

5. Learning Why the Spirit Gives Life

In our last topic, we saw that God causes us to triumph as we share the Gospel with the right motive. We saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example how to share the Gospel to please Christ and not for self-gain. In our topic today, we are going to see why others learn about the power of Spirit of the living God as they see us yield our lives to the control of the Holy Spirit.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, he asked them two questions. Those questions are given for us in 2 Corinthians 3:1 where we read, “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you?” The word that is translated “commend” means *to present, to introduce or to place together*. It can be used in either a good sense or a negative sense. In 2 Corinthians 10:12, we read, “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” We see in this verse that “commend” is used in a negative sense to talk about those who are trying to make themselves appear good to others. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul is asking if he and those traveling with him needed letters of introduction to the Corinthians.

Some false teachers would bring letters that they said were from one of the apostles or another leader in the church to give the appearance that they were true teachers. Such false teachers had probably written the letters themselves. Paul said that he and those with him did not need to write such false letters for themselves. Paul then asked if the Corinthians felt that they needed to have letters of commendation about Paul and those who traveled with them. He asked if they needed letters from them in order to be accepted by them. Here, we see that Paul is making it clear that they already knew Paul and his traveling companions.

That is why 2 Corinthians 3:2 says, “You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men.” Paul said that the Christians in Corinth were the only letter that he needed. Paul said that the Corinthians were written in the hearts of Paul and his companions. This meant that they were loved and close to the hearts of Paul and his companions. It also meant that Paul prayed for them without ceasing. Ephesians 3:16-19 gives us an example of how Paul prayed for Christians in other areas. Those verses say, “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height--to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Here, we see five things for which we should pray for Christians in other areas even though we do not see them regularly.

As Paul prayed for other Christians, he prayed that:

1. God would grant them according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man
2. Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith
3. They would be rooted and grounded in love
4. They would be able to comprehend the width, length, depth and height of the love of Christ

which passes knowledge

5. They would be filled with all the fullness of God

We see why Paul could say that the Corinthian Christians were written in their hearts because they prayed for them continually. Paul said that the lives of the Corinthian Christians were the most important letter that could be written. The other people of Corinth knew the Christians. They knew how the Lord had transformed the lives of the Christians. Paul said that the changed lives of the Corinthian Christians were the most important introduction for Paul and the team with him. Everyone could see that their lives were changed by the message of Christ that Paul and the team had shared with them. In the same way, the lives of our physical and spiritual children are the best testimony of the effectiveness of our lives.

Paul described the changed lives of the Christians in Corinth when he said in 2 Corinthians 3:3, “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.” Paul said that their lives were a letter of Christ. However, they were not a letter that was written with ink. Instead, they were a letter written by the Spirit of the living God. Here, we see that the Holy Spirit is the one who changes and transforms our lives as we yield our lives to the Holy Spirit moment by moment. The Old Testament law was written by God on tablets of stone and given to Moses. In contrast, the lives of the Christians in Corinth had been changed and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the same way, our physical and spiritual children are the letter that we have written in our lives and ministry. 1 Corinthians 4:17 says, “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” Timothy was a spiritual son of Paul. Paul said that Timothy was a faithful and beloved son. He said that Timothy would remind the Corinthians of the ways of Paul in Christ. Here, we see that that his example and his words were in agreement because he taught the same things and lived the same life wherever he went.

During the time of the early church, false Jewish teachers were trying to tell Gentile Christians that they also had to keep the Jewish law in order to be saved. Such false teachers were trying to keep the Law of Moses written on pieces of stone in their efforts to try and earn their salvation. In contrast, Paul said that true Christians are those who have the Holy Spirit living in their hearts. Romans 8:2-4 says, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” We have been set free from the Law of Moses and have been given spiritual life because the Holy Spirit has come into our human spirit and given us spiritual life.

We go on to read in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6, “And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency

is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” The false teachers thought that trying to keep the law was sufficient to make them acceptable to God. Paul made it clear that he did not try to depend on his own efforts to serve the Lord. In John 15:5, Christ told the disciples the night before He was crucified, “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Even as Christians, we will always fail if we try to depend on our own strength.

The word that is translated “sufficient” means *to have the ability to do what we do*. We do not have any ability to do the work of the Lord in our own strength. That is why Christ told the disciples in Luke 24:49, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” We must have our sufficiency from God in order to have the power to do the work of the Lord. Here, we see that God has made us sufficient ministers of the new covenant. The old covenant was the law and could only bring death because the law showed that we are all guilty of sin and that there is nothing we can do in ourselves to change.

In contrast, the Holy Spirit was given as our down payment and guarantee of the eternal life that we received by faith in Christ. 2 Corinthians 1:22 says, “Who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” However, the Holy Spirit is more than just the guarantee of our eternal life. Philippians 2:13 says, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.” We must realize that our sufficiency comes from God. Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” As we yield our lives to the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit works in us. As a result, God makes it possible for every Christian to be sufficient as ministers of the new covenant.

The law kills because it shows that we are guilty of sin. In contrast, the Holy Spirit gives us life and power to serve the Lord. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” God works in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit to cause change to happen in our lives. That change begins as the Holy Spirit comes into our human spirit. Because of the change in our human spirit, the Lord is able to transform our soul which includes our mind, emotions and will. Then, the Lord is able to carry out His work through our body because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 3:20-21 says, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” The Holy Spirit gives both we and our children life and the power to carry out the work that God has for each of us. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand that the Spirit gives life.