

2nd Corinthians Chapters 2 and 3- John Karmelich

1. I call this lesson, "Dealing With Forgiveness". Specifically, we are going to be focusing on the issue of how and when do we forgive other Christians.
 - a) When it comes to forgiveness, I've always found the "easy part" is to accept the fact that God has forgiven our sins. If God is perfect, then He could perfectly forgive us. The trick is learning to forgive people who have hurt us or hurt people that we care about.
 - b) It would be appropriate at this time to bring up something from the "Lord's Prayer". If you study that pray line by line (See Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4), there is only one line of that prayer where God asks of us to do something. That "something" is to forgive others. That actual line is "As we also have forgiven our debtors". (Matthew 6:12b, NIV) Every other line of that prayer is asking God to do things for us.
 - i) Since God is more "faithful than we are", asking God to do things for us is less of an issue than us doing things that God wants us to.
 - c) Let's get some "extreme situations" out of the way. If someone is physically threatening you, it does not mean to just stand there and take it. One should get away if all possible.
 - i) The related idea is when somebody commits some sort of criminal action against us. We should have forgiveness so we can have a sense of peace, but that does not mean the guilty party should avoid being punished by the authorities for their crime. There is a price to paid and that still stands.
 - ii) We also have to accept that justice is not always perfect. Sometimes in this life people get away with stuff. Whether or not they get punished should have no bearing on developing a sense of peace about life. I'm not saying it is easy, but if we pray in the right way, we can learn to have peace about those who hurt us.
2. In summary, a lot of this lesson deals with the issue of forgiveness in its various forms and applications. Forgiveness is really about having a sense of peace. God wants us to have peace in our relationships with other Christians and our relationship with Him. We are to forgive those that hurt us, not so punishment can be avoided, but so we can enjoy that peace.
 - a) I understand that sometimes that takes time. If somebody has hurt us in a bad way, it is difficult to forgive them. The natural thing is to desire revenge and justice. We need to personally forgive that person(s) not because they deserve it, but so we can live in a sense of peace. Sometimes that takes time and I find that continual prayer for those that hurt us helps us to deal with that pain.
 - b) Let me break down and actually tie this principal of forgiveness and peace to this chapter.
 - i) There were "supposed" Christians living in Corinth back then that didn't like Paul or his message. That preaching turned some people against Paul. What Paul does in this letter is rise above the "who said what" issue and deal with forgiveness.
 - ii) In this lesson we also have an issue of a person who the church refused to forgive even after that person had repented of that sin. I think one of the hardest things for Christians to do is forgive "veteran Christians" after they have committed some sort of sin and have repented of that sin. It's interesting how we expect God to forgive our sins, but we aren't as merciful on our fellow Christians. That gets us back to "our part" of the Lord's Prayer.
 - a) What churches worry about is if they still let that person still be in charge of "something", after they have sinned and repented of that sin, it will taint the image of that church. That is a case of not forgiving. Grant it, if it is something serious, I am all in favor of watching that person to prevent repeat offenses, but that is a separate issue from that of non-forgiveness.
 - c) OK, with that condemning introduction completed, ☺ let's get back to 2nd Corinthians.

3. Chapter 2, Verse 1: So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you.
 - a) To explain Verse 1, we have to review some things from the last lesson:
 - i) Sometime between Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians and this second letter we are now studying, Paul made a visit to the Christians in Corinth.
 - ii) Apparently, Paul didn't like what he saw and that visit was "painful".
 - iii) I suspect that there were some serious sin issues the church was still dealing with at that time. In other words, Paul wanted his next visit to Corinth to be one of joy and not have to come down hard due to sin issues.

