

Reflecting The Glory Of God

One of the chief ways which God helps us to endure and persevere is by the supernatural support He provides through His **Holy Spirit**. The Holy Spirit lives inside of all believers in Christ Jesus (**John 14:16-17**), and it is through the Spirit's ministry that we receive the **power** to do all that God wants us to do, whether it be spiritual growth, personal ministry, or bearing up under hardship. Because of the high degree of confusion among contemporary Christians regarding the Holy Spirit's ministry, it may be helpful for us to consider the exact nature of His work "on our behalf." Writing to the heresy-prone Corinthians, Paul explores this question in 2nd Corinthians, chapter 3. *"Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You 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" (2 Corinthians 3:1-3).*

Paul begins by criticising the Corinthian church's use of the secular practice of writing "letters of recommendation." The Corinthians were apparently being hoodwinked by a parade of traveling charlatans who carried such letters from other Christian communities and leaders. Things had degenerated to the point where the Corinthians were more impressed with these relatively unknown "dinner-circuit speakers" than with the true apostles, simply because of their "good credentials." No doubt they were good speakers too, with polished lines, and titillating rhetorical flourishes which kept the Corinthians entertained. However, this Spirit was not leading them! Doesn't this sound familiar? Here, Paul is exasperated by the Corinthians' attitude, and rightly so. For they have put more emphasis in man's approval (as represented by the letters of recommendation) than in God's approval!

The primary reason why we are here on earth is for the purpose of glorifying God. So how do we go about accomplishing this incredible task? The Corinthians had the impression that if "important people" say you are glorifying God, then you really are doing just that! On that premise we should therefore seek the approval of men, call attention to ourselves, and energetically engage in activities of which the world would approve. Paul, on the other hand, tells them candidly that they are wrong. He says that he, for one, does not need "human" approval (i.e. letters of recommendation). Paul has divine validation provided by the Corinthians themselves, for they are his letters, living proof of his ministry. Paul's "letters" are not written with material things like pen and ink, or on perishable paper, but are written by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of men. Do you see the point Paul is making? The real **power** for living a Christian life comes from God (through His Holy Spirit), not from human effort, and the real mark of a Christian's success is not to be found in human praise, but true spiritual results.

Paul knew that God's way was to "make known" only through the lives of the Corinthians themselves. Their lives were the only legitimate "letters of recommendation," demonstrating the true effect of his ministry. People were to look at his followers, look at their spiritual growth and service, and conclude *"truly, this must be the work of God we see."* How do we glorify God? We let Him glorify Himself through us. If we continue to follow Him, continue to grow spiritually, continue to bear up under pressure, then His power, His love, His glory will indeed be reflected in our lives. Paul's words here do not mean that we should seek to glorify God merely by saying, "I am a Christian."

No, we can only fully **reflect** His glory by living the Christian life so that others will say, *"this must be the power of God we see."* Notice, if you **reflect** His glory then others will see exactly what you are reflecting! And as a result, God is glorified!

"We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ. It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God. He has enabled us to be ministers of His new covenant. This is a covenant not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:4-6).

In verses 4 through to 6, Paul makes the additional point that this qualification (confidence, sufficiency) does not stem from his own ability or power, but from God. Paul declares that he is not self-sufficient, but that God is all-sufficient to empower his ministry. The same is true with us. As God empowered Paul to serve Him, so He **empowers** us to do everything He asks of us. The immediate source of that power is the Spirit. Through the indwelling ministry of God's Spirit we have something unique, something believers in the Old Testament did not have. Paul emphasises this by saying in verse 6 that we are ministers of a new covenant, which is *"not characterised by the letter, but by the Spirit"*, and that *"the letter (i.e. the law) kills, but **the Spirit gives life.**"* What Paul means by this is that under the Mosaic law, God's word looked forward to Christ (who had not yet died for us), emphasising our need for a Saviour. While under the new covenant, God's word focuses on our 'empowerment' by the Holy Spirit (**John.7:39**). Through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit, we have a tremendous advantage. Paul tells us that without the Holy Spirit, he would not have "what it takes" to do what he is doing, but with the Holy Spirit, he is **"made able"** to fully accomplish his divine assignment.

"The old way, with laws etched in stone, led to death, though it began with such glory that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was already fading away. Shouldn't we expect far greater glory under the new way, now that the Holy Spirit is giving life? If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new way, which makes us right with God! In fact, that first glory was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the new way. So if the old way, which has been replaced, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new, which remains forever!" (2 Corinthians 3:7-11)

In comparison with the glory of the new ministry of the Holy Spirit (to all believers), the glory manifested under the Old Covenant is said to be negligible. What does this mean? "Glory" is the translation of the Greek "doxa" which means "brightness or brilliance", but also "reputation and fame." So, to glorify God is to somehow make known or visible the incredible luminescence of His person and His awesome works. In the Old Testament example cited by Paul, God gave the world a small glimpse of that brilliance by making Moses' face shine. Moses had spent forty days with the Lord receiving the Law, and a bit of His glory had "rubbed off", so to speak, on Moses. This glory was fading, and Moses covered his face so that the Israelites would not see its end. The glorification of God provided by the Holy Spirit, however, is enduring. It is a brilliant light burning on the inside of every believer, and manifesting God's glory on the outside. According to Paul, this new **glory** surpasses the miracles of the Old Testament in magnitude. The faith, and hope, and love that flows from us, through the Holy Spirit, is a **brighter** star than any manifest miracle could ever be!

