this week.

Paul also taught us that our victorious life is a sweet savor, a sweet aroma, a sweet fragrance to God and also to those with whom we come in contact each day. Paul said,

that some folks will smell that fragrance and be **saved**,  
and that some will smell that fragrance and remain **lost**.

Look at the last sentence of verse 16:

Paul is saying,

"Who is **adequate**...who is **equipped** for the great work of speaking words which save some and damn others?"

### Verse 17:

Paul says,

"Well, it won't be folks who peddle or corrupt the word of God, folks! It will be done by folks who are sincere...  
who speak from sincerity...  
who speak as sent from God...  
who speak realizing they are speaking in the very presence of God...  
and who speak as men who are in Christ Jesus...  
That's the folks who are adequate and equipped to show forth Jesus to other people."

See, we're not responsible for the decision folks make...but we **are** responsible for the fact that they see Jesus in us and are aware of the Gospel of Jesus by the testimony of both our **lips** and our **lives**!!

In chapter 3 of 2 Corinthians, we're going to see a **tremendous contrast...a contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant**, and we're going to see this contrast take on many labels.

Most theologians believe that **false teachers** had come in and had corrupted the Gospel by telling the Corinthians that the New Covenant...the Gospel of grace that Paul had preached...was not enough! They taught that they must add to the Gospel **rules and regulations and rituals that were under the Old Covenant**.

### Verse 1...

I believe this verse refers back to verse 17 of chapter 2. Paul had enemies in Corinth and he was anticipating their reaction when this letter would be read to the church of Corinth. Paul knew his enemies would say,  
"there Paul goes again...commending himself..."

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It may very well have been that the enemies were the false teachers, because Paul mentions “letters of commendation.” The false teachers would ask for letters of commendation, much like our reference letters of today...to be presented to the next church in which they wanted to teach their false doctrine.

So, Paul is saying, “Am I like them? Do I need letters of commendation? Don’t you know me well enough by now?”

And, then Paul answers his own question...

## Verse 2-4...

Paul is saying,

“I don’t need someone to write me a letter of reference. The proof of my effectiveness and authority is **you!**”

You know, it’s really not very important what people **say** about us, is it? The important thing is what God **knows** about us!

**And, God knew that Paul had shared the Gospel with these folks. He had led them to salvation in Jesus Christ. He had cared for them and taught them and admonished them and encouraged them and exhorted them...and because of this, they were his letter of commendation and they were his confidence.**

## Verse 5-6...

Paul was a brilliant and well-educated man, yet he didn’t depend on all that...he depended on the Lord!

Now, the false teachers had come into Corinth with a message of legalism. They said, “Jesus is alright as far as He goes. He just doesn’t go far enough.”

They had told the Corinthians that their relationship with God depended on what they **could do...**

how many **rules** they could keep...

how many **regulations** they could obey...

how many **rituals** they could observe...

and, so Paul begins to contrast that kind of **religion based on legalism** with the **relationship with God based on grace**.

Let’s just take the next several minutes and look at some of the ways Paul contrasts the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. By the way, what do we mean by the Old Covenant and the New Covenant?

Let’s look back up at **verse 3**. “...*tablets of stone and tablets of the human heart...*”

When God gave the Law, how did He give it? He wrote it on tablets of stone...

Remember what happened to the first tablets of stone?

Well, before Moses could even get down off the mountain, the people had broken the first two commandments. Remember the golden calf incident? The people brought their jewelry to Aaron and he fashioned a golden calf and the people said, “This is our god which brought us out of Egypt.” But, God said, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me” and “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.”

In fact, God told Moses the people had corrupted themselves, and He was going to destroy them for it. Moses begged God not to do it!!

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The Mosaic Law was strict and rigid. It demanded an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, burning for burning and cutting for cutting. It demanded absolute **righteousness**, absolute **holiness**...and it demanded **punishment** if broken...

