

THE MINISTRY IN 2 CORINTHIANS 3:4-18
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Lament of Unchanged Lives

Many pastors and church leaders bounce from seminar to seminar, from methodology to methodology, in an attempt to “grow a church.” Yet, in spite of valiant and well-meaning efforts, many lament that most people in the pew are not growing spiritually or serving Jesus Christ and His church with joy and a certain level of effectiveness. Even with the renewed emphasis today on small groups, home Bible studies, discipleship, mentoring, leadership development, and worship, many Christians appear to be no more like Christ in their behavior or attitudes than they were several years ago. Growing out of a renewed interest in spirituality, the process of spiritual formation has been proposed as the solution for the lack of spiritual growth and Christlikeness among believers in Jesus Christ.

The Need for an Expository Compass

The close of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first has seen a remarkable surge of interest in spirituality as it relates to spiritual formation. Spiritual formation has been marked as one of the major movements of the last few decades.¹ Along with the concern over the lack of spiritual growth, the renewed popularity of the age-old concept of spiritual formation is credited to such things as a

¹ M. Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 11.

resurgent cynicism concerning the value of material possessions,² a remarkable hunger for the quest for spiritual answers to big questions,³ and even a moving of the Spirit of God which is bringing together the isolated traditions of spirituality.⁴

However, the popularity of spirituality imposes an inherent peril. Simon Chan warns that calling any cause or movement a spirituality seems to bestow a certain respectability to it. He cautions that any sociocultural movement, an interest group, or a particular cause or concern is described today as a type of “spirituality.”⁵ Thus, spiritualities of all varieties have emerged on the religious landscape. These include the traditional spiritualities that come from the Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Zen, Eastern meditation, and New Age spiritualities⁶ as well as more recent types grouped under Christianity such as small group spirituality, marriage spirituality, and single-spirituality.⁷

Not all approaches to spirituality are equally valid nor are they equally drawn out of the truths of Scripture. Churches which espouse liberal theologies have promoted spiritualities such as the reimagining of God, Buddhist Tantrism, Hinduistic meditative techniques, and pagan symbolism in worship.⁸ The inherent danger implicit in the many

² Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 1.

³ Kenneth Boa, *That I May Know God: Pathways to Spiritual Formation* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1998), 11.

⁴ Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), xv.

⁵ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 15.

⁶ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 11.

⁷ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 16.

⁸ Boa, *That I May Know God*, 12.

different approaches to spirituality and spiritual formation is the potential failure to discern the “the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6). However, Kenneth Boa suggests that there is a variety of biblical approaches to the spiritual life which have grown out of the complexity of the spiritual paths which have been taken by godly pilgrims of previous centuries.⁹

The concept of spiritual formation unto the likeness of Christ is implicit in several passages of Scripture. For example, the apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians that he would be in labor until “Christ [was] formed” in them (Gal 4:19). Romans 12:2 speaks of being “transformed by the renewing of [the] mind” while Romans 8:29 states that the believer in Jesus Christ is, “predestined to become conformed to the image” of the Son of God. Of particular significance is 2 Corinthians 3:4-18. This passage is considered to be one of the most significant Spirit passages in the Pauline corpus.¹⁰ The argument of the passage from beginning to end has to do with activity of the Holy Spirit which culminates in 3:18 with the transforming work of the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:4-18 has been selected for exposition in this writing because the passage provides a doctrinal “compass bearing” for two key concepts related to spiritual formation in the evangelical community.

The two key concepts related to spiritual formation are the presence of God by way of the Spirit of God and, secondly, the practical experience of the believer as one

⁹ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 20. For the purposes of his book, Boa discusses twelve of the various facets of spiritual formation which are: relational spirituality, paradigm spirituality, disciplined spirituality, exchanged life spirituality, motivated spirituality, holistic spirituality, process spirituality, Spirit-filled spirituality, warfare spirituality, nurturing spirituality, and corporate spirituality.

¹⁰ See Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 297.

participates in the Spirit's transforming work and learns how to live in God's presence. Gordon D. Fee argues that if the truth were told, most of God's people live far below the transforming presence of God that is made available to them by the Spirit of God.¹¹ The Spirit of God is God's personal presence in the lives of believers who leads them into "paths of righteousness for His own name's sake" (Ps 23:3). The exposition of 2 Corinthians 3:4-18 will show that by the Holy Spirit, a person not only comes to know God, but also learns how to live in His presence in such a way as to be constantly renewed into Christ's image.

The Method of Approach

In the next chapter, significant spiritualities that are currently influencing spiritual formation will be described and evaluated in terms of influence and impact on evangelical believers. In doing so, the need for an expositional compass will be further delineated and it will be shown that the significant contribution of evangelical spirituality is the striking of a necessary balance between the other spiritual approaches. That balance is cradled in the truth of God's Word, the practice of spirituality, and a vital transforming experience of God by the presence of His Spirit.

Chapter 3 contains an exposition of 2 Corinthians 3:4-18. Although the impetus for the passage in 2 Corinthians is Paul defending his ministry and apostleship, his ministry is set in the larger picture of the new covenant ministry which is of the Holy Spirit. Paul's argument from beginning to end has to do with the activity of the Spirit, both in Paul's ministry and in the Corinthians' lives as a result of that ministry. Paul argues that by the Spirit of God, the Lord's new covenant people are brought into His

¹¹ Ibid., 302.

presence so as to behold Him and thus be continually transformed into the image of Christ (see 2 Cor 3:18).

In chapter 4, several direct applications for the spiritual formation of believers will be drawn out of the passage. Each of these applications will be rooted in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Of particular importance will be the applications related to ministry and secondly, how believers live in God's presence so as to be transformed into Christ's image.

CHAPTER 2
CONTRIBUTIONS TO SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The Wealth of Material

The wealth of material on spirituality that has been published in recent years is greatly impacting the process of spiritual formation of believers in Jesus Christ. The noteworthy interest in spirituality has resulted in a flood of literature, new works along with the translating and reprinting of the classics of Christian spirituality. Within these works, dozens of spiritual approaches and spiritualities are proposed as instruments for the spiritual formation of the believer. While no clear, defining lines exist between what may be termed as spiritualities, none of these spiritualities are intentionally proposed in isolation from others. Yet within the diversity and complexity of the multitude of approaches to spiritual formation, certain spiritualities which are positively influencing evangelical Christians today can be isolated and described.

Because of the vast scope of spirituality as it relates to spiritual formation, not all the possible aspects of differing spiritualities will be discussed in this writing. However, three aspects of spirituality which are greatly influencing spiritual formation in the evangelical community today will be isolated and described. They are: (1) classic spirituality which includes a renewed interest in the spiritual disciplines, contemplative spirituality, and spiritual direction, (2) psychological spirituality which emphasizes personality types and sacred pathways, and (3) evangelical spirituality which offers a healthy balance of doctrine, experience and practice. These three have been selected for

this writing as purely functional expressions to describe a very specific positive influence on the spiritual formation of evangelical believers today. Each influencing contribution to spiritual formation will be described and evaluated in terms of its influence and impact on the spiritual formation of believers.

Classic Spirituality

The first positive influence on the spiritual formation of believers today is a renewed interest in classic spirituality. Richard J. Foster has edited two volumes containing selected readings from the spiritual classics.¹ Because of the classic writings contained in his books, Foster's works have become classics themselves. There is an extraordinary hunger today to read what has been written in times past concerning the transformation of the soul and an intimate walk and love relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Devotional and spiritual classics describe a kind of writing that has stood the test-of-time and seeks to form the soul before God.² Classic spirituality encompasses a wide variety and mix of traditions that fall under the rubric of Christianity. Because of its inordinate scope, a broad survey of the classics will not be offered here.³ Rather, it will be shown how the spiritual classics are influencing spiritual formation today in three

¹ The two volumes are: Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993) and Richard J. Foster and Emilie Griffin, *Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000).