4. Verse 2: For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? ³I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. ⁴For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.
 - a) What Paul wanted to avoid on his next visit to Corinth was to have any sort of stress or grieve issues to deal with. What Paul wanted was a "love relationship".
 - i) That doesn't mean that Paul just wanted to go around hugging everyone. (Not that anything's wrong with a good hug. ☺) Paul simply wanted a visit where Paul and the Corinthian Christians could enjoy each others company without having to focus on any particular sin issue.
 - ii) Verse 2 says, " For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved?" In other words, if Paul has grieved the church, who is left that Paul could share the joy of Christian fellowship with?
 - iii) What Paul is trying to do is have this whole issue settled and done with so he could have a happy relationship with this church.
 - b) Let me step back here and talk about Paul's relationship with this church in Corinth.
 - i) When Paul first came to Corinth, he spent eighteen months there. (Acts 18:11.)
 - ii) After that much time, Paul developed a great sense of love for these people. It wasn't just about them getting saved in the "once and for all" sense. It is about salvation in the continual sense of having the peace of God within us and not letting anything come in the way of God's peace.
 - c) Paul's point in these verses is that he didn't like the fact that he had to come down hard on the Corinthians in the last letter. Paul just wanted love and forgiveness.
 - i) OK, let me ask the tough question: If Paul is preaching forgiveness, why did he come down so hard on them in his last letter? ☺ If Paul is preaching forgiveness, why doesn't he act like that himself?
 - ii) The key issue is repentant sins versus unrepentant sins. It is one thing to come down hard on a Christian who refuses to turn from their sin. It is another to come down on someone who has admitted they are wrong and wants to have peace with other Christians again. My point is to forgive the "unrepentant" sinner is wrong and to not forgive the "repentant" sinner is equally as wrong.
 - iii) Paul is stating in effect that the reason he had to write that last letter (which again, is lost and not part of the bible) is that the person was unrepentant.
 - d) Paul's other point is how painful it was for him to write that letter in the first place. Paul mentions the tears he had to shed in order to write such a letter.
 - i) Think of it this way: How easy or difficult is it to confront someone living with a particular sin that refuses to repent? Nobody wants to be the bad guy and come down hard on such a person. It's just as hard for a pastor as it is for anyone else in the congregation. Paul is stating how difficult it was just to write to them to have to deal with this issue.

- ii) As a reminder, Jesus taught us there is a 3-step method to deal with a sin issue in the church. Step 1 is to confront the person "one on one". If that person refuses to change, then "Step 2" is to go back to that person and take witnesses with you. If there still is no repentance, Step 3 is to bring up the issue to the whole church. If that person refuses to repent at that point, then the person should be kicked out of the church until they repent. (See Matthew 18:15-17.)
 - a) What if that "sinning" person leaves and joins the church down the street? ☺ We can either inform that church or let that be their problem.
 - iii) I have personally seen all sorts of church problems simply because that church refused to follow Jesus' three step plan. Sometimes we take an accuser's word for it and refuse to confront the accuser with witnesses. It is essentially that two or more agree before a charge is brought against someone.
 - e) What all of this comes down to is we have to follow Jesus "three step program" to deal with sin issues. Sometimes we fail because people are afraid to confront the "guilty" and sometimes we fail because we take the word of one "accuser" without other witnesses. The point is Jesus' plan for dealing with sin is an excellent plan, but it is rarely followed through like Paul had to do in that "painful" letter.
5. Verse 5: If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent - not to put it too severely. ⁶The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. ⁷Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.
- a) In these verses, we get into the issue of forgiveness of someone who has repented.
 - b) There was a reference in 1st Corinthians to a man who was having sexual relations with his stepmother. Paul could be referring to that man. The point is that he has now repented, but the church as not forgiven him.
 - c) There is an old saying that Christian churches make the mistake of organizing their "firing squads" in circles. In other words, we tend to hurt our own and not forgive.
 - i) I have seen many cases of Christians who have committed some sort of "bad sin" and after that person has confessed their sin, that church refuses to let that person back in the church or let that person hold any sort of office. Even if they do let him or her "back in", it is never the same and that person faces ridicule for a long time. Often that person ends up changing church to avoid his or her accusers.
 - ii) A "tough" example is when pastors get caught in adultery. Even if they repent from that situation, it often takes a long time for the congregation to be willing to forgive him of that sin. There are churches that literally break up when the head person gets caught in some bad sin.
 - iii) I'm not excusing the sin. I'm saying that when people realize their mistake, there has to be forgiveness. Some churches take steps to help that person work through the issues and that is a good thing. The issue at hand is not being able to forgive.
 - d) Let me give another personal example that may help here: Years ago, my wife and I were defrauded. Over the long term, the hardest part wasn't the money as it was being willing to forgive that person. The only way I got through that pain was to start praying for that person every day. Once I started praying for his well being, I was able to let go of the pain. Once in awhile I still think about that, and then I have to pray for him again. I don't pray he returns the money, but I pray for his salvation and "well being".
 - e) Remember the issue is forgiveness. We ask God to forgive all of our sins. God asks us to forgive others, even if what they did to us "deserves" anger and judgment. What God wants is a loving relationship with us and He doesn't want anything to block that. When we are angry at someone (even if it is deserved), that blocks our relationship with God.