**and here were the people already breaking it!**

**So...what in the world was going to happen? Well, as Moses approached the people, he was so upset by what they were doing, that he threw down the tablets of stone that the Law had been written on and they shattered and he ground up that golden calf that Aaron had fashioned for the people and he mixed the powder with water and made the people drink it!**

Then, God called Moses upon the mountain again, and even though all the people should have been destroyed...God gave them a second chance (thank God He's a God of the second chance) and He gave Moses the second tablets containing the Law.

And, when God gave Moses all the ordinances and laws and rules and regulations and rituals and requirements, God also gave something else to Moses...the specifications for a Tabernacle and a sacrificial system.

You see, God is a God of righteousness and holiness and justice and wrath. How in the world can man ever hope to get into His presence?

Well, God would have to make a way and God **did** make a way...  
but, it was a temporary way...and we're going  
to see that in a moment...

Year after year after year, lambs and bulls and goats were slaughtered. Can you imagine the vast amount of blood that was poured out to atone for the sins of the people? Think about it...the people would bring their animals to the priest and the next year they would do the same and the next year and the next...

Why? Because the people could never keep the Law God gave...They could never attain to the righteousness and the holiness the Law demanded.

What was wrong? Did God make a mistake? Was there something wrong with the Law? **No, God does all things well! Something was wrong with man! Man was too weak and too feeble and too sinful to keep the Law! And so, the Law became a ministry of death...this Law that was written on tablets of stone.**

In 1846, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a short story called "Earth's Holocaust." In this story, humanity had gathered and built a giant bonfire. They were determined to rid themselves of everything evil and wicked and violent upon the earth.

Into that bonfire they threw cannons and swords and guns and even books. While all these things were being thrown into the bonfire, one of the characters stood up and said, "There is one thing yet to throw into the fire and that is the human heart. For if we do not throw into the fire the human heart...if we do not do something about the human heart, all these other things we **have** thrown into the fire will come back to us and it will be the same old world yet again!"

Beloved, the problem of mankind **is** now and has **always** been the human heart. And, God knew that...That's why He tells us in the Book of Ezekiel that He would remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh.

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The Old Covenant was written on tablets of stone, but the New Covenant is written on tablets of flesh...the human heart.

I believe God is telling us is that we cannot **ever** keep an **external law**. We need help. We need power and that power doesn't come from **without**. It must come from **within**. You see, that passage Ezekiel (Ezekiel 11:19) tells us that not only is He going to give us a heart of flesh, but He is going to put a new Spirit within us. (Also Ez. 36:26-27)

***The legalist will admonish us with his list of "do's" and "don't's" but he cannot give us the power to obey that list of "do's" and "don't's"***

The ministry of grace changes the heart. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God and writes it on the heart...

Then, Paul says the Old Covenant was of "the letter." And, what does the letter do? **Verse 6** tells us "*it kills,*" but the New Covenant is of the Spirit and "*it gives life.*"

The Old Covenant couldn't give life, because we could not keep it! The New Covenant gives life because of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary!

The Old Covenant demanded blood...remember all the animal sacrifices?  
The New Covenant demands blood, as well...but the blood of the New Covenant is far superior to the blood of the Old Covenant.

**Is Paul suggesting that the Old Covenant was a mistake?...or that the ministry of it is unimportant?**

**NO!!** Paul knew that the lost sinner must be **slain by the Law**. **The lost sinner must stand totally and helplessly and hopelessly condemned before he can be saved by God's grace.**

**Verses 7-11...**

Beloved, you'll never see your need for righteousness, until you stand condemned as unrighteous before a holy God!

You'll never know you need life until all you face is death!

You'll never know you need salvation until you realize you're lost!

You'll never realize your need for fellowship with God until you know you're separated from Him!

***The Book of Galatians says the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ!***

Folks, the Old Covenant, the ministry of death, was glorious!  
(Look at **verse 7**) But, the New Covenant, the ministry of the Spirit is **more** glorious!