² Foster and Smith, *Devotional Classics*, 1.

³ The broad range of the classics includes the writings of Augustine of Hippo, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, François Fenélon, Julian of Norwich, Bernard of Clairvaux, Ignatius of Loyola, Brother Lawrence, John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, Blaise Pascal, Jonathan Edwards, Thomas à Kempis, George Fox, John Wesley, Hudson Taylor, Evelyn Underhill, E. Stanley Jones, Hanna Whitall Smith, Thomas Kelly, Thomas Merton, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, A. W. Tozer, C. S. Lewis, Henri J. M. Nouwen, Dallas Willard, and Richard Foster.

specific ways: (1) through a renewed interest in the spiritual disciplines as the means of spiritual formation, (2) through the influence of contemplative spirituality, and (3) by means of spiritual direction.

The Influence of the Spiritual Disciplines

In spite of the wide differences between the various Christian spiritual traditions, most are in agreement today concerning the importance of the spiritual disciplines in relation to the spiritual formation of the believer. This agreement accounts much for the significant role that the spiritual disciplines play in spiritual formation.

The renewed interest in the spiritual disciplines in evangelical Christianity has been sparked by Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*⁴ as well as Dallas Willard's book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*.⁵ In his book, Foster classifies the spiritual disciplines into three categories. The first include the inward disciplines which include meditation, prayer, fasting and study. The second group consists of the outward disciplines which are simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. The last category includes the corporate disciplines which are confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Dallas Willard brings it into perspective by describing the purpose of the disciplines as, "activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order."⁶

⁴ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988).

⁵ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

Although it is widely accepted that spiritual formation requires the exercise of the disciplines, a delicate balance must be maintained. The spiritual disciplines are not the *means* of producing godliness or transformation into Christlikeness, but rather are interactive *participations* with the Holy Spirit who is transforming the believer (see 1 Cor 3:18). Kenneth Boa recognizes this tension by pointing out that a growing number of leaders in the body of Christ realize that more is required of believers than just being spectators. He stresses that believers must engage in the means of transformation that have been modeled for centuries by Christlike men and women.⁷

An unhealthy imbalance occurs in exercising the disciplines when either God's role or the human role in spiritual formation is emphasized over the other. On the one hand, the life of Christ can only be reproduced by the power of the Holy Spirit for, "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13 NASB⁸). On the other hand, there is no spiritual growth or transformation apart from discipline and self-control (see 1 Tim 4:7; 1 Cor 9:25). Foster places the disciplines in proper tension when he echoes their classic purpose, "God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that, by His grace, He can transform us."⁹ Any spirituality which does not hold this careful tension must be rejected. The goal of the disciplines should be the transformation of the believer into Christlikeness for His glory (see 2 Cor 3:18), but there must also be recognition that spiritual transformation is completely and fully the

⁷ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 77.

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture passages are quoted from the New American Standard Bible Update.

⁹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 7.

work of the Holy Spirit.

The Influence of Contemplative Spirituality

The second way that classic spirituality is influencing the spiritual formation of evangelical believers today is through a renewed call to contemplative spirituality. While the spiritual disciplines correctly stress the practices of body and mind that participate in the Holy Spirit's work of transformation, contemplative spirituality stresses both "resting in the Lord" and "seeking the face of God."

Resting in the Lord. One writer points out that one of the best descriptions of the role of the contemplative is found in Moses' prophecy concerning the tribe of Benjamin: "May the beloved of the Lord dwell in security by Him, Who shields him all the day, And he dwells between His shoulders" (Deut 33:12).¹⁰ "Resting between God's shoulders" aptly describes the contemplative who wants to enjoy God and learn to love Him.¹¹ Contemplatives live for the love of God and want nothing more than to find some quiet place of solitude and fully enjoy adoring God.¹² They yearn for what Thomas Merton reminded is lacking in so many Christians. He writes that many, "have practically no idea of the immense love of God for them, and of the power of that Love to do them good, and bring them happiness."¹³

¹⁰ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 176.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹² Classic contemplative spirituality enjoys a rich tradition that includes the desert spirituality of Antony and John Cassian, and is perpetuated in the *Rule* of St. Benedict, and continues in Bernard of Clairvaux, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, François Fénelon, Evelyn Underhill, Frank Laubach, Thomas Kelly, A. W. Tozer, Thomas Merton, and Henri J. M. Nouwen.

¹³ Thomas Merton, *What Is Contemplation?* (London: Burnes, Oates, and Washbourne, 1950), 5.

However, Merton seems to limit the process of spiritual formation to contemplation and downplay the role of Scripture. He writes, “The message of hope the contemplative offers you is not that you need to find your way through the jungle of language and problems that today surround God: but that whether you understand or not, God loves you, is present in you, lives in you, dwells in you, calls you, saves you, and offers you an understanding and light which are like nothing ever found in books or heard in sermons.”¹⁴ Merton’s exclusive “resting in the Lord” approach led him to explore Zen, existentialism, and erroneously establish the transcendental presence of God as *Sophia*, “God’s Wisdom.”¹⁵

Contemplatives correctly observe that by sitting at Jesus feet and “resting in the Lord,” Mary chose the “better part” over the activity of her sister, Martha (see Luke 10:42). However, Jesus stressed the importance of truth when He prayed to the Father for His disciples, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17). “Resting in the Lord” must be fully tethered to the sanctifying truth of the Word of God.

Seeking the face of God. Building on the idea of “resting in the Lord,” Boa further defines contemplative spirituality as an experiential way of the heart that travels the mysterious path of realized fellowship with God through experiences of personal, loving, and “intimate perception.”¹⁶ This intimate perception is classically referred to as “seeking the face of God.” The goal of “seeking the face of God” is a personal, intimate,

¹⁴ Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. William Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), 156.

¹⁵ Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), xvii.

¹⁶ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 167.

encounter with God. It is seen in the life of Moses when God promised that His presence would go with Moses and give him rest as Moses led the children of Israel (see Exod 33:14). Yet, for Moses, this was not enough. He cried out to God, “Show me your glory” (33:18). The Lord’s response to Moses request equated the Lord’s glory with the Lord’s face. When the Lord explained to Moses how He was going to respond to his request, twice He said in effect that no one can see His face (34:20, 23). The yearning of the contemplative is to perceive God who is adored, as much as He will allow, by “seeking His face” through the classic disciplines of silence and solitude. In referring to these two primary disciplines of the contemplative, Chuck Swindoll reminds his readers that there is no way that a believer can move toward a deeper, intimate relationship with God without protracted times of silence and solitude.¹⁷

As a word of caution, it is recognized that contemplative spirituality is not the beginning point for those who are new in the faith.¹⁸ Prerequisites to contemplative spirituality are extensive Bible study and grounding in good theology. Otherwise, one might drift into introspective New Age practices or the seeking of feelings and experiences instead of God. In commenting on the benefits of “seeking God’s face,” Gary Thomas appropriately reminds believers that, “Christian contemplation has less to do with mystical experience than it has to do with adoration.”¹⁹ Contemplative spirituality is primarily the experiential way of the heart. When grounded in the truths of Scripture, contemplation leads one deeper into a loving, intimate, perception and personal encounter

¹⁷ Charles R. Swindoll, *Intimacy with the Almighty* (Dallas: Word Books, 1996), 36.