- f) Meanwhile, back at 2nd Corinthians: The main point here is that somebody who had sinned and was kicked out of the church (after properly going through the steps of that process) now has repented. Paul's point is the church has not forgiven this person even though he has confessed his sins as wrong. It is just as much a "sin" to not forgive someone as it was for that person to sin in the first place.
 - i) Remember that Jesus said we are to forgive a person up to "seventy times seven" times. (Ref.: Matthew 18:22). That does not mean we forgive 490 times and then on the 491st time, let's get him! ☺ Jesus point is that it doesn't matter how many times a person sins. The issue is forgiveness. If that person is truly sorry and has repented (walked away) from that sin, then we have to forgive them.
 - ii) I should also add there is a big difference between forgiveness and "full trust". If a person stole money, and is repentant, we should forgive, but it may take time before we trust that person with money (or whatever) a second time.
- 6. Verse 9: The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. ¹⁰If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven – if there was anything to forgive – I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake,
 - a) Paul's last letter "indirectly" was a test. He wanted to see if the Corinthian church would be obedient to God in all things. It does not mean Paul expected them to be perfect. It meant that Paul wanted the church to fully trust God and understand and "live by" the rules of forgiveness of someone who has repented.
 - b) Paul's underlying desire here is unity with the church. If the church in Corinth was willing to forgive that person who repented, then Paul would stand with that church and forgive him as well. What Paul wanted was to be "one" with that church. That means Paul wants to stand with their decisions. At the same time, Paul can't allow sin and can't allow non-forgiveness to occur.
 - c) In Verse 10, Paul says I have "forgiven in the sight of Christ". The idea is that Jesus is watching us all the time. Even if Paul couldn't be present with the Corinthians at that time, Paul could still forgive that repentant sinner in the "sight of Jesus". Paul is saying even though he is not present with that church, he could have unity with the church as we are all under the sight of God.
- 7. Verse 11: in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.
 - a) Paul is saying that the Corinthians are aware of what Satan's "schemes" are. You can't find a place in the bible where Paul says "Here are the 3 (or 5 or 10) methods that Satan uses and we are to be aware of them". The way we know what Satan's schemes are is by reading through the bible and studying history.
 - i) If you stop and think about it, Satan does not have a lot of "schemes". One can pretty easily number the ways Satan can attack us. Paul is focusing here on sins that cause division in the church by either 1) not dealing with sin in the first place or 2) not forgiving someone who has repented.
 - b) Here's something to ponder: Why would Satan attack us in the first place? If we can't lose our salvation, why would Satan bother going after us? The answer is to make us (individually or collectively) a bad witness for God. If Satan can convince us that we sinned so bad, we should not be in church, we are not being a witness for God. If Satan can convince us not to forgive someone for a sin, he gets our focus off of God and onto that person sinning. Again, this type of situation makes us a bad witness for God.
 - i) The reason Satan attacks believers is that it prevents us from being good witnesses for Him. Satan's days are numbered based on an unknown (to us) number of people becoming Christians. When that "x" number is reached, Jesus comes back and then Satan knows he will be locked up and later, put in hell eternally. (References: Romans 11:25, Revelation 20:2, and 10).