Let's quickly recap these verses and the many contrasts they contain...

1) The O.C. is called **"the letter,"** the N.C. is called **"the Spirit."**

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- 2) The O.C. **killed**; the N.C. **gives life**.
- 3) The O.C. **ministered death**; the N.C. **ministers the Spirit**.
- 4) The O.C. was **engraved on stone**; the N.C. is **engraved upon human hearts**.
- 5) The O.C. **ministered condemnation**; the N.C. **ministers righteousness**.
- 6) The O.C. was **temporary**; the N.C. is **permanent**.
- 7) The O.C. **was glorious**; the N.C. is **more glorious**.

## Verses 12-16...

The Book of Exodus tells us that when Moses returned to the children of Israel after having met with God the skin of his face shone with the glory of God, and because of this, Moses would put a veil over his face...Why?

So the people couldn't see the glory fade away!!

And, Paul is drawing yet another contrast here:

He's saying that this veil that hid the fact that the glory of the Old Covenant was fading away is **still** there for many folks.

He's saying that every time the Old Covenant is read, their **minds are hardened** and their **hearts are blinded**.

What Paul is saying is that the Old Testament contains **Jesus!** The Law points us to **Jesus!** **If we read the Old Testament and fail to see Jesus, we better read it again!**

But, Paul is saying that Jewish people have hard minds and blind hearts when it comes to seeing the Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament.

Now, of course, there are **some** Jews who can see Him there. I read a book many years ago, Betrayed! by Stan Telchin, whose daughter was away at college. She called her parents one day and told them that she had become a Christian. This devastated her Jewish parents and their daughter challenged her father to read the Scriptures and look for Jesus in them with an open mind. Stan Telchin had been taught that the New Testament was a "hate book" for the Jewish people. However, he started to read the New Testament and he found out that the Book of Matthew was written by a Jew, for other Jews, about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and about the Messiah He had sent for His people. He was amazed that the first believers were **Jewish** and it wasn't until Acts 10 and Cornelius that the Gospel was taken to the Gentiles. Then, he began to read the Old Testament...Jeremiah, Isaiah, Proverbs 30 and Psalm 22... Well, to make a long book short, **Stan Telchin saw the Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament and was gloriously saved as was his wife and other daughter.**

The vast majority of Jews do not have this experience. I have just read an excellent book entitled America's Real War by Rabbi Daniel Lapin. This book is **so relevant** for today and I highly recommend it. Rabbi Daniel Lapin is the son of an orthodox rabbi and he has three brothers who are also orthodox Jewish rabbis.

The book this man has written is a great book exposing the sad condition of our country...how far we've strayed from what our founding fathers dreamed America would be. He

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also comes down hard on the liberal and secular Jewish stand against conservative and evangelical Christians.

He champions the evangelical Christian and says our country would have failed a long time ago if it wasn't for the Christian influence and standards.

Rabbi Lapin is so right about so many things.

Rabbi Lapin has his hand upon the pulse of America and he has diagnosed the critical condition of our country in a clear and concise way.

Rabbi Lapin has articulated the fact that Israel's only real friend in this world is the United States, and that the only reason is that we take seriously God's promise that He will bless those who bless Israel and will curse those who curse Israel.

**There are so many things right about Rabbi Lapin...but there's one glaring thing that's wrong...**

Rabbi Lapin has a veil over his heart when it comes to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He states at the very beginning of his book that he is not a Christian nor would he ever want any Jew to become a Christian.

It's hard to understand how someone as brilliant as this man can believe that he can keep the Law. It's hard to understand how someone as sympathetic to the Christian cannot love the Christ whom they serve and by whose name they are called.

But, Paul says Rabbi Lapin has a veil over his heart and his mind is hard.

Bill and I have feebly attempted to share our faith with our CPA...a wonderful Jewish man, but Paul says our CPA has a veil over his heart and his mind is hard.