¹⁸ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 166.

¹⁹ Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 180.

with God.

The Influence of Spiritual Direction

The third way that classical spirituality is influencing spiritual formation today is through the discipline of spiritual direction. Classic spiritual direction enjoys a deep and long lasting tradition in both Roman Catholic and Anglican spirituality as well as Protestant spirituality. The Catholic and Anglican approach to spiritual direction will not be discussed because it only indirectly influences spiritual formation in the evangelical community.²⁰ However, spiritual direction is gaining popularity in Protestant circles.

The heart of spiritual direction is that God uses fellow believers as instruments of growth and spiritual formation. Spiritual direction is a dynamic relationship that exists between two persons as one helps the other grow in the Christian life. A spiritual director is not an authoritarian figure, but rather a companion on the journey who helps another discern the workings of grace in one's life as one seeks progress in prayer and obedience to Christ. This includes spiritual friendship, guidance, mentoring, and direction.²¹ The overriding principle is that a person is too close to oneself to see things as they really are. Believers are to encourage one another, "so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb 3:13). One evangelical writer points out that spiritual direction has a long history in both Scripture and tradition with a prime biblical example being

²⁰ For the classic Roman Catholic/Anglican approach to spiritual direction see: Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion: Guide to Tending the Soul* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001). Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: Spiritual Direction in the Modern World* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2001). Francis Kelly Nemeck and Marie Theresea Coombs, *The Way of Spiritual Direction* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1985). Wilfrid Stinissen, *The Gift of Spiritual Direction: On Spiritual Guidance and Care for the Soul* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1999).

²¹ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 440.

the spiritual direction relationship of Paul and Timothy.²²

Until recently, the evangelical community has primarily limited personal spiritual direction to discipling, mentoring, and leadership development without a thorough understanding of the personal spiritual pathway and journey of the one being directed. Since spiritual direction does not fit the typical program model of the local church, it is not finding its way into very many congregations. But along with a renewed emphasis on the spiritual disciplines and a renewed call to contemplative spirituality, spiritual direction is just beginning to make its mark on the spiritual formation of evangelical believers.

A discussion of the need for spiritual direction is now getting a page or two and even a full chapter in many recent evangelical books on spirituality and spiritual formation.²³ However, the dominance of psychologists, as the primary proponents of protestant spiritual direction, presents a potential drawback. The contemporary foundation for spiritual direction is predominately being laid by psychologists rather than by theologians or biblical expositors.²⁴ This is not to suggest that there is no place for professional counselors in spiritual direction. Psychology offers much, related to motivational and behavioral temperaments, as will be seen in the next section. But a notable exegetical and expository dearth of writing exists in relation to spiritual direction.

²² Howard Baker, *Soul Keeping: Ancient Paths of Spiritual Direction* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998), 143.

²³ See for example: Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 440. Baker, *Soul Keeping*, 136-146. Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 225-240.

²⁴ Popular books by psychologists that promote spiritual direction include: David G. Benner and Larry Crabb, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002). Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams: God's Unexpected Pathway to Joy* (Colorado Springs, CO: Water Brook Press, 2001). Gerald G. May, *Care of Mind Care of Spirit* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982, 1992).

Psychological Spirituality

A second major movement that is influencing spiritual formation today is a term that has been coined for this writing: “psychological spirituality.” It is not so much a type of spirituality, as it is a prominent factor in spiritual formation today that has its roots in psychology and is promoted by those who see a benefit in understanding personality types and temperaments described by Peter B. Myers and Isabel Briggs Myers. Other than spiritual direction already mentioned, psychological spirituality is greatly influencing spiritual formation in two discernable ways: the use of personality types and by “sacred pathways.”

Personality Types

In recent years, Carl G. Jung’s personality classifications in *Psychological Types* have become popular in Christian as well as New Age Circles.²⁵ Personality classifications have been further popularized by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) which is often used in spiritual formation to determine a person’s spiritual bent or personality preferences. Jung’s four essential pairs of preferences included extraversion (E) and introversion (I), sensing (S) and intuition (N), thinking (T) and feeling (F), and judgment (J) and perception (P).²⁶ Myers and Briggs expanded Jung’s four basic pairs of preferences of how people relate to one another into sixteen different personality types.²⁷

²⁵ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 470.

²⁶ M. Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 50.

²⁷ The complete discussion of the Myers-Briggs Personality Types is in Isabel Briggs Myers and Peter B. Myers, *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type* (Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing, 1995). The sixteen personality types are ISTJ, ISFJ, ISTP, ISFP, ESTP, ESFP, ESTJ, ESFJ, INFJ, INTJ, INFP, INTP, ENFP, ENTP, ENFJ, and ENTJ.

For the purposes of spiritual formation, it has been proposed that those who follow Christ tend to gravitate toward the spiritual activities and disciplines that nurture their own personality patterns.²⁸

This celebrates the marvelous diversity in the unity of the Body of Christ, but it is cautioned that when one carries it to an extreme, it can lead a person to an unhealthy spiritual one-sidedness. For example, when extroversion is carried too far, it can result in such an emphasis on the social and corporate dynamics of the spiritual life that no room is left for the disciplines of solitude and silence. Also, strong introverts tend to avoid community and are prone to practice spiritual isolation.

It is apparent that human wholeness and spiritual health does not merely consist of understanding and developing one's particular personality type and preference. The personality types are helpful indicators of how a person is uniquely made and why one spiritual activity is preferred above another, but the model for spiritual formation is Jesus Christ (see Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). Therefore, it is spiritually healthy for a person to be familiar with and develop an opposite preference and type by engaging in a discipline that stretches a person and causes growth and full-orbed balance unto the likeness of Christ.

Sacred Pathways

Building on the concept that one's personality type determines how human beings relate to one another, it has been proposed that there are also spiritual temperaments that point to different ways that believers relate to God. Gary Thomas refers to

²⁸ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 472.

these as “sacred pathways.”²⁹ A sacred pathway, or what is more commonly called a spiritual temperament, describes the way a person relates to God and how one draws near to Him in love. In the same way that human relationships are impacted by the differing personalities involved, one’s relationship with God is impacted by the particular spiritual temperament of the believer.

Based on historic movements in the church and the study of personalities in scripture, Thomas proposes nine sacred pathways, which he does not consider all-inclusive, but nevertheless are helpful indicators of how a believer relates to God. He categorizes them as: naturalists who love God out of doors, sensates who love God with the senses, traditionalists who love God through ritual and symbol, ascetics who love God in solitude and simplicity, activists who love God through confrontation, caregivers who love God by loving others, enthusiasts who love God with mystery and celebration, and intellectuals who love God with the mind.³⁰ These spiritual temperaments are not intended to be exclusive in any individual, but they point to a person’s inclination in how one relates to God in loving Him.

An understanding of the sacred pathways guards against a generic approach to spiritual formation. John Wesley developed what has become known as his “method” which he proposed as a means to spiritual growth. Wesley’s method has helped countless believers draw closer to God and grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, it can be also be used as a spiritual prescription that says, in effect, that

²⁹ Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22-29.

all a Christian has to do is follow Wesley's six points and one will grow to be like Christ.³¹ In the same way many Christians have found Wesley's method helpful, others have been thrown into a spiritual rut of mechanized religion. They wonder why their spiritual life is lifeless and listless while the solution may be as simple as changing the time and place of their regular devotions to one that better fits their spiritual temperament. In much the same way that the Holy Spirit has given a variety of gifts, ministries, and effects (see 1 Cor 12: 4-6) personality types and sacred pathways or spiritual temperaments are a recognition that God has made every individual unique in how one specifically relates to Him.

