

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## 2 CORINTHIANS 3-4

Like most professions, when a pastor wants to relocate to a new church he sends out his resumé. Of course, a resumé is a listing of his skills, traits, and experiences - *what might be assets to a congregation.*

Churches in need of a pastor read through these resúmes - then invite candidates in for an interview.

But a prospective pastor needs to be careful what he includes on his bio. Today, I've got with me the [Top Ten statements a pastor should NOT put on his resumé...](#)

**10)** In the five churches I've faithfully served over the last two years...

**9)** My extensive counseling of church members has produced a rich source of illustrations for my sermons.

**8)** I have the stamina to preach hour-long sermons.

**7)** My personality type has provided me ample opportunity to develop a wide range of conflict-resolution skills.

**6)** I've been told every sermon I preach is better than the next.

**5)** With a suspended driver's license a car allowance won't be necessary.

**4)** Hobbies include pit bulls and automatic weapons.

**3)** I require Sundays off.

**2)** I have learned to cope with financial crisis at every church I've served.

**1)** I have five jokes that are so funny I tell them over and over. *Not what you want to have on your resume.*

I mention pastoral resumés, because there were critics of Paul in the church at Corinth who were questioning the apostle's resumé - *or the lack of one*.

His detractors were using this to cast doubt on his credibility. Chapter 3 opens with his reluctant defense.

He writes, “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?” A common practice in the early days of Christianity was for traveling preachers to carry *letters of commendation*, or *referrals* from their home church.

Even today when requests come from folks who are asking for support, or who want to speak or sing at CC, they include references from other churches where they've ministered. It's standard protocol. It's a good way to validate the legitimacy of a person's ministry.

And Paul participated in this practice. In Romans 16 he recommends Phoebe. 2 Corinthians 8 endorses Titus. His letter to Philemon commends Onesimus.

But what Paul did for others, he saw no need to do for himself - at least not in Corinth. *Why would he need letters, when He started the church, and led its first members to the Lord?* Paul was Christianity's ground zero in Corinth. The existence of Christianity in their city alone, should've validated Paul's ministry.

In essence, Paul is saying to the believers in Corinth, “*I started your church. Through my preaching God saved your*”

*soul - and now you want to see my ID?"*

The Corinthians were asking for Paul's resume', but he says **they were his resume'**... "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men..."

The false teachers who came to Corinth after Paul departed, had come with impressive paperwork. But Paul insists that the Corinthians were his paperwork.

Here's the point, *how do you know a pastor is called by God?* A wall of diplomas and ordination certificates are just wallpaper. **The proof is the fruit of his ministry.**

Verse 3, "Clearly you are an epistle (that is, a letter) 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 was the pen God used to write on the hearts of the Corinthians.

God's transforming Spirit was the ink, and Christ was the author of their salvation. Put it all together and Paul calls the Corinthian believers "*letters of Christ.*"

Today we send text messages, and emails, but when Paul wanted to communicate with people he picked up a quill pen and parchment. He literally **inked** his letters.

Yet ink can smear, or smudge, or fade with time...

Even when the ink is legible the words can be lost, or ignored, or misinterpreted. And this is what happened with the Old Covenant that God gave to the Hebrews.

God wrote His will on stone tablets. When He gave the Ten

Commandments to Moses, God chiseled His commands with His finger into two pages of stone.

In essence, Doctor God was saying to His patients, “**Take these two tablets daily, and you’ll feel better.**” *The problem was the Jews ignored the prescription.*

There was nothing wrong with God’s Law. The issue wasn’t with *what was written*, but *how it was written*.

Because it was an external document the Hebrews could neglect or abandon or misunderstand God’s Law.

Say a friend hands you directions to a new restaurant. He writes them down on a piece of paper.

Just having that paper doesn’t mean you’ll arrive.

*You can lose the directions - or misread it - or spill a drink and smear the ink...* but if I plugged the address into your car’s navigation or on your phone... the GPS would prove much more efficient than a piece of paper.

And this is why under the NC God writes His will in our hearts. Living under the Law was like carrying directions on a piece of paper - *or stone tablets...* but when a person comes to faith in Jesus, God implants His will into their basic desires and instincts. His Spirit activates a spiritual GPS inside them - *a new nature* - that keeps directing and recalibrating them into His will.

This is the miracle of the New Covenant - and Paul holds it up in contrast to the Old. With the NC, **God has gone high-tech!** He’s discarded papers and stone tablets, and planted a *spiritual chip* deep into our spirit.