- c) I've always stated that there are two great mistakes to make about Satan and his legion of demons: One mistake is to think Satan doesn't really exist. (If you have doubts about Satan's existence, try opposing him for a while and see what happens.) The other mistake is to think Satan is behind every tree or bush.
 - i) Know that often our sins are simply our own ego's getting in the way even without Satan's influence. One of the purposes of the millennial rule of Jesus is to show that sin will still exist even if Satan is bound up for that time period.
 - d) Getting back to the verse, we as Christians can become aware of his schemes if we just think about them for a while. In summary, Satan appeals to our egos to get us to sin or harm us in some way (e.g., allow us to get hurt) so we get our focus off of God. Satan then uses that sin to cause "harm" in the Christian fellowship by either us not confronting that sin or not forgiving that person when they are willing to repent.
8. Verse 12: Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, ¹³I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia.
- a) In these verses, Paul is giving an example of how much love he had for the Christians that lived in Corinth. Paul was in a city called Troas and he was having success winning people to Christ in this place. (This event is mentioned in Acts 16:8.)
 - i) Despite that success, Paul didn't have peace in heart as he needed to know if the Christians in Corinth had forgiven that person and there was peace there.
 - b) Paul had an assistant named Titus. Apparently, Titus was sent by Paul to go check on the church in Corinth and see if things were better. When Titus had not shown up where Paul was (in Troas), Paul was so concerned for the Corinthian church that he walked away from Troas to go find Titus and see what was happening in Corinth.
 - c) Paul is saying in effect is that he gave up opportunities to win new converts for Christ as he went looking for Titus so he could check on the status of the Corinthian church.
 - d) This reminds me of the "difficult task" of discerning God's will at any given moment. Paul had a great opportunity to win new Christians in Troas. That was Paul's calling and he loved that opportunity. At the same time, Paul had a "great urge" to find Titus to get word how the Corinthians were doing. My question is, "Was it God's will for Paul to stay in Troas and win new converts, or was it God's will for Paul to go find Titus and check on the Corinthians? I would argue the latter.
 - i) Sometimes the way to know God's will is to see what issue He puts on our heart. Sometimes God's will means to drop what one loves to do.
 - ii) For example, I always try to stay a few weeks ahead of this bible study group in that I'm writing a few lessons in your future than what you are reading. That way, if there is an emergency or God calls me to something else for awhile, I have a "buffer zone". My point here is we have to be open to what God calls us to do, and sometimes that means getting us out of our comfort zone of what we enjoy doing.
9. Verse 14: But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. ¹⁵For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. ¹⁶To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life.
- a) In Verses 14 through 17, Paul compares our salvation (in the "present sense" as well as the "future sense") to a parade celebrating a victory.
 - i) Most likely, what Paul had in mind, was a Roman victory parade. When a Roman general came back to Rome after winning new territory for Rome, there would be a big parade in his honor.

- ii) This parade would include showing off captured items and that parade included those prisoners would be put to death soon.
 - iii) The parade would include the Roman (non-Christian) priests giving off incense. The smell of the incense would be a smell of victory to the Roman army and a smell of death to the prisoners who were about to be executed.
 - iv) The point here is our victory of salvation in Christ is like a sweet smell to those who are saved and like a deadly smell to those who are dying.
- b) Let me put the "smell test" another way: Have you ever spoken a bible verse out loud to someone and all they do is complain how you are "preaching all the time"? The hearing of God's word is a sweet smell (as a word picture) to some people and a foul odor (as a word picture) to those who don't want to hear God's word.
- i) Even if Paul was thinking of something other than a Roman victory parade, the point is the same: Those who trust in Christ will end up victorious. It will be like something that smells sweat. For those that reject the gospel message, the "smell of God" is something foul and a topic they want to avoid.
- c) Here's another point to contemplate here: Here was Paul talking about forgiveness through most of the chapter, and now Paul switches topics to that of a "victory parade" to those who trust in God. What is the connection? Why bring this up here?
- i) The answer is Paul wanted the Christians in Corinth to remember the "big purpose" of forgiving the person who has repented from their sins. It is to have peace with God the Father. Those that trust in God will be victorious in the end no matter what Satan or life throws at us.
 - ii) The related point was that the Corinthian church was getting smug in the sense they successfully kicked the sinning person out of church, but they were not willing to let that person back in after he repented. The Corinthian church was enjoying the fact they executed God's righteousness but forgot about God's forgiveness. They forgot what the ultimate goal was, which is to have as many people as possible join in God's "victory parade".
 - iii) Let me put it this way: When someone hurts us and we let that "stew" within us, we are still saved, but we are letting that pain or anger block our relationship with God. We need to forgive not so much for the sake of the one who hurt us, but for the sake of our own peace of mind. If we are to truly enjoy God's "victory parade", we can't let anything spoil the moment and holding anger over some person or some issue can spoil that moment.
10. Verse 16 (cont.): And who is equal to such a task? ¹⁷Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.
- a) The question, "Who is equal to such a task?" is a question Paul asks of himself as well as his intended audience. Paul does not consider himself worthy of the task of preaching salvation. The point is nobody is! God uses imperfect people to spread the message of salvation. Paul was not a special holy man who never made mistakes. Paul was a regular person like you and me who was called to go out and be a witness for God.
 - b) Paul's point is that he is not so special that only "he" could preach the Gospel. God never asks, nor expects perfection. God asks that we confess sin when we become aware of specific sins and then make an effort to not repeat that same sin. There is never (emphasis on the word "never!") a point in our lives where we are no longer good enough for God. Remember that God called us to salvation before we committed any and all future sins. God was well aware of all our "future" sins prior to us committing those sins.
 - i) In summary, never let guilt block one's relationship with God.

