

Lesson 2 11 May 2014

The Glorious Gospel of Christ

Lesson Scope: [2 Corinthians 2:12](#) – [2 Corinthians 4:7](#)

Lesson Focus

Paul expected to meet Titus at Troas with the anticipation of receiving a report concerning the response of the Corinthians to his first letter. Titus was not there, however, and Paul moved on to Macedonia, where he met severe difficulties (2 Corinthians 7:5). Nevertheless, he was greatly comforted by the coming of Titus, who gave him a favorable report of the saints at Corinth (2 Corinthians 7:6).

The lesson opens with a burst of thanksgiving for the efficacy of the Gospel and for the triumph of its ministers. In humility Paul exclaimed, "And who is sufficient for these things?" He understood that divine power had changed his life completely, and the consuming passion of his life was to share the Gospel with others.

The Gospel outlines God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. Its provisions transform and empower the believer, bringing liberty from the bondage of sin.

The teachings of the Lesson Text rest on Paul's use of three illustrations. The first is that of a Roman triumphal march with its burning incense. The second is the epistle or letter of commendation carried by a clergyman traveling to serve in another city. The third is the veil that Moses wore when he descended from Mt. Sinai. These pictures help us to understand the text.

The theme of glory pervades the text. The revelations of God are always glorious. The glory of God was manifested in the establishment of the Old Covenant, but that glory has been eclipsed by the glory of the New. The glory of the New Covenant will not fade or be eclipsed by another. It is an ever-increasing, eternal glory.

Lesson Aim: To increase our understanding of the purpose and power of the Gospel.

Theme Verse: [2 Corinthians 4:6](#). For God, who commanded the light

to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Lesson Text

"The Spirit Giveth Life"

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 ¹⁴ Now thanks *be* unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. ¹⁵ For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: ¹⁶ To the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:2-6 ² Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: ³ *Forasmuch as ye are* manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. ⁴ And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: ⁵ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God; ⁶ Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

"The Glory That Excelleth"

2 Corinthians 3:7-8 ⁷ But if the ministration of death, written *and* engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which *glory* was to be done away: ⁸ How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

2 Corinthians 3:10-16 ¹⁰ For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. ¹¹ For if that which is done away *was* glorious, much more that which remaineth *is* glorious. ¹² Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: ¹³ And not as Moses, *which* put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: ¹⁴ But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which

vail is done away in Christ. ¹⁵ But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the *vail* is upon their heart. ¹⁶ Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the *vail* shall be taken away.

"The Light ... of the Glory of God"

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 ¹⁷ Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. ¹⁸ But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 4:1-2 ¹ Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; ² But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

2 Corinthians 4:6-7 ⁶ For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Questions for Study

"The Spirit Giveth Life"

1. How could Paul be triumphant in the midst of difficulties?
2. How can the Gospel be a savor of life to some but a savor of death to others?
3. In what sense is the Christian an epistle read of all men? "

"The Glory That Excelleth"

4. Why did Moses veil his face? What did that symbolize?
5. In what ways does the Gospel excel the Old Testament system? "

"The Light ... of the Glory of God"

6. What does it mean to have an open face (2 Corinthians 3:18)?
7. What are the "earthen vessels" spoken of in 2 Corinthians 4:7? How do they demonstrate the purpose and power of the Gospel?

Analyzing the Passage

In 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 Paul alluded to the processions that followed a Roman triumph. The victors rode in great glory, bearing laurels and

burning incense. But the captives were often chained to the victor's chariot wheels. To the victors, the smell of incense was the aroma of victory; but to the captives destined to die in the arena, it was the odor of doom.

Paul portrays the Gospel as a "sweet savour" or fragrance (2 Corinthians 2:15). The believer bears this sweet fragrance of Christ as a testimony for God. This testimony encourages those who believe, but it condemns those who reject.

In 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 the believer is likened to a letter. The letter is from Christ; the pen is the ministry of the church; and the ink is the Spirit. Paul magnified the work of God and minimized human instrumentality. The changed life of the believer proves the validity of the Gospel.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6-18 Paul showed the fallacy of holding on to the Old Testament Law. He compared the glory of the old with the glory of the new. The glory of the old was a fading glory; but the glory of the new becomes brighter.

The veiling used by Moses served two purposes: It covered the brightness of his countenance so that Israel could bear to look at him, and it prevented Israel from beholding the fading of the glory (2 Corinthians 3:7, 13). Through the work of the Spirit, the believer is changed from glory to glory!

Principles and Applications

"The Spirit Giveth Life"

1. The Gospel enables the Christian to have continual victory over Satan (2 Corinthians 2:14). Satan is a defeated foe. He sealed his own doom when he instigated the crucifixion of Christ. Through faith in Christ and by the aid of the Spirit, we can receive the divine nature and live in victory.

2. Victory through the Gospel enables the Christian to give forth an attractive testimony for Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14-16; 3:2). The world notices true Christians. They acknowledge the sweet fragrance of Christian brotherhood and godly homes. They like to do business with people who are honest and fair. The challenge rests with us to never mar that testimony by inconsistent living. It has been well said that the Christian is the only Bible many people read.