The OC involved following external directions, while the NC

creates onboard guidance - a person now inhabits us, the Spirit of Jesus. Thus, verse 4, "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..."

Again, the Law depended too heavily on our ability to obey directions. Not everyone excels at reading and following what's written. In fact, the worst person on the planet at following directions is me! *I have a terrible sense of direction.* Here's the saying in our house, "If you want to get to heaven ask Sandy. If you want to go anywhere else ask Kathy." *I get lost coming to church.*

But success under the NC has nothing to do with our knack for directions. "Our sufficiency is from God."

Rather than hand us the Law - *a set of instructions to follow* - God plants His homing device in our hearts. He writes His will and way inside us. Our job is to trust Him and what He's done! "Our sufficiency is from God."

I love little Darth Vader. He thinks the force is with him. He tries to muster his power. Yet in the end the only person with any power turns out to be his dad. \*\*\*

This is what the OC taught us - **we** are insufficient. It's the power of our Father God - He is our sufficiency.

It's God "who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit..."

Paul's ability to *live out* the NC was also his ability to *pass it on*. The Holy Spirit ministered *through him*.

For Paul adds in verse 6, **“for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”** Assign someone a task without the strength or skills to do it, and you'll sentence them to despair! This is exactly what the letter of the Law did.

The Law on stone tablets was impossible for the Jews to keep - *not because there was anything wrong with the Law.* The Law was *perfect*, but the people trying to keep it were *imperfect* - and thus, unable.

In the early and not-so-successful days of Chicago's NBA team, the Bulls had a coach named Johnny Kerr.

Once before a game, Kerr entered the team's locker room to get his players fired up. He said to one guy, **“You go out there and act like the best scorer in the league.”** To another fellow he shouted, **“You pretend to be the best rebounder there is!”** And to a third player, **“You imagine you're the best defender in basketball.”**

Yet sadly, when the game was over the Chicago Bulls had lost again - by 17 points. Coach Kerr was so depressed. That's when one of his players encouraged him, **“Don't worry coach. Just pretend we won.”**

But this is what happens when you live under the law. You're trying to win a game you simply can't win.

You're not good enough. You don't have the skill.

And if you're too proud to admit it, you end up just pretending - *you play the hypocrite.* That's why Paul says, **“the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”**

Verse 7 recalls the initial giving of the OC, "But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory."

Exodus 34 describes the face of Moses after he came down the mountain with the Law in his hands.

His countenance was actually flush with the glory of God. Call it the "divine shine" or the "Mo Glow." Moses looked like he'd stayed too long in a tanning bed. His face beamed. Moses radiated God's glory.

God actually required Moses to cover his face with a veil. God's glory was off-limits to the sinful Hebrews.

But Paul tells us, the Mo Glow faded over time. And likewise the glory of the OC - *it too waned and fizzled*.

When God first gave the Law on Mount Sinai it was accompanied with thunder, and lightning, and shaking.

It started out with a bang, but ended up a dud. **The Law of Moses was unable to make anyone righteous.**

It turns out the OC was transitory. It gave way to a better covenant. The grace of God and work of His Spirit make for a more glorious covenant. The divine shine passed, but the glory of His grace lasts forever!

Verse 10 "For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels."

Compared to the glory of the Gospel of Christ the glory of the Law now looks dull and lackluster.

"For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious." The prominence and splendor of the OC was fleeting. You could literally watch it fade from Moses' face. But the preeminence and significance of the New Covenant lasts forever.

"Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech - unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away."

Under the OC the Hebrews were unworthy to behold God's glory. Thus, Moses hid his face behind a veil.

And that veil became a symbol of the blindness that existed in the hearts of the Jews. They read the Law, and understood its demands, but were unable to obey.

The Law produced *guilt* not *confidence*. It was a source of *frustration*, rather than a *sense of freedom*.

And verse 14 explains the effected this had on the Jews, "But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.

But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart." The Old Covenant wasn't just obsolete, it created a spiritual impediment for Jewish hearts...

Whenever we study OT passages like Isaiah 53 that speak vividly of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, "He was wounded for



our transgressions... bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him... by His stripes we are healed” we ask ourselves why don’t the Jews recognize Jesus as their Messiah?

