

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: II Corinthians 3

Scripture of Lesson: II Corinthians 3: 1-18

1. Christians as Epistle of Christ: v. 1-6

While in verse 2:16 Paul testified that the ministers of Christ including himself are a sweet savor of Christ to those who are saved, he compares the Christians as an epistle, which can be read by all people [v. 3:2]. Verse 3 describes what kind of a letter the Christians are:

Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. [3:3]

Why is he comparing the epistle written by the Spirit of God with tablets of stone? Apparently, the object of comparison in Paul's mind is the tablets of Ten Commandments given by God to Israel through Moses in the wilderness:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them." [Ex 24:12]

The tablets of commandments and the detailed ceremonial and civic laws were provided for compliance, the people of Israel complained to God through Moses some 14 times during their wilderness journey over 40 years. The covenant of God through Moses was the same covenant of grace. Yet it was given through written commandments and laws. In comparison, the new covenant through Christ is given to those who accept and follow Christ as written on the hearts, on "tablets of flesh" as Paul referred as.

Paul is testifying in verses 5-6 that he is a minister of this New Testament of the spirit. As he looks back on the OT, though it served its purpose of keeping the people in line with God's guideline of holiness, the written laws did not give life to people. As military people, active or retired, we had to undergo various training programs under defined rules and guidelines. These trainings shaped our behaviors and performances in line with the defined standards of the military. However, some soldiers, sailors or airmen never truly become true patriots because their hearts fail to be molded to the spirit of the military. Likewise, although two million Israeli people traveled together for 40 years under the Mosaic Law discipline, many died in the wilderness as failed souls because of their unbelief and willfulness.

And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. [Num 14:33]

Paul is pointing out to the Christians at Corinth that he is not a minister of legalism, which specifies what to do and what not to do such as the Mosaic Law did, but rather he has been made an able minister of the NT of the Spirit of God so that they ought to be subject to the inner workings of the Holy Spirit as encouraged and admonished by the NT ministers such as himself.

2. Veil of Hindrance to God's truth: v. 7-18

In the account of the time Moses spent with God on top of Mount Sinai [Ex 34:29-35], while he was speaking with God, his face became shiny. So when he came down to deliver God's message to the people, they could not dare to look at his face straight because it was so shiny. Therefore, Moses put a veil over his

face whenever he spoke to the people. This is the glory Paul is referring to in verse 3:7 when he pointed out that the ministry of life-giving NT had more glory than the glory of Moses who ministered to the Mosaic Law.

This veil over Moses' face is used as a symbol of prejudice, willful spirit of disobedience and spiritual dumbness that are before the Jewish people who are abiding in the law and not in the Spirit of God. In verse 15 Paul criticizes, "Even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart." As the people of Israel could not look straight on Moses' face because of God's glory on it, the Jews of the first century could not comprehend the truth in the OT when they read the Scriptures. Paul indicates this condition of the Jews with veil over their hearts is a spiritual bondage. In verse 17 he claims, "Now the Lord is that Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." In other words, when a person accepts the Lord Jesus, the veil over his/her heart is removed and we are set at true spiritual liberty to see God's truth without prejudice and spiritual dumbness.

In verse 18 Paul points to "the glory of the Lord," which we the Christians can behold with an open face without a veil of hindrance, and we can be changed to the image of Jesus Christ of heavenly glory by the Spirit of the Lord. Peter encouraged Christian elders to be examples to the flock, "when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. [1 Pet 5:4]." Peter, John and Paul must have seen ahead through a vision the heavenly throng before the throne of God assembled in heavenly honor and glory, worshipping God day and night and enjoying the consolation and rewards from the Lamb of God [Rev 7:9-17].

The glory of Christians is not here on the earth but is yet to come when the Lord returns and in the heavenly kingdom. But the hope we have is a sure one. In verse 12 Paul affirms this sure hope, "*Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech.*" Gospel of Christ is not confusing but is delivered in great simplicity, plainness and truthfulness. When a person attempts to deceive people, they use ambiguous, flowery words and expressions to create an aura of mystery and thus mislead people to believe their false story. The truth of the gospel of Christ is just the opposite. That is why when honest people listen to the gospel, the veil that has been shrouding their conscience due to sin and depravity is removed when the person responds truthfully to the message. Then the wonderful light of understanding penetrates deep into the person's inner self, illuminating what is in it, convicting the person of his sinful state and cause him to lie prostrate before God in true repentance.

We live in an evil era when Satan has deceived many people to love intellectual sophistication, which is nothing but a ploy to draw people away from God and to make their hearts impure and their conscience dull. Satan has deceived the people to regard sins as acceptable norms of life style. He has pushed the human pride and arrogance take the place of this world's dominion where God should be enthroned. He has preached the so-called "New World Order," which is nothing but a ploy to place the nations under his umbrella towards God's damnation. Christians today must watch and pray so that we do not fall into Satan's trap. Rather, Christians must testify God's truth bravely so that His kingdom spread throughout the world.

Discussion topics:

- 1. Share stories of the times you felt like your life was being read, like a letter written in ink, by others.*
- 2. Did you have any veil like hindrances over your heart when you listened to the gospel of Christ? How was it removed to receive the gospel?*
- 3. What kinds of veil has Satan placed over the world today as hindrances of the work of God?*