- c) In Verse 17, Paul says that he is not like men who "peddle the word of God for profit".
 - i) This has nothing to do with paying those in the "professional ministry". The issue is not pay, it is motivation. Unfortunately, there are people in the ministry for the money, and are not (or are no longer) motivated by the message itself.
 - ii) I like to put it this way: Are you saved? If you are, then congratulations, you are now in the full time ministry. One's ministry can be the home and/or work or school. It does not mean one spends 100% of one's time preaching the Gospel message. It means that one is always a witness for God in all that one does and sometimes that does include preaching when the situation calls for it.
 - iii) The question is not whether or not we are "fairly compensated" for our work. The question is what is our primary motivation? Are we motivated to be a part of God's "victory parade" or are we motivated by our next paycheck!
 - d) Let me pause and talk about "burn out" in the ministry. Most if not all people in the "professional ministry" consider quitting at times. It is hard work and one gives up a lot for that lifestyle. It is common for ministers (like the rest of us) to develop doubts about God. That too, is one of Satan's greatest methods of attack, to get us to doubt our trust in God. Sometimes one just has to pray their way through such situations.
 - i) A pastor named Alistair Begg said this about burnout: "I usually quit the ministry Sunday night before bed time. Then I wake up Monday morning and say, "OK, I'll give it one more week!" He then goes on and does what God calls Him to do.
 - ii) I've also seen pastors get so bogged down in "programs" that they can't adequately spend time in God's word or do the things God calls them to do. At such times, remember that Paul had to choose between staying in "Troas" where there was a great opportunity to do what Paul loves to do or "go where his heart is" and check on the Christians in Corinth. My point is sometimes the best way to avoid burnt out is to focus what God is calling you (not me, not anyone else) to do for that moment. If God wanted more people in Troas to be saved God will make it possible even if we are not the one's to "do it".
 - iii) I recently heard an illustration that applies here: If for the moment we are 90% sure that God exists and "10% of us have doubts", remember that the "90%" majority is still in God's favor and we should focus on that aspect.
11. Chapter 3, Verse 1: Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? ²You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. ³You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.
- a) To understand the opening verse of Chapter 3, we need to remember what Paul said at the end of Chapter 2. Paul said in Verse 16 of Chapter 2 that we don't peddle the word of God "for profit" but speak out of sincerity. (For those who don't know, the chapter breaks were added many centuries later and are not part of the original text.)
 - i) With that said, these verses make more sense. Paul had opposition in Corinth. Apparently this "opposition" carried letters of recommendation about themselves.
 - ii) Let me quickly go on the record and say that there are many situations where letters of recommendation are a good idea. That is not the point here.
 - iii) Paul is saying in effect that he doesn't need any letters of recommendation. Paul started the Corinthian church and preached there for at least eighteen months.
 - iv) Paul is asking in effect, "Do you want proof that I was sent from God". Well, look no further than to look at yourself. You, the Christians of Corinth are my proof that I was sent by God. Look at your lives now compared to before you became a Christian. That is my proof that I was sent by God. I don't need any letters of recommendations from other people, as I have you people as my living proof.