Evangelical Spirituality

A third spirituality that is greatly influencing spiritual formation today is evangelical spirituality. Ken Boa refers to spirituality as a "gem with many facets" and classifies twelve spiritual paths which have been traveled by godly pilgrims who have gone before.³² Evangelical spirituality is diverse and often makes use of many classical approaches to spirituality as well as the psychological approach. The scholarship and writings of evangelicals are positively influencing spiritual formation specifically by striving to strike a balance between many of the spiritual approaches that have been mentioned in this chapter. In *Rediscovering Holiness*, J. I. Packer addresses the problem of "rhapsody without realism" and "rule-keeping without relating."³³ "Rhapsody without realism" occurs when the heart concentrates totally on the devotional exercises and

³¹ For Wesley's six points see John Wesley and Frank Baker, *The Works of John Wesley*, Oxford. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), vol. 14, 358.

³² Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 18.

³³ J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1999), 163-165.

contemplative spirituality. At the opposite extreme is “rule-keeping without relating,” where the heart glows with the love of God’s law and doctrine. Packer argues that all of us, regardless of spiritual temperament, personality type, and natural aptitude, need a healthy balance of doctrine, experience, and practice. The healthy balance is described by another writer as the biblical combination of knowing, being, and doing.³⁴

Many evangelical popular works maintain this biblical balance by presenting the spiritual disciplines, emphasizing contemplative spirituality, explaining the role of temperament and personality, while still holding firmly to the importance of sound doctrine.³⁵ However, since the primary emphasis in evangelical spirituality has been on truth rather than on experience, many Christians are confused concerning the role that experiences play, not only in spiritual formation, but in the spiritual life in general. Some Christians today are similar to Moses. They want to cry out to God, “I pray You, show me Your glory!” (Exod 33:18), but they are not sure it is even the right thing to do. Should a believer in Christ even seek a personal encounter with the Almighty? Yet, A. W. Tozer reminded believers a generation ago that at the heart of the Christian message is God Himself waiting for His children to “push into conscious awareness of His Presence.”³⁶ Tozer cautioned against the type of Christianity where one is aware of the presence of God positionally, but nothing is said about the need to experience that

³⁴ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 480.

³⁵ Books on spiritual formation that maintain the biblical balance include: Baker, *Soul Keeping*. Boa, *Conformed to His Image*. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*; Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*. *Invitation to a Journey*; Mel Lawrenz, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000). Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002).

³⁶ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1948), 137.

presence actually.

The current popularity of Henry Blackaby's book, *Experiencing God*,³⁷ indicates that evangelical believers are hungry today to experience God's presence in actuality—in experience. However, the delicate balance proposed by Packer must be maintained between doctrine, practice, and experience. The next chapter will confirm that 2 Corinthians 3:4-18 is a key passage which brings doctrine, practice, and experience into proper balance concerning both the ministry and the transformation of believers into the image of Christ.

³⁷ Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994).

CHAPTER 3
THE MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT IN
2 CORINTHIANS 4:4-18

The Background to 2 Corinthians 3:4-18

The apostle Paul's main purpose for writing 2 Corinthians was to regain the complete confidence of the congregation in Corinth in order to tie them closer to himself and thereby closer to the gospel message that he taught and proclaimed.¹ Therefore, Paul is on the defensive in much of the letter.² In the first seven chapters, Paul tries to regain the Corinthians' trust by demonstrating the validity of his ministry. One of the ways he does this is by presenting the Corinthians with credentials intended to inspire confidence in him as a minister of the gospel that also serve as ammunition against itinerant evangelists who were seeking to displace him.³ This is the main thrust of Paul's argument that begins in 2:14 and extends to 4:6. Gordon D. Fee writes that in the course of Paul defending himself and the gospel, four concerns are integrally woven together in this section: "(1) a defense of Paul's apostleship, and thereby his gospel, which (2) though characterized by suffering and weakness, is nonetheless full of the Spirit and therefore of glory, as is evidenced (3) by the Corinthian believers themselves and by their own experi-

¹ See Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, ed. Grant R. Osborne, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 22.

² See Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 354.

³ See Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 22.

ences of the Spirit; therefore (4) they should not succumb to the wiles of some outsiders, who despite letters of commendation, are nonetheless ‘peddlers of the word of truth.’”⁴

Furthermore, Ben Witherington notes that one of the keys to understanding this letter and Paul’s approach in writing to the Corinthians is a recognition that Paul and the Corinthians seem to have different views on who is the client and who is the patron in their relationship.⁵ Witherington stresses that Paul viewed God as the benefactor or patron and the apostle as God’s ambassador or agent who dispenses the largess of God in the form of salvation, grace, faith, and the Spirit. The clients are the Corinthians. But in contrast, some of the Corinthians saw themselves as benefactors of various itinerant evangelists and were upset when Paul did not allow them to be such for him. Based on the misunderstanding of their social relationship, the Corinthians felt that something was wrong with Paul because he would not accept the financial support that they were generously extending to him.⁶ Others had come to Corinth who apparently had accepted the patronage of the Corinthians. These itinerant evangelists were disparaging Paul for not accepting the support of the Corinthians as they had. Paul must show how the Corinthians have completely misunderstood their relationship and how that affects their understanding and acceptance of Paul’s ministry.

Paul’s defense of his apostleship begins in the salutation, where he identifies himself as a commissioned agent through the will of God (2 Cor 1:1). Then, in the third

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 297.

⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 353-354.

⁶ Paul had supported himself as a tent-maker while ministering in Corinth (see Acts 18:3) and did not “charge” the Corinthians for his ministry (2 Cor 11:7). Later, Paul was accused of deceitfully keeping part of the collection for the believers in Jerusalem for his own use (see 2 Cor 4:2; 12:16-18).

chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul presents evidence or proofs for his claim to be God's commissioned agent. Two kinds of proof or arguments were used in ancient forensic rhetoric: artificial and inartificial.⁷ Derived from the facts of the case, Witherington notes that artificial proofs include *ēthos*, *logos*, and *pathos*.⁸ *Ēthos* has to do with the establishment of moral character by showing oneself in the best possible light and one's opponent in the worst. The aim is to establish goodwill and uprightness of the person under scrutiny. Through out 2 Corinthians, Paul is presenting himself as one who encourages his readers in order to build rapport with them. *Pathos* attempts to arouse the audience's emotions to sympathy with the case of the accused and rejection of the views of the opponents. An example of *pathos* is at the end of 2 Corinthians where Paul appeals to the stronger emotions such as anger (2 Cor 12:20). Finally, *logos* involves deductive arguments and arguments based on examples from history. 2 Corinthians 9:10 contains an inductive argument while chapter 3 contains arguments from history, namely the example from the life of Moses. The example of Moses comes from the Old Testament, a document consisting of inartificial forensic evidence.

Inartificial evidence was the sort with which most people were preoccupied. Inartificial evidence involved such things as decisions of previous higher courts, rumors, evidence gained by torture, documents, oaths, and witnesses. Using the methodology of forensic rhetoric to make his defense, Paul submits two "documents" of inartificial evidence in 2 Corinthians 3. First, in 2 Corinthians 3:1-3, Paul submits the Corinthians themselves as evidential proof. Then in 3:7-14, he submits documentation pertaining to

⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 375.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 334.

the old covenant as further inartificial evidence.