**And, Paul says that veil can be removed only one way...the Lord Jesus must do it.**

Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, but he had such a burden for the Jews...he said at one point that he could wish himself **accursed, separated from Christ** for the sake of his brethren according to the flesh.

The **last thing** Paul wanted was for **these** Gentiles, these Corinthian believers to be put back under the bondage his unbelieving brethren according to the flesh were under.

Look at what he says in **verses 16 and 17**:

Only the Spirit of God can lift the veil and help us to see that Christ is the Savior. He alone can do that.

Do you think you came to Jesus on you own? Jesus said,

"The Holy Spirit will convict the world of **sin** and and of **righteousness** and of **judgment**...He will guide you into all truth."

We should pray this every single day:

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**“Thank you, Holy Spirit, for not giving up on me...for loving me...for convicting me of my sin, and finally, for bringing me to the Cross so I could see the saving power of Jesus Christ. Thank you for showing me that the Cross is my one and only hope!”**

One last thing and I'm through...

All we need for **salvation, sanctification and glorification** has already been done for us at Calvary!!

Anytime we take our eyes off the Cross, we open ourselves up to false teaching.

Anytime we minimize the Cross, what happens? When we **minimize** the Cross, when we **forget** the Cross, when we **don't teach** the Cross, and we **don't want to hear** about the Cross...

**Then, what do we do?...we talk about our goodness, our efforts, our doing the best we can. When we forget about the Cross, we begin to focus on ourselves!!**

**Paul said in Galatians, “ God forbid that I should boast save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Nothing we can ever do can make God love us any **more**...  
Nothing we can ever do can make God love us any **less**...

We are saved by **grace through faith** and we live the Christian life. not by following rules or regulations or rituals **We live it by faith!!**

Isn't it wonderful how God has made salvation so available?

There was an old Scottish evangelist who used to say  
that you **could put a man in a wooden barrel**  
and **nail down the lid**  
and **wrap chains around it**  
and **padlock the chains**  
and then, **punch out a knothole**  
and **whisper through that knothole how to be saved**  
and **that man could be saved...right there in that barrel!!!**

Why? Because it's all by faith and by the way...**even that faith is a gift from God!**

I read this week that in 1948, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered that it was found in Habakkuk 2 where the Scripture says, “The just shall live by his faith...” that the word “his” was capitalized! “The just shall live by **His** faithfulness!”

**I don't live by my faith! I wouldn't give you two cents for my faith. My faith is fickle...I'm real full of faith today, but I may not be so full of faith tomorrow. But, praise God, He is faithful and we can live by His faithfulness!**

I mean...think about it...

**I haven't promised God that sin shall not reign in my mortal body...God has promised that to me!**

**I haven't promised God that every need of mine shall be met according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus...God has promised that to me!**

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I haven't promised God the peace that passes all my understanding will guard my heart and mind in Christ Jesus...God has promised that to me!

**See, if I make a promise to God, it's up to me to keep it! No wonder some of us are so worried!**

**Listen...forget about making all those promises to God...just get your Bible out and write down all the promises He's made to you...and you know what? The just – you, Beloved, are the “just” – shall live by His faith!**

Look at verses 17 and 18...

**The people who lived under the Old Covenant were bound to a covenant of rules and regulations but we are free because of the liberty of the Holy Spirit has given us...**

Not free to do what we please, but free to do what pleases Him!!

## **Why and How?**

**There's a sanctification process going on in us...the people under the Old Covenant could not look upon the glory that was fading...but we are beholding glory...Christ's glory in the Scriptures, and Christ's glory in the Spirit...and that glory is transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ...from one level of glory to the next level of glory.**

**If we're not being transformed...**

**If we're not being sanctified...**

**it's because we've taken our eyes off the glory of Christ at Calvary!!**

**May God help us all to get our eyes back on the Cross and to be transformed more and more into the image of Jesus!**