12. Verse 4: Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. ⁵Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
- a) Paul's point is that neither he, nor us, should claim any credit for the good work we do through Christ. It is God working through us that makes a difference. It is the Holy Spirit leading us that gives us the ability to draw others closer to God. My point is God, in the "trinity" is working in us to make a difference for Him.
 - b) This gets back to Satan's methods of attack. One of those methods is to appeal to our ego. The danger is about giving ourselves the credit that God deserves. For any good thing we do for God, we need to turn around and give God the credit.
 - i) So what's wrong with giving ourselves a little "pat on the back" when something we do turns out for "God's glory"? The danger is it builds our ego and makes us think we can do things without God.
 - ii) Giving God all the credit is not only the "truth" in terms of who deserves the credit, but it also gets our focus back on the source of our power.
 - c) Paul says we are ministers of a "new covenant" in Verse 6. Paul's point is that he is comparing the Gospel message to what Jewish rabbis were teaching.
 - i) I suspect that the people who opposed Paul (i.e., the "false teachers" that came to Corinth) were teaching that in order to be saved, one had to be obedient to all the laws in the Old Testament. Because that was Paul's opposition, Paul is going to make an argument that those who teach the "law" are teaching of something that leads to death. Those that teach about Jesus teach how we get saved for eternity.
 - d) Before I move on to the next set of verses, I would like to explain why the Old Testament is called the Old Testament and the New Testament is called the New Testament?
 - i) The idea of a "Testament" is a contract between two parties. One can think of the Old Testament and the New Testament as contracts between God and mankind. A new "contract" was necessary due to the collectively failure of mankind to be able to keep the "Old" one. Let me explain further.
 - ii) The Old Testament is all about a contract between God and the Jewish race. The idea is that in order to be saved, one has to keep all of God's laws and one had to perform sacrificial rituals in order to receive forgiveness' of sins.
 - iii) The New Testament is all about a contract God makes with all people who choose to believe in Him through Jesus. We get eternal life and we will become perfect not because we are "good enough", but because we accept Jesus' payment for our sins. In other words, we deserve to be punished for the sins we have committed in our lives, but we accept Jesus sacrifice as a substitute for our sins.
 - iv) So, why was the "Old Testament" necessary? Why couldn't Jesus have died on the cross after Adam and Eve sinned and saved a lot of trouble? If Jesus died back then, nobody would know what "sin was" and what were God's requirements to spend eternity with Him. The law teaches us what God expects us and what are His requirements for us as humans. In order for us to understand that we are sinners and we need to be redeemed, the "Old Testament contract" was needed.
 - v) Another purpose of the Old Testament was to let history show that nobody is able to perfectly keep the Old Testament laws. Don't get me wrong. There are lots of saved people before Jesus' time. A purpose of history through the Old Testament was to show that people could never be good enough for God based on keeping the law.
 - e) OK, enough about the "Testament's". ☺ Let's get back to this letter to the Corinthians.

13. Verse 7: Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was,
- a) Verse 7 is a sentence that is finished in Verse 8. Sometimes when I write, I use run-on sentences. When it comes to writing, Paul has me beat in long, run on sentences. ☺
 - b) It is best to take this verse one phrase at a time and then tie it together.
 - i) The first part says "the ministry that brought death". This refers to the "Ten Commandments". It brought death in the sense that they tell us what are God's standards for salvation. The Old Testament never gives us the power to live in the way God wants us to live. That is what the Holy Spirit does.
 - a) The 10 commandments brought death in that the price for not obeying those laws (without seeking God's forgiveness) leads to death.
 - ii) The text then says, "Engraved in letters of stones". The Ten Commandments were written by the "finger of God" in stone and given to Moses. (See Exodus 31:18.)
 - iii) Next it says, "Came with glory". There is a "glory" to the Old Testament. It should not be disregarded. It still came by the "finger of God".
 - iv) The last part of the verse talks about how when Moses spoke to the Israelites he had a veil over his face. This is described in Exodus Chapter 34.
 - a) If you recall, Moses received from God the "Ten Commandments" twice. The first time Moses got the tablets, he broke them in anger as the Israelites were sinning in that they made an idol (a calf) and worshipped it. The second time Moses got the law is when he "glowed" from God's presence.
 - b) It is as if God manifested Himself to Moses in the form of visible light and that light stuck to Moses' face. Moses put a veil over his face as it was too bright for the Israelites to look at. (Again, this is in Exodus, Chapter 34.)
 - c) Paul's point is that Moses kept the veil on his face so the Israelites could not see the light fade over time. It is as if the Israelites could say to Moses, "Hey Moses, your face was not as bright as it was yesterday! What did you do, yell at your kids today or something?" ☺
 - v) Paul is taking a true, historical story and using it as an illustration. Paul is teaching that the Old Testament and its laws had "glory" as it came from God. At the same time, the New Testament will be more glorious as it provides a way for man to be saved and not just a "you do this and I'll do that" type of contract.
14. Verse 8: will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?
- a) Verse 8 finishes the sentence and is the key point. The point is that the "ministry of the Spirit" is more glorious than what Moses did.
 - b) Let me pause from the main topic and explain why Paul is discussing all of this.
 - i) I believe the underlying idea is that those "teachers" in Corinth who opposed Paul were the ones who wanted to teach that in order to be saved, one had to obey all the laws that Moses gave. Paul is giving this line of argument in order to show that obedience to the law is not necessary for the Christian in the sense that the price for sin has been paid once and for all.
 - c) Getting back to Verse 8, why is the "ministry of the Spirit" more glorious than when Moses gave the Israelites "the law"? To answer that, first understand that in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit could "come and go" upon a person at will.
 - i) One of David's prayers is for God not to take the Holy Spirit from him. (See Psalm 51:11). Christians cannot pray David's prayer in that when a Christian is saved, the Holy Spirit comes upon us and stays upon us. As long as we believe Jesus is God and paid the price for sins, the Holy Spirit lives with us.