3. God alone makes men worthy ministers of the Gospel through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:4-6). "Who is sufficient for these things?" Many times, in the midst of life's trials and tests, we come to the end of ourselves and realize that our sufficiency is of God! It is the Spirit who gives life and enables the Christian to be a light and testimony to the world. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Let us by faith reach out to God for His blessing and direction.

"The Glory That Excelleth"

4. The glory of the Gospel is that it is spiritual and life-giving (2 Corinthians 3:7-8, 10-11). The Law brought condemnation, but the Spirit brought life and power for righteous living. The Law made man aware of sin but provided no remedy. The Gospel not only identifies sin but also provides a remedy. Our lives must reflect that glory, that power, and that spiritual life.

5. The Gospel surpasses the Law in permanence (2 Corinthians 3:11). The Law served God's purpose for a limited time. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ is eternal. Christ's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. The Old Testament is full of types and shadows, but the Gospel fulfills them with a permanent reality. Through faith in the Gospel, we have assurance and the hope of eternal life.

"The Light ... of the Glory of God"

6. The glory of the Gospel is light for the soul (2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 2 Corinthians 4:6). An open-faced person sincerely desires to grow in the likeness of his Lord. Through the Scriptures we catch a vision of Christ and learn how we should live. It is a growing experience that will culminate in the glories of heaven.

7. The power of the Gospel is expressed in a practical life of righteousness (2 Corinthians 4:1-2). The Gospel must be expressed in everyday life. We are no longer under law as a schoolmaster; we are under grace with principles to apply. God calls us to progressive sanctification and Christian growth. The fruit of the Spirit replaces the works of the flesh. Do our neighbors know us as honest, blameless, and compassionate people? We must carefully avoid evil and anything that has the appearance of evil.

Important Teachings

1. The Gospel enables the Christian to have continual victory over Satan (2 Corinthians 2:14).
2. Victory through the Gospel enables the Christian to give forth an attractive testimony for Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14-16; 3:2).
3. God alone makes men worthy ministers of the Gospel through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:4-6).
4. The glory of the Gospel is that it is spiritual and life-giving (2 Corinthians 3:7-8, 10-11).
5. The Gospel surpasses the Law in permanence (2 Corinthians 3:11).
6. The glory of the Gospel is light for the soul (2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 4:6).
7. The power of the Gospel is expressed in a practical life of righteousness (2 Corinthians 4:1-2).

Answers to Questions

1. How could Paul be triumphant in the midst of difficulties?

Paul was triumphant in the midst of difficulties because he saw God at work! He found great comfort in Christian fellowship. The favorable response of the saints at Corinth was a contributing factor. Paul viewed present difficulties as insignificant in the light of eternal reward.

2. How can the Gospel be a savor of life to some but a savor of death to others?

The answer to this question is linked to the Romans' triumph. The smell of incense meant something different to the captives than it did to the victors. Just so, the witness of the Gospel is condemning to those who reject it, but it is sweet to those who believe.

3. In what sense is the Christian an epistle read of all men? The answer to this question is illustrated by a leader in the church needing an epistle of commendation when serving away from home base. Just so the Christian is a living proof of the efficacy of the Gospel. When others view the life of a Christian, they see the teachings of Jesus applied in real life.

4. Why did Moses veil his face? What did that symbolize?

Moses veiled his face because the children of Israel could not bear to look upon the brightness of his countenance. Later in the text we learn

that the veil also prevented Israel from seeing the fading of that glory. The veil symbolizes the blindness of Israel in their inability to see Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. They were refusing the glorious Gospel by holding on to the Law, even though it was abolished by the coming of Christ. This veil upon the heart is removed when individuals turn to the Lord.

5. In what ways does the Gospel excel the Old Testament system?

The Old Testament system provided a covering for sin, but the Gospel is able to remove sin. Romans 3:25 clearly states that the blood of Jesus made propitiation for the sins that were past (Old Testament). The Gospel excels in that it is spiritual and life giving. The Law made man aware of sin and brought condemnation, but the Gospel provides a remedy. The Gospel surpasses the Law in preeminence. It fulfills the Old Testament types and shadows.

6. What does it mean to have an open face (2 Corinthians 3:18)?

To have an open face is to have the veil of unbelief removed through faith in the Gospel. Through the indwelling presence of the Spirit, the joy of freedom produces a radiant countenance. Through the light of the Gospel, our lives show forth the glory of God, and we have nothing to hide. Through sanctification of the Spirit, our lives become more glowing.

7. What are the "earthen vessels" spoken of in 2 Corinthians 4:7? How do they demonstrate the purpose and power of the Gospel?

The earthen vessels are our perishable human bodies. By placing the treasure of the Gospel in perishable human vessels, God's marvelous wisdom and power are more clearly evident. In ourselves, we could never do what God accomplishes through us.

Summarizing the Lesson

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises throughout the Old Testament. It expresses His love and reveals the glorious purpose of His heart in the creation of man. Man's faith in the Gospel brings him into sympathy with God's heart, and the power of grace makes it possible for him to be instrumental in carrying out God's will. The ultimate goal is a glorious eternity with God! Praise the Lord!

Research Guide

1. Read the account of Moses veiling his face (Exodus 34:29-35).
2. Read Scriptures listed under "Gospel" in Nave's Topical Bible.