The first inartificial evidence submitted by Paul is the Corinthians themselves as, “our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men” (2 Cor 3:2). Since the implication that Paul is sufficient for such ministry may sound like self-commendation, or arrogance, he turns to rhetoric in 3:1-3 to assert otherwise. In contrast to others who apparently had made a point of having their letters of reference, Paul needs no outside commendation at all, at least in the form of letters (see 2 Cor 3:1).⁹ Therefore, Paul submits that the Corinthians themselves are the living proof of the effectiveness and therefore the veracity of his apostleship. The primary evidence relates to 2 Corinthians 2:2-3 where Paul reminds the Corinthians that on account of his ministry they had received the Spirit. The credentials that he has to offer are Christ’s own letters written with the Spirit of the Living God on the hearts of his converts (see 3:3).

Not only had the Corinthians received the Spirit, Paul includes them with the believers who are being transformed just as from the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). They had received the Spirit and were also being transformed from glory to glory. Therefore, spiritual formation is implicit in the lives of the Corinthians themselves. The Corinthians would exhibit spiritual progress unto Christlikeness as a result of the ministry which is of the Spirit. Thus, 2 Corinthians 3:18 serves to set the goal for Christian spirituality.

The Minister and the Ministry of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6

Before introducing the second piece of inartificial proof as evidence—doc-

⁹ See Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 298.

uments pertaining to the old covenant—Paul firmly establishes the ministry which is of the Spirit as the overarching subject of 2 Corinthians 3:4-18. Paul begins the section in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 by answering the rhetorical question he asked in 2:16: “And who is adequate for these things?” He answers the question of competency by stating: “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God” (2 Cor 3:4). In contrast to the letters of recommendation and endorsement that put a seal of approval and authenticity upon the ministry of the itinerant evangelists, Paul unequivocally states that competency in ministry is God-given and of the Spirit, not something that is humanly achieved or prescribed.

The Minister’s Disclaimer of Competency

Paul is concerned that his claim to have letters of recommendation that originate with the Spirit of God could be misconstrued as overconfidence.¹⁰ But it is not self-confidence or human ability at all that Paul has in mind. So this leads Paul to list a series of disclaimers in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 that are designed to forestall any allegations that he is trusting in his own abilities, strengths, or the plaudits of others in order to have an effectual and authentic ministry. Paul’s first disclaimer is that his confidence is: “through Christ toward God” (3:4). Paul had been called by Christ on the road to Damascus and commissioned by Him through the words and by the laying on of hands of Ananias (see Acts 9:13-16). The source of Paul’s confidence is that he had been commissioned as an apostle by the will of God (see 2 Cor 1:1). It is Christ who is the author of the apostle’s letter of recommendation. It is through Christ, not through human recommendation or reverence.

Ralph P. Martin translates the second part of the phrase, “through Christ

¹⁰ See Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 92.

toward God” (2 Cor 3:4) as “through Christ in the presence of God.”¹¹ Rather than promoting self-confidence, it is in the divine presence that a person is most aware of his frailty and finitude.¹² For example, when confronted with the presence of God, the prophet Isaiah was most aware of his sin and inability. He lamented, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:5). One gains a proper sense of human limitation which comes to full realization when a person is confronted with divine omnipotence and sees all ministry as being in the “presence of God.”

Paul states in the second disclaimer that he does not possess any competency in and of himself. He continues in verse 5: “Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves.” The word translated “to consider,” (*λογίζομαι*) in this place means to “credit to one’s own abilities.”¹³ Paul does not seek any credit for himself, unlike those who boasted in their own letters of recommendation. Paul no longer places any trust in his own heritage, devotion, or natural ability and considers these to be rubbish in comparison to gaining Christ (see Phil 3:3; 5-6).

Paul is confident, not because of his own resources and abilities, but because as he states in the third and final disclaimer: “[his] adequacy is from God,” (3:5b). Paul

¹¹ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 52. The phrase, “πρὸς τὸν θεόν” (3:4), has raised a point of difficulty in interpretation. It is a question of whether it is speaking of proximity or of movement toward God. If it is speaking of movement toward God and thereby translated as, “toward God” (see BDF § 239; Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 92), then it is toward God that “confidence” is directed. However, if it is speaking of proximity and translated or understood as “before God” (see Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 162; Thrall, *II Corinthians*, 228), the phrase is parallel with 2:17: “in the sight of God.” Martin understands the phrase to denote the sphere in which Paul’s ministry is exercised. In keeping with heavy emphasis in 2 Corinthians 3 on the presence of Spirit, the phrase is best understood and translated as “in the presence of God.”

¹² *Ibid.*, 53.

¹³ See Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 93.

wants his readers to understand that the only resource from which he, or anyone, can draw is the infinite reservoir of grace provided by God's present and empowering Spirit.¹⁴ Ministerial competency issues not from self but from God. Having set forth a series of disclaimers related to human ability and self-confidence, Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 3:6 with the true basis for competency as a minister of Jesus Christ: "[God] also qualified us as ministers of a new covenant."

The Minister's Basis for Competency

Verse 6 of 2 Corinthians 3 serves as a transition to the extended discussion of the superior new covenant ministry of the Spirit. The terms *διάκονος* (minister) and *διακονία* (ministry) occur five times in verses 6-11. Paul's point is that competence as a minister of Jesus Christ lies chiefly in God whom he represents. He eschews all claims to being self-appointed or relying on his own abilities and resources. Martin emphasizes, "[Paul] sees his life *coram Deo* [in the presence of God], as God sees it in its weakness, and he knows that only God can equip him."¹⁵ If the minister of Jesus Christ truly wants to be effectual, this lesson must be learned. It is God alone who bestows both competence and qualification while effective ministry is exercised in His presence.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul uses a phrase that occurs only here in the New Testament: "ministers of a new covenant." The shorter part of the phrase—*καλινης διαθηκης*—appears also in Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant written in the hearts (Jer 31:33; see Heb 8:8), is spoken by the Lord Jesus at the Last Supper (Luke 22:20; see

¹⁴ See David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenden, New American Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 162.

¹⁵ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 54.

1 Cor 11:25), and is also found in Hebrews 9:15. In 2 Corinthians 3:6, however, Paul uses the phrase *καινός διαθήκη* (new covenant) in conjunction with *διάκονος* (ministry) to contrast his ministry with the false apostles he will condemn in chapters 10–11. Paul states that the false apostles disguise themselves as “ministers (*δίακονοι*) of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:15) and rhetorically asks, “Are they ministers (*δίακονοι*) of Christ” (2 Cor 11:23)? In the course of defending his ministry, Paul describes himself and his cohorts as “ministers (*διακόνους*) of a new covenant.”

The nature of the new covenant, of which Paul is a minister, is defined in the remainder of 2 Corinthians 3:6. The character of the old covenant is “of letter” (*γράμματος*) and “kills” while the new covenant is “of Spirit” (*πνεύματος*) and “gives life.”¹⁶ What is qualitatively better about the new covenant is that it is not a “letter” covenant—an external code—but that it is a “Spirit” covenant—an internal power.¹⁷ Paul points out in the next verse, 2 Corinthians 3:7, that the old covenant was written in “letters engraved on stones.” Concerning the weakness of the old covenant, David E. Garland suggests, “Since the letter only specifies God’s demand and the punishment for failing to obey, it ends up only condemning the disobedient to death and never giving life or righteousness (Gal 3:21).”¹⁸ The Spirit covenant, however, gives obedience, life, and the potential for the old to become new (Gal 5:17; Eph 4:22,24; Col 3:9-10). Paul is talking about

¹⁶ Both the head noun (*διαθήκη*) and the two genitives (*γράμμα* and *πνεῦμα*) lack the article. Wallace notes that when an anarthrous genitive (attributed) is related to an anarthrous head noun both nouns will usually be equally definite, indefinite, or qualitative. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 89. In this case, the nouns are equally qualitative. “Letter” and “Spirit” are descriptive terms that set forth the quality or nature of their respective covenants.