- ii) The "ministry of the spirit" is more glorious in that the Spirit guides us as to how to please God. The idea of the Spirit is "Here is all the power you need in order to please God in the first place!"
 - d) Another way to put all of this is that the failure in the Old Testament is that mankind (collectively) is incapable of pleasing God without having "God-given" power to do so. The law taught us God's standards for right and wrong, but didn't provide us with the power to please God. The Old Testament "collectively" teaches us that we are incapable of pleasing God based on our own abilities. We can't do it without the "Spirit of God" living within us. That is the idea behind Verses 7 and 8.
15. Verse 9: If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! ¹⁰For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. ¹¹And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!
- a) Paul is continuing his point of the superiority of the Gospel message over "the law" in verses 9 through 11.
 - b) Verse 8 says, "The ministry that condemns men is glorious". The idea is that the "law" still has glory as it came from God. Yet it is inferior to the New Testament in the sense that the teaching of the New Testament brings "salvation".
 - c) The idea is the "ministry of Spirit", is Paul's term to describe those who accept Jesus are "more glorious" in that the benefits lasts forever and brings everlasting life.
 - i) The idea is that the ministry of Moses "fades over time" in that if one fails to obey God's law, it leads to death. There is no such condemnation in Christianity.
 - ii) If you talk to a religious Jewish person, they will argue the "law is just fine" in that all one has to do is confess their sins and then they are forgiven. What that religious Jewish person doesn't get is that God still requires blood to be shed for the forgiveness of sins as it was in the Old Testament. We as Christians accept Jesus' blood as our sin payment. Why must blood be shed? The concept is to show that sin hurts the "innocent" and the sacrifice of innocent animals not only pointed toward Jesus, but visually showed that the price for sins must be paid.
 - iii) John, are you saying that if Jews started doing animal sacrifices again, they could be saved without the blood of Jesus? No. That is because they are now guilty of rejecting God's free gift of the forgiveness of sins in rejecting Jesus' sin payment.
 - d) Let me put this another way: We as Christians believe that in order to be saved, we trust in Jesus for our salvation. If we believe that, why is all of this understanding of the "Old Testament" necessary for us to learn? In other words, what is Paul's point here?
 - i) The reason Paul is going through all of this is because Paul is warning of the danger of "adding" to what Jesus did. Over and above our trust in the cross of payments for our sins, we tend to "add things" in order to be saved. We start to think, "Well God is not happy with me unless I also do this and that". The correct answer is God loves us just as we are.
 - a) Don't get me wrong, God still wants us to live a life pleasing to Him, and when we sin, God wants us to confess that sin.
 - b) My point is we can't be "more saved" by doing this or that. When we sin, it messes up our life on earth, but it doesn't affect our salvation.

16. Verse 12: Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.
- a) Paul gets back to the concept of the "glory of Moses" fading over time. We as Christians can be bold in preaching the Gospel because that message doesn't diminish when a saved person commits some sort of sin. We can still preach salvation for ourselves and anyone who wants to join us, despite whatever sin we are guilty of at any moment.
 - b) When we confess a sin, it draws us closer to God in that we realize what we did was wrong. However, the confession of any one sin after we are saved has no bearing on our salvation. Confession affects our life "hear and now", but not our salvation.
 - i) Again, the issue for us is not so much the "return" to the Old Testament, but the danger of trying to "add things" to our salvation requirements.
17. Verse 14: But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.
- a) Here we get to Paul's "real point": It is that when Jewish people read the Old Testament today (Paul calls it the old "covenant" in Verse 14), their hearts are "made dull" as if there is a veil between their eyes and the words of the bible.
 - b) I have an Orthodox Jewish friend who quoted me this verse years ago and then laughed. He believes religious Jews can understand the Old Testament "just fine" and even read the New Testament if they wanted to. I didn't know how to respond to that "laugh" until I understood the following principal:
 - i) The point here is not that an unsaved person cannot read the New Testament.
 - ii) The point here is that an unsaved person does not believe the New Testament.
 - iii) I believe someone who is not saved can read the words of the bible "just fine". That is not the point of the "veil" illustration. The point is not that a "religious Jewish" person is unable to read the New Testament. The point is that their heart is "veiled" in that they refuse to comprehend the proper meaning.
 - c) When Christians read the Old Testament, we see Jesus all over the place. The mistake Christians make is we think we can walk up to a religious Jewish person and show them "Isaiah 53" (as an example) and think they will be instantly converted as that passage is very bluntly about what Jesus did on the cross. Yet, the religious Jewish person will deny that interpretation. That is because "a veil remains on their heart" about Jesus and just showing them that passage doesn't remove the veil.
 - i) So, if that is true, how does one witness to a religious Jewish person? The same way we witness to any other unsaved person. We start by praying for their salvation. We pray that God (not us) removes the "spiritual veil" so that they can see that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Then we approach them and watch and see if God (not us) does remove the veil.
 - d) Personally, I think the biggest mistake Christians make in trying to witness to anyone is we try to go for a "home run", when often a "single" will work. What I mean by that baseball analogy is sometimes it is better to give the person something to think about as oppose to trying to force them to accept Jesus there on the spot.
 - i) For example, most unsaved American adults have heard and comprehend the Gospel message, they just don't believe it. Therefore, simply preaching the message of salvation won't be enough. What people like that often need is something for them to think about. That is where "hitting a single" can help.

- ii) In summary, it is always about God working in people's lives. We make the mistake of thinking that unless "I" convert that person, they will never be saved. If God desires that person to be saved, He will make it possible. There may be times where God wants us to "hit a home run" for Him. Often, He just wants us to "hit a single" and help draw that person just a little closer to Him.
- e) This leads me back to my opening theme of "forgiveness". When somebody does something wrong to us, our natural instinct is to want to get revenge. God wants us to see people as someone who needs salvation. Even if they are saved and hurt us, God wants us to see them as needing to draw closer to Him, or else they would not have done that deed in the first place.
 - i) The point is, the way we get past that hurtful pain is to look at the one who has hurt us as needing Jesus. As a simple example, if we can learn to pray for people who cut us off in traffic as oppose to wishing death upon them, ☺ we can have a greater sense of peace and possibly make a difference in their lives.
- f) As usual, I got on a roll, with a few more verses left to go. Let's take it on now:

18. Verse 17: Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

 - a) First, notice that Verse 17 says, "The Lord is the Spirit". If you have any doubts that the Holy Spirit "is" God, here is a proof verse.
 - b) Let me ask quickly, why does the Spirit have to be a separate "entity" than God the Father? Why can't the Spirit just be describing God's will being done in us?
 - i) Part of the answer is to comprehend the "Spirit of God" only taking up residence in believers and not nonbelievers.
 - ii) Part of the answer is that it is the Holy Spirit's job to draw people closer to God. The Holy Spirit is the one who convicts believers and nonbelievers of sins. Nonbelievers understand the conviction; they usually just choose to ignore it.
 - iii) Since the Spirit is working in some people's lives and not others, it is best to comprehend the Spirit as a "separate entity" from God the Father, but still "One" with God the Father in that they agree upon the same goals.
 - c) Paul's next point is "where the Spirit is, there is freedom". The idea is Christians are not condemned by the requirements of the law, as the price for sin has been paid.
 - d) The final point I want to make is the phrase "being transformed" from Verse 18.
 - i) The idea is that salvation is a "three prong" process. We were saved when we first accepted Jesus. We will be saved when we are resurrected, and more importantly here, we are being saved in that God desires we grow more and more like Him every day.
 - ii) Think of it this way, "Are we the same person now then before we were saved?" If you have been a Christian for a significant period of time, do you act differently now than how you did before you were saved? We didn't change by trying harder. We are changing by God working in us to be more like the person He wants us to be. That is the idea of "being transformed".
 - iii) OK, I said that was my last point, and I meant it. ☺
- 19. Let's pray: Father, thank You for changing us into the person You want us to be. Help us to draw close to You so You can continue to work in our lives for Your glory. Help us to see others as "needing Jesus" and not somebody we need to take revenge upon. Help us to forgive others who have done us wrong and see them as needing You. Guide us so that nothing blocks our relationship with You and we trust in You, and You alone for our salvation. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.