And there are multiple reasons I can give, but the short answer is verse 14, *“Their minds were blinded... when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.”*

The problem is spiritual blindness. When the Law is read, pride rises up. *The thought is inflamed, “we’re good people, God’s chosen, we can earn His favor, we can keep His Law.” Pride blocks them from His grace.*

Under the Law there was hopelessness. God seemed a million miles away. You’d sooner travel to the nearest star than get to God by your own efforts. You wanted to see God, but butted noses with the veil.

And that’s why verse 16 should cause your heart to skip a beat, *“Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”* The moment you turn to Jesus the veil of separation vanishes. Instantly we’re invaded by God’s presence. His glory fills our emptiness. The distance we felt evaporates. *The veil is removed.*

Verse 17, *“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”* The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, *and under the NC He continues in us, the work Jesus did for us.* Thus, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom from the OC and the Law.

Yet here’s what happens to Christians. We believe Jesus alone is sufficient to save us, but after we’re saved we try to

live the Christian life as if we were still under the OC. *As if we're still following the directions.*

Remember, we're now under a NC. The directions have been plugged into our spirit. Thus, we need to live by faith. We need to lean into the Holy Spirit and His work in our hearts. *"Our sufficiency is from God."*

As Paul says in verse 17, *where the Spirit of Jesus is at work transforming a heart; there's liberty from the Law.* Rather than follow rules, we rely on the Spirit.

Author and speaker, Warren Wiersbe, traveled extensively among churches across North America.

He writes about what he observed. *"There are Gospel-preaching churches that have legalistic tendencies and keep their members immature, guilty, and afraid. They spend a great deal of time dealing with the externals... they exalt standards and denounce sin, but they fail to magnify the Lord Jesus. Sad to say, in some New Testament churches we have an Old Testament ministry."* Here's the great tragedy of modern Christianity, *"NT churches with OT ministries."*

*We have a NC, but we live as if we're under the Old.*

We emphasize *rules*, whereas NC Christianity is about *faith in Jesus and the work of His Spirit in us.*

Verse 18 is a crucial truth. *"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."* Here's what happens to a believing heart living under the NC...

God strips away the veil. The light of God pours into a heart

that was dark. Not because *we tried hard*, or *earned it*, or *proved our worth* - but because of simple faith. His glory transforms us. It makes us like Jesus.

The Greek word translated "*transformed*" is "*metamorphosis*" - which speaks of a radical change.

When a rock crystalizes, or a caterpillar leaves its cocoon and flies off a butterfly - it's a metamorphosis.

Under the OC you *conform*, and *produce* your own righteousness. But under the NC you're *transformed*. You *radiate* His righteousness. You become like Jesus.

Paul said the glory of the OC faded and diminished, but notice the glory of the NC intensifies. We go "*from glory to glory...*" The Christian life is a progression.

And here's how *the glow grows...* we "*behold as in a mirror...*" - you keep spending time with Jesus. You keep the focus and attention of your heart God-ward.

Christianity a metaphysical miracle. We change! *First our spirit - then our thoughts and attitudes - ultimately our actions* - and we do it not by trying, but by looking!

We keep our face toward Jesus and He achieves the changes. A mirror effect takes place. As we look to Jesus, we become like Him. It's His Spirit that does the work, we just supply the look. *Oh, the power of a look.* Fix your eyes on Jesus and you'll never be the same!

Chapter 4, "*Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.*"

Being a pastor is a tough job. In a recent Life Way survey

54% of pastors feel frequently overwhelmed. In another place I read where 50% of pastors would leave the ministry if they had another way to make a living.

But being a pastor has always been a tough job.

Paul faced persecution from without the church, and criticism from within. Yet he tells us *“we do not lose heart.”* *How was Paul able to maintain his enthusiasm?*

First was *“this ministry.”* What a joy to preach a NC!

Second he *“received mercy.”* God forgave him much.

How can you consider quitting when God has given you a *glorious message and boundless mercy?*

And Paul writes of his ministry, *“But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, 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.”*

Paul handled God's Word faithfully, not deceitfully.

Some pastors are like painters who cut the paint by watering it down. This makes it *spread easier* and *go further*. But Paul doesn't water down the Gospel so it'll spread easier. Paul spoke truthfully and confidently.

I've never liked buying cars. Often, you're lied to, or manipulated, or strong-armed - I don't like any of the above. So after visiting several traditional dealerships, Kathy and I went to car lot where they didn't dicker.

The salesman told me, *“No pressure, this is a good car, at a good price. If you don't buy it somebody else will.”* I liked that

approach and bought a car from him.

And this was Paul's approach to sharing the Gospel. He didn't use shameful methods - craftiness, and manipulation, and deceit. *Paul had confidence in his product.* The Gospel is the best deal ever offered...

This is why you don't *preach* the Gospel like you *pitch* used cars. You don't have to stretch or twist the truth. You don't have to bully anybody into buying.

The Gospel is such a good deal it'll sale itself if you just present it as clearly and plainly as possible.

A godly pastor knows he's not on commission. His job is to be *truthful with people and faithful to God.*

Verse 3, "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." Paul says the Gospel is such a good idea, the only reason folks reject it is that they've been blinded by Satan - "*the god of this age.*"

This is why before we preach we need to pray.

I love verse 5, it's important! "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake." Christian ministry should be void of any self-aggrandizement. Terms like "*promotional tours,*" and "*image consultants,*" and "*fan clubs*" have no place in the Christian vocabulary.

We're "*bondservants for Jesus' sake.*" Can you imagine a

servant with a fan club? You can't *promote yourself* and *magnify Jesus* simultaneously. The spotlight only shines on one person at a time - and if it's on you, that means Jesus is being overlooked!

"For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." You break the darkness not by talking about yourself, but by shining God's light! It's the knowledge of Jesus that drives out the darkness.

Verse 7, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." At first glance this is a strange metaphor - *who puts a treasure in clay pots?*

It's like serving steak and lobster on a paper plate, or expensive wine in a styrofoam cup. You expect to find jewels and gold in a treasure chest, not in a paper sack. *But this is how God packages His valuables...*

He's taken the most expensive treasure on Earth, the Gospel, and put it in clay pots. That's us...we're the clay. We're coarse, uncouth, pots - **we're the cracked pots.** *Imagine, God places the Gospel in ball jars.*

*But why?* Paul gives us the explanation, "**that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.**"

God puts His spiritual treasure in cracked pots to hammer home the point, that the power, and beauty, and wisdom is in the message, not in the messenger.

DL Moody was the Billy Graham of his day. He was an evangelist who was used by God in mighty ways.

Yet Dwight Moody was uneducated. Neither did he have a pleasing appearance. His voice was nasally and high-pitched. Once, a reporter was sent to analyze Moody's success. He wrote, "I see nothing whatsoever in DL Moody to account for his marvelous work."

And that is exactly the reason God chose him. He puts His treasure in brown paper sacks - so everyone will know *"that the power is of God and not of us."*

This is why Christian ministry should always be conducted in humility and simplicity. No glitzy fanfare, or ostentatious displays, or verbose introductions.

Certainly we should strive for excellence in our ministries, but the issue is motive. There's a difference between *expressing ourselves*, and *impressing others*.

The question is, "Are we trying to get the *message heard*, or are you wanting to get the *messenger seen*?"

Whenever you take a drink, you want the taste of the liquid to be that of the *contents*, not the *container*.

I have a cup in my office devoted to coffee. On occasion though, I'll pour Coke into that cup, and I end up with coffee-flavored Coke. *The contents gets contaminated by the container. The drink gets tainted.*

This is what we want to avoid when the Gospel is shared. The message needs to be pure and untainted by the container. Folks should leave marveling at the message, not how cool or hip the messenger happens to be. *Do we preach*

## *Jesus, or promote ourselves?*

The reason Paul endured hardship in his ministry is because he was enthralled by the message. Verse 8, "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed..."

Everywhere Paul went to preach he got *beat-up*, but he never *gave-up*. His message motivated his ministry.

The same is true for us. When you *carry* a glorious message you *carry on* despite painful circumstances.

Paul says in verse 10, that he's "always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you." Paul was one of the walking wounded. But the cracks in his body became opportunities for the life of Jesus to shine through.

I heard the story of a young man who lost his leg due to cancer. He fell into a dark depression. A psychiatrist trying to help him, ask him to draw a picture of himself.

The man drew an ugly, cracked, worthless vase.

Yet over time, this young man started helping other cancer patients. He discovered he could encourage them and bring hope. It gave his life new meaning.



One day the doctor showed him his old drawing.

The young man took out a yellow crayon and drew colorful streamers flowing out of the cracks in the vase.

He said, "Where it's broken, this is now where the light comes through." And in essence, Paul is making the same statement. He's not discouraged by his hurt and suffering, for he knows it's where he's dying that the light of Jesus can shine through for others to see.

The Gospel is the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection. But for Paul the Gospel wasn't just an article of faith - *it was a way of life*. His life was a repetitive succession of deaths and resurrections.

Paul would suffer; then God would resurrect hope.

His life was a reminder that God brings resurrection from death. Author Kent Hughes puts it, "The cycle of Christ's experience becomes the pattern for Paul and all serious Christians: affliction - death - resurrection."

Remember this when you suffer a death - *the death of a friendship, or a romance, or a business*. The death we experience may just be a set up for the resurrection of something new, and better, and truly miraculous.

God still works in waves of death and resurrection!

Verse 13, "And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke..." Here Paul quotes Psalm 116:10...

"We also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and

**will present us with you.**" Paul had given his body to God as a living sacrifice. He wasn't worried about its present welfare - his body would be resurrected immortal, incorruptible, invincible. Death could not take from Paul anything that really mattered.

**"For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God."** Paul considered his sufferings worth it, knowing that God was glorified.

Verse 16, **"Therefore we do not lose heart."** Paul ends the chapter as it began. No matter how *banged up* he gets, he refuses to *give up*... And in these last three verses Paul tells us how he overcame painful and discouraging circumstances. It was all about focus.

He **locked** onto **the inner man rather than the outer man** - he **lived** for **the eternal rather than temporal** - and he **looked** to **the spiritual rather than the tangible**.

Notice first, Paul tells us, **"Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day."** Here Paul notes a potential source of great discouragement - *you and I are growing older*.

The other day I went to straighten out the wrinkles in my socks, *when I realized I wasn't wearing any socks*.

*Hey, the outward man is perishing...*All supermodels get wrinkles. Every body-builder withers in the grave...

While the outer man is *deteriorating*, the Holy Spirit is *invigorating* the inner man. We wear down physically, but we can get stronger and stronger spiritually.

God made our spirits rechargeable. We just need to plug into spiritual outlets: *God's Word, prayer, worship, fellowship*. The key to overcoming discouragement is to stay focused on the **inward man - not the outer man**.

A second way that Paul beats the blahs was to focus on **his eternal rewards, not his temporal troubles**.

He tells us in verse 17, "**For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...**" It's amazing, Paul endured shipwrecks, stonings, imprisonments, but he calls them "**our light affliction**." *How can that be?*

*You know objects that are heavy on earth, when taken into outer space become light. This is what we do with troubles when we see them up against eternity.*

*Heaven's highs make today's burdens seem light as a feather. Heaven will be so heavy your first nano-second with Jesus will more than make up for a lifetime of tears on earth. Paul says "**our light affliction...is just for a moment**." Compared to eternity, this life is a flash.*

I love verse 17. In it God has promised us not just "**glory**," but a "**weight of glory...**" And not just a "**weight of glory**," but an "**eternal weight of glory...**" And not just an "**eternal weight of glory**," but an "**exceeding and eternal weight of glory...**" And *there's even more...*

Not just an "**exceeding and eternal weight of glory**," but a

*"more exceeding and eternal weight of glory..."*

And not just a *"more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,"* but a *"far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!"* Now how's that for a bright future! This is why we should keep our eyes on heaven. Much is in store!

And finally, we stay hopeful by looking beyond **the visible and tangible** to **spiritual things**. Paul says it in verse 18, *"while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."*

The spiritual stuff of life are the realities that matter most... *love, grace, mercy, peace, integrity, fellowship.*

*"For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."* Material things lose their luster. Give it a few months and the brightest new fad starts to dim. But love, and grace, and peace, and joy - *the spirituals* - only grow in their brilliance.

Focus on what you see and you'll lose heart, but focus on what's below the surface and faith grows.

Recall when Elisha's servant heard that the king had dispatched men to take the prophet captive, he was frightened - *but not Elisha*. For the prophet had eyes of faith. He saw more than his servant's eyes could see.

Elisha prayed that God would open his servant's eyes. And we're told, *"Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."* God had dispatched troops of His own.

The angelic secret service was protecting Elisha.

Hey, we won't get discouraged if we keep our minds from focusing on the deterioration of the *outward man* and let God renew the *inward person* day by day.

If we seek *eternal rewards* not *temporal success*.

And if we gravitate toward the *spiritual* not *visible*.

A Christian's priority should be **inward not outward, eternal not temporal, and spiritual not tangible.**