¹⁷ See Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 94.

¹⁸ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 166.

ministry or rendering service to God. Therefore, the letter and the Spirit are two different ways of serving God under the two different covenants. One is carved on stone tablets (2 Cor 3:7) which requires obedience without ability and the other is written on human hearts (3:3) where obedience is compelled by the power and presence of the Spirit. Paul is reminding the Corinthians that he serves as a minister of the new covenant directed by the power of the Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 3:1-3 Paul used the method of forensic rhetoric to submit the Corinthian believers themselves as evidence for proof for the veracity of his ministry and apostleship. Paul subsequently compares himself with Moses, a minister of the old covenant (2 Cor 3:7-18) by submitting a second piece of inartificial proof as evidence.

The Splendor of the Ministry of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11

Beginning in 2 Corinthians 3:7, Paul submits an Old Testament narrative to further substantiate his claim that he is a commissioned agent through the will of God (see 2 Cor 1:1) and to further demonstrate the validity of his ministry. The evidence comes from the Old Testament narrative concerning Moses and his experience of the transformational presence and glory of God in Exodus 32–34. Paul uses the narrative to explicate the essential differences between the ministries of the old and new covenants. Because of the importance of the Old Testament narrative concerning Moses to Paul's argument, a brief review of the narrative will be offered here.

The Splendor of the Old Covenant Ministry

Israel's ongoing experience of the glory of God had the potential to purify

them to become a holy “kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:5-6; 20:20).¹⁹ However, because of their sin of idolatry while Moses was on Mount Sinai, God revealed to Moses His desire to destroy the people and start over by making a great nation from Moses (32:10). This led Moses to intercede on behalf the people in order to keep Israel from being destroyed and to further secure God’s promise of His continual presence with the congregation (32:11–33:17). The Lord responded to Moses’ intercession by informing him: “My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest” (33:14). Although God had granted Moses’ request to preserve Israel as a nation, the people remained “stiff-necked” (32:9; 34:9), and the covenant stipulations of the law relating to the curses and judgment of death remained in effect. The effect, in Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians, is: “the letter kills” (see 2 Cor 3:6). From this point, God’s presence would bring punishment to Israel, not the potential purification (Exod 33:3, 5). Scott J. Hafemann stresses that God’s response to Moses raises the pressing theological problem in the passage in Exodus, “How can God’s glory continue to dwell in the midst of Israel without destroying her?”²⁰

Knowing that God cannot dwell in the midst of a stiff-necked people, Moses’ final request of God was, “I pray Thee, show me thy Glory” (33:18). Moses desired to visibly see God’s glory as the solution to Israel’s dilemma (33:18-23). The Lord granted Moses’ startling request and renewed the covenant with Israel (33:4). When Moses came down from the mountain with the new tablets, his face shone brilliantly on account of speaking with the Lord (34:29). Aaron and all the people of Israel were afraid to come near to Moses. Moses called to them and when they returned to Moses, he commanded

¹⁹ See Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, ed. Terry Muck, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 142.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

them to do all that the Lord had spoken to him on Mount Sinai (34:29-32). When Moses finished speaking to the congregation, he covered his face with a veil (34:33). His continued solution to the problem that God's presence would bring judgment and death to the people was to pitch a tent a great distance outside of the camp (Exod 33:7-11). Whenever Moses visited this 'tent of meeting' and entered into God's presence, he took off the veil until he came out; at that time he replaced the veil because the people would see that Moses' face was shining (34:34-35).

The Superior Splendor of the New Covenant Ministry

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, against the backdrop of the narrative in Exodus, Paul contrasts the glory of the old covenant ministry with the superior glory of the new covenant ministry which is of the Spirit. The effect and application of the new covenant ministry follows in 2 Corinthians 3:12-18.

Paul's approach to the old covenant is not to denigrate it, but rather to demonstrate the superiority of the new covenant ministry. He submits the old covenant documents—namely the narrative from Exodus—as evidence in defense of his ministry to show that although the old covenant came with glory, the new covenant ministry, of which he is a minister, has even more glory (2 Cor 3:7-8). To prove this, Paul uses a common rhetorical method which consists of arguing from the lesser to the greater. His first line of reasoning is that if the glory of the old covenant came with such overpowering splendor that the congregation could not look into the face of Moses as he descended Mount Sinai, how much greater must be the new covenant splendor. The reference to the fading glory of Moses' face is used by Paul to indicate the character of

the old covenant which is transitory (2 Cor 3:7) and has no lasting effect.²¹ The giving of the Law on Mount Sinai and the ministry of Moses came with a magnificent, but fading, glory; but in contrast, the ministry of the new covenant has eternal effects which include the imputing of righteousness (see 2 Cor 3:9) and the transformation of the believer (see 2 Cor 3:18).

Paul's second evaluation of the glory of the old covenant compared to the new covenant is even more to the point. He refers to the old covenant in 2 Corinthians 3:9 as the "ministry of condemnation" and the new covenant ministry which is of the Spirit as the "ministry of righteousness." Paul parallels what he wrote earlier in verse 6: "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The old covenant did nothing either to alleviate the human condition as sinful or empower the obedience necessary to obey its external codes (see Rom 8:2-3). The new covenant ministry "excels" (περισσεύω) in glory because it can bring "righteousness" (2 Cor 3:9). Paul sees his ministry as the agency of righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). In the text, righteousness is set in contrast to condemnation (κατάκρισις). Therefore, Thrall suggests that "righteousness" here must mean "justification" or the verdict of acquittal in the divine judgment.²² Paul preaches the gospel of the death of Christ (1 Cor 2:2) which he sees as the means of man's justification (see Rom 3:24-25).

²¹ On the one hand, Thrall (*II Corinthians*, 244) states that the participle of καταργέω refers specifically to the fading of Moses' face and that Paul is supplying additional information that is not given in the Exodus account: i.e. the glory of Moses' face faded. Hafeman (*2 Corinthians*, 148) on the other hand, indicates that there is no need to suggest that καταργέω means to gradually "fade away." He suggests that the passive voice points to the fact that the impact or significance of the glory was brought to an end. He further suggests that it was Moses' veiling that was rendering the glory inoperative. Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 175) mediates between these two positions to point out that in some way, it was still a transitory glory.

²² See Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton, International Critical Commentary, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 249.

Paul declared to the Romans, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). Since the message of the new covenant ministry can effect acquittal, it is far superior to the old covenant ministry which is incapable of alleviating the human condition as sinful.