"Since this new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold. We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory, even though it was destined to fade away. But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ. Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand. But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image" (2 Corinthians 3:12-18)

The NKJ says, *"Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."*

As a result of the Holy Spirit's ministry, Paul has "confidence" (the Greek word means "positive hope"), and is therefore encouraged to push forward with his ministry. Under the Old Covenant, Moses had to put a veil over his face, but we have a far different mandate. We are commanded to **reflect** God's glory (*"reflecting the glory of the Lord"*). Note: many Bible versions mistranslate the Greek word as 'beholding', but it really means "reflecting." Now, the brilliant light from Moses' face was literal light, while the **glory** we are told to reflect is the very Person of God - namely, the fame and reputation of God Himself.

But how can we possibly reflect God's divine 'Person'? Paul tells us that we are to accomplish this task by ***"being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Spirit of the Lord"***. The "same image" is the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. By nature we are not at all like Christ, but as the name "Christian" (literally, "little Christs") implies, we are to strive to become more like our Saviour day by day. If we do make this effort, the result is *"an ever increasing reflection of glory"*, and those who see us grow in grace will have to conclude that the cause of this miraculous transformation must be ***"from the Spirit of the Lord."***

However, to genuinely reflect God's **glory**, we must do it His way. The true power source for transformation must be the Holy Spirit, not our own human energy or efforts. The more we seek to intrude, by placing ourselves into the picture, the more others will see only our own faces. When those around us look into the "mirror" of our lives, they should only see a clear reflection of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we embrace and reflect His image, we go from glory to glory - not by our own efforts but by the **Spirit of the Lord!**

To conclude let's ask ourselves three important questions:

(1) **How do we do things God's way?**

First of all, we don't do them man's way. People can easily see through phoney "happy-talk". Merely adding spiritual-sounding phrases to every sentence (speaking 'Christianese'), or making an outward show of "being holy" without any of the inner spiritual dynamics is a waste of time. In its broad outline, the Christian way of life is fairly simple. Believe in Christ and then pursue holiness! And as you grow spiritually, God gives you opportunities to minister to

others (according to your various gifts). If you are on this road, you will inevitably reflect God's grace and love to an ever increasing degree.

(2) **How does the ministry of the Holy Spirit work?**

First of all, we must never forget the Lord's words to Zerubbabel in **Zechariah 4:6** "*Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.*" We are only instruments. God has given us very precise marching orders. We should simply carry them out, as good servants, and the Holy Spirit provides the power, the growth, and the results. When Elijah fled to mount Horeb in panic, the Lord sought to teach him this same lesson by bringing past the cave where Elijah hid a terribly powerful wind, then an earthquake, and finally a furnace. But the Lord was not in any of these phenomena, despite their visible power. Then the Lord brought a "still quiet voice", and this voice did contain the power and presence of God.

The whisper of the Holy Spirit to our hearts, encouraging us, guiding us, comforting us, is far more powerful than any visible miracle. If we do in fact walk and talk with God, then His Spirit will help us. The ministry of the Spirit may not be visible, but its effects will be obvious. The fact that we cannot see His ministry, or feel it in the same way that we feel heat and cold, does not make it any less real or vital. This is an important point because many believers are involved in questionable, practices because of their desire to "feel and experience" something tangible. We need only try (do our best), and the Holy Spirit will help us follow where He leads. And that is usually somewhere unexpected!

(3) **How does all this relate to the storms of life?**

If we do reach out to the Lord in trust, His Holy Spirit (whom He has given to us as a comforter and helper) will indeed help us to endure whatever storms we must navigate. If we really do believe that God is our shepherd, that he watches over us and is greatly concerned for us, why do we complain, why does our faith get shaken?

Sometimes we complain because we hurt and because we are human. The Psalms of David are filled with David's woeful cries to the Lord, but David did not faint in his faith. In the midst of his trials, he trusted God. He shed his tears to the Lord knowing that the Lord would deliver him because of His amazing grace and great mercy. Our challenge today is to have such faith, such confidence, in a loving Father who will help us! If we will but take this step of faith in times of trouble, His Holy Spirit will help and comfort us also. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there you will find the victory! And as with any transformation, you will go from glory to glory and from victory to victory!

Remember, in order to genuinely reflect God's glory, we need to do things His way! The true power source for transformation must be the Holy Spirit, and not our own human efforts. When those around us look into the "mirror" of our lives, they should only see a clear reflection of Jesus Christ. As we embrace and reflect Christ's image, we go from glory to glory - not by our own efforts but by the Spirit of the Lord! Yes, we've all been given the opportunity to "*arise and shine, for the glory of the Lord has risen upon us!*" So get up right now and do it **His way**!

His way is glorious! His way is victorious! His way is miraculous!