In 2 Corinthians 3:10-11, Paul takes the lesser to greater arguments one step further. Not only is the splendor of the old covenant transitory; not only does it do nothing to alleviate the sinful human condition; it is completely eclipsed by the glory of the new covenant. In 2 Corinthians 4:17, the noun form of the verb translated “surpassing” (ὑπερβολή/ὑπερβάλλω) is used as Paul writes, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (ὑπερβολή).” There is no comparison. The splendor of the new covenant so outshines the old covenant that it makes the old covenant seem nonexistent. Theodoret is quoted as saying, “As the light of a lantern shines at night, but at noonday is overpowered by the sun, so was the glory of Moses overshadowed by Christ.”²³

In concluding his lesser to greater arguments, Paul returns in 2 Corinthians 3:11 to the transitory nature of the old covenant ministry. The reason that the ministry of righteousness is a greater glory is because it remains and does not fade away like the ministry of condemnation. The veiling of Moses’ face indicated from the very beginning of the old covenant that it was of a transitory nature. If the impermanent covenant was attended by glory at its inauguration, much more glory is possessed by that which is permanent. The nature of the ministry of death and condemnation is a fading glory. It is surpassed by the ministry of righteousness because the nature of the ministry of righ-

²³ Theodoret as quoted by Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 178.

teousness abounds in glory that remains and supercedes the glory of the ministry of condemnation.

Having submitted two “documents” of proof—the Corinthians themselves as “our letter” (2 Cor 3:2) and the documentation concerning the narrative in the Old Testament concerning Moses (2 Cor 3:7-11)—Paul turns his attention in 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 to the effect and application concerning the glory of the two contrasting covenants. In doing so, Paul returns to Moses’ veil to lead up to an essential distinction between the two covenants, a vast difference in effect related to spiritual formation (see 2 Cor 3:18).

The Effect of the Ministry of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:12-16

The next step in Paul’s argument interprets Exodus 34:29-35 which returns to the habit of Moses who veiled himself before the people of Israel and removed the veil when he was in the presence of the Lord. But before drawing conclusions from the text in Exodus, Paul draws a conclusion from the greater splendor of the new covenant ministry of the Spirit. Since the ministry of the Spirit has a greater splendor, then its ministers have a greater boldness (2 Cor 3:12). Apparently, those who were seeking to displace Paul had accused him of professional arrogance. Paul responded in 2 Corinthians 3:5 by relating that the new covenant minister’s competency is from God, not considered from one’s self. Paul interjects in 2 Corinthians 3:12 that since the new covenant is permanent and therefore has a relationship to the future (cf. the future tense in 3:8) and is not transitory, the new covenant minister may also proclaim its message with greater “boldness” (3:12).

The reason for making the most of a greater boldness is because of a greater

“hope” (2 Cor 3:12). Hope does not refer to a wishful thinking to Paul, but rather to a supreme confidence. For example, Paul uses the word ἐλπίς (“hope”) to express his unshakable confidence in the Corinthians (2 Cor 1:7) and confidence that their faith will continue to grow (2 Cor 10:15). In 2 Corinthians 3:12, Paul has in mind confidence in the spiritual realities of the new covenant ministry which he has enumerated. Namely, Paul serves in the ministry of righteousness where God justifies sinners and where the glory is greater because it does not fade away like the ministry of condemnation. This solid assurance gives the minister of the gospel great “boldness” (παρρησία). Παρρησία refers to a use of speech which conceals nothing and passes over nothing.²⁴ Garland suggests the term refers to the right to speak freely and openly and to give frank criticism in order to cultivate moral improvement.²⁵ The Corinthian correspondence indicates that believers in the church in Corinth suffered from a variety of spiritual disorders and most likely, there were some who would take issue with Paul’s admonitions. Some Corinthians thought Paul was too outspoken and that his letters did not match his “personal presence [which was] unimpressive and his speech [which was] contemptible” (2 Cor 10:10). But Paul’s boldness stems from the fact that God chose him to deliver a life and death message in the presence of God (see 2:17) in much the same way that God chose Moses.

Paul introduces his interpretation and exposition of Exodus 34:29-35 by contrasting himself with Moses: “[We] use great boldness in our speech and are not like

²⁴ The word παρρησία is used of outspokenness or frankness in John 7:13; 10:24; 11:14; 16:25. Paul uses παρρησία in 2 Corinthians 7:7 when he says, “I am speaking to you with great frankness.” See also Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 781.

²⁵ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 181.

Moses” (2 Cor 3:12b–13a). The point is that Paul and new covenant ministers do not have to behave like Moses who was in the habit of veiling his face.²⁶ Paul states that Moses put a veil over his face so that the “sons of Israel would not look intently at what was fading away” (3:13).

Contemporary interpretations divide between two basic alternatives as to why Moses behaves this way in veiling himself: either he wanted to hide something from the people or he wanted to protect the people.²⁷ Those who understand Moses as hiding something see *τέλος* as the fading of the glory on Moses’ face. This view portrays a note of embarrassment in Moses because he did not want the people to see the fading of his facial splendor. Some even suggests that Moses wanted to hide the fact that the Mosaic covenant was only temporary.²⁸

Scott J. Hafeman proposes the second alternative; Moses wanted to protect the people.²⁹ He explains that the Israelites were justifiably afraid of the glory on Moses’ face because of their sin and subsequent punishment (see Exod 32:19-29). Hafeman notes that in 2 Corinthians 3:7, the reason Israel was not able to gaze continuously into the glory on Moses face was because of her “stiff-necked” condition which would have destroyed her. In 2 Corinthians 3:13, it is Moses’ practice of veiling himself that brings about Israel’s inability (*πρὸς τὸ plus the infinitive μὴ ἀτενίσαι*). Thus, in verse 13b Paul

²⁶ Syntactically, an abbreviated construction is used where *καὶ οὐ* means “we do not do,” indicating that Paul is referring to behavior. See F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Greek Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), (482) 2.

²⁷ See Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 184.

²⁸ See Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 103.

²⁹ See Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 155-156.

makes this purpose explicit by calling attention to Moses' intention in veiling the glory of God. In the view that Moses was protecting the people, τέλος is understood as "outcome" or "goal" rather than "end."³⁰ The outcome or τέλος is that the old covenant, as a whole, is "being rendered inoperative" (καταργουμένου) in terms of its consequences. This outcome refers to the death-dealing judgment of God's glory on his "stiff-necked people." If Moses was hiding something, as the first view proposes, then Moses' motive is suspect and Paul is expressing something that goes beyond the text in Exodus. Yet, no hint appears in the text in Exodus or in contemporary Jewish tradition that the glory on Moses' face was fading.³¹

Paul refers to the veil as the "same veil" (τὸ αὐτὸ κάλυμμα) that remains unlifted at the reading of the old covenant (2 Cor 3:14). The barrier, present at the time of Moses, remained the same as at the time of Paul. In spite of Paul's bold proclamation, Israel did not respond to Paul for the same reason she did not respond to Moses: "But (ἀλλά) their minds were hardened" (3:14). Paul introduces a contrast in verse 14 that lends to difficulty if it is related directly to verse 13b. The question is, "What is contrasted to the hardening of the Israelite's minds?" If ἀλλά retains its usual adversative meaning, it must be contrasted with the statement in verse 13a: "We are not like Moses . . . but their minds were hardened." Paul adds in verse 15, "but (ἀλλά) to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart." Paul remains adamant that Israel

³⁰ The word τέλος has a broad range of meanings including "end," "termination," "conclusion," "last," and "goal" or "outcome." See Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 998. Romans 10:4 references Christ as the τέλος of the law. If the καταργουμένου in 2 Corinthians 3:13 is the Mosaic covenant in general, then Romans 10:4 is a parallel verse.

³¹ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 187.

remains stiff-necked and refuses to turn to the Lord or submit to His will. The fault, though, is not with Moses or the Law but with those who hear. Hafemann comments, “This again highlights the contrast between Israel’s inability to encounter God’s glory because of her stiff-necked state, which necessitated the use of the veil, and Moses’ ability to encounter the glory of God unveiled as one whose heart had been transformed by the Spirit.”³² In Exodus 34:34, it was Moses who entered before the Lord unveiled. In 2 Corinthians 3:16, Paul plays on this idea to say, “anyone who turns to the Lord” has the veil taken away.

The first effect of the new covenant ministry is that its ministers can speak with much boldness and are not like Moses who had to veil his face in order to protect those he served (see 2 Cor 3:12-13). The second effect of the new covenant ministry is that the veil or the barrier can be removed (3:16). Paul then returns to Moses and the veil in 2 Corinthians 3:16 and quotes from Exodus 34:34 freely with some significant changes to show how it applies to the one who comes to faith in Jesus Christ.³³ The changes to the text in Exodus are made by Paul to show that the ministry which is of the Spirit is a prototype experience available to those believers under the new covenant who follow Moses example “to the Lord” (2 Cor 3:16).

The change from a spatial idea of “enter” (εἰσπορεύομαι; Exod 34:34) to the

³² Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 159.

³³ The first change is that “Moses” is omitted from the citation by Paul and the verb ἐπιστρέφω (turn) has no explicit subject. Second, the verb εἰσπορεύομαι (enter) in the Septuagint is changed to ἐπιστρέφω and is an aorist subjunctive. With the subjunctive, ἐάν (if) is added to introduce a third class condition that makes a more probable future condition (See Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 696. The subjunctive is not present general condition because there is a fulfillment of the protasis. Finally, the verb περιαιρέω (remove) is changed from an imperfect tense in the Septuagint to a present tense. Garland further notes concerning Paul’s quote: “In the Exodus passage the verb is clearly a middle voice so that Moses removes the veil when he come into the presence of the Lord. In Paul’s text the verb should read as a passive voice so that the veil is ‘taken away,’” (Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 194).

verb “turn” (ἐπιστρέφω; 2 Cor 3:16) suggests that Paul has conversion in mind (see Acts 9:35; Acts 11:2; 15:19; 26:20). At conversion, the hardness of the heart of rebellion is removed and forgiveness has been received and life has been given (see 2 Cor 3:6). Most often in the New Testament “Lord” refers to Christ; but in this case it refers to God the Father.³⁴ Like Moses, the one who turns to the Father encounters the glory of God without fear of destruction. By virtue of the ministry which is of the Spirit—who gives life (2 Cor 3:6) and who writes God’s law on the heart (Jer 31:33)—anyone can safely enter God’s presence through Jesus Christ (see Eph 3:12). A parallel reference related to turning to God is contained in 1 Thessalonians 1:9: “For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.”

Moses placed a veil over his face in order to protect those whom he served in order that they might not be destroyed by the glory of God on account of their “stiff-necked” condition. In contrast, the minister of the new covenant ministry which is of the Spirit can be open and bold. Anyone can enter God’s presence through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, with unveiled faces (see 2 Cor 3:18), all Christians can encounter the presence and the glory of God and live because the condemnation of the old covenant has been annulled for those who turn to the Lord. The result is transformation which is demonstrated in the final section in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.

³⁴ In Paul’s writings κύριος generally means Christ except when Paul is quoting Scripture or working with a scriptural text. In all of Paul’s quotations of the Old Testament, the reference to the Lord refers to YHWH. See Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, Anchor Bible, vol. 32A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 211.

**The Transforming Ministry of the Spirit
in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18**

Paul's interpretive conclusions and exposition of the account of Moses and the veil in Exodus 34:34 contain two results for the believer who has turned to the Lord and has had the veil taken away. The first result is freedom from the veil (2 Cor 3:17) and the second is transformation into the image of Christ.

Freedom from the Veil

Verse 17 of 2 Corinthians 3 is seen as an age old problem³⁵ that has mystified theologians.³⁶ Gordon D. Fee, however, sees this verse as one of the more significant Spirit passages in Paul's letters where his argument that began in 2 Corinthians 3:4 begins to take wings.³⁷ The difficulty lies in the notion that Paul seems to identify Christ as the Spirit: "Now the Lord is the Spirit" (3:17). Fee solves this difficulty by pointing out that Paul intends 3:17-18 to be an interpretation of his transformed citation of Exodus 34:34 in 2 Corinthians 3:16.³⁸ Paul uses an introductory formula, ὁ δὲ κύριος, in which a previously cited biblical text is now reintroduced with δέ.³⁹ The usage of the formula is almost identical in Galatians 4:25 where Paul is interpreting the Sarah and Hagar stories as analogies. He interprets Sarah and Hagar as being "two [different] covenants."

Therefore, Paul is not confusing the Persons of the Trinity and equating Christ with the

³⁵ See Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 160.

³⁶ See Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 109.

³⁷ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 309.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 311.

³⁹ This introductory formula occurs three times in Paul's writings: 2 Cor 3:17; 1 Cor 10:4; Gal 4:25.

Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:17. He is making clear, in his interpretation of the Exodus text, that Moses' experience of Yahweh in the tent of meeting is equivalent to the current experience of the Spirit in Paul's ministry.⁴⁰ It is not so much that the Spirit is the proper identification of the Lord in the Exodus text, but that it is the proper way to understand what happens to those who, like Moses, "turn to the Lord." The Spirit applies the work of Christ to the life of the believer. This presupposes the Spirit as the fulfillment of the presence of God. The same Lord, whose presence Moses entered and who tabernacled in the midst of the old covenant people, is the same Lord whose presence is now in the hearts of believers. It is the life-giving Spirit of the living God.

In the last part of 2 Corinthians 3:17 Paul expresses one of the results of the presence of the Spirit with one word—freedom (ἐλευθερία). Where the Spirit is present, there is freedom. Paul associates the "Spirit" and "freedom" in three other passages (Rom 7:6; Rom 8:2ff; Gal 4:21–5:25). All three passages indicate that Paul's association of the Spirit and Christian freedom is deliberate.⁴¹ In Romans 7:6, Paul describes freedom from the law as "the new life of the Spirit." The thought is repeated and elaborated in Romans 8:2 beginning with, "the law of the Spirit of the life in Christ Jesus did set me free from the law of the sin and of the death." In what follows, "walking according to the Spirit" is contrasted with "walking according to the flesh" (see Rom 8:3-8). The third passage, Galatians 4:21–5:25, moves again to an appeal to "walk by the Spirit."

In 2 Corinthians 3:17, the idea freedom is closely associated with the idea of boldness (παρρησία; 2 Cor 3:12). As indicated in 2 Corinthians 3:12, the word παρρησία

⁴⁰ See Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 160.

⁴¹ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 236.

refers to the right to speak freely and openly. It does not refer to freedom from some restraint. Therefore in 2 Corinthians 3, Paul does not have in mind freedom from the law. The subject is not freedom from the law, but the ministry of the new covenant. Without discounting the importance of freedom from the law (Rom 7:6; 8:2), Paul uses the idea of freedom to emphasize the positive results to be set free. Paul is free and can use boldness without holding back. In the same way, believers have freedom—apart from the veil—that only comes when one turns to the Lord (2 Cor 3:16).

Because Israel did not have the Spirit to make their hearts receptive to God's law, they were prevented from beholding God's glory. Using a metonymy, Paul employs the term *κάλυμμα* (2 Cor 3:15; "veil") to represent the people's hardheartedness that thwarted their ability to experience God's glory to its fullest extent.⁴² In the age of the Spirit, there is no need for veils.

Progressive Transformation

The proximity of the divine presence caused Moses' transformation and in 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul expresses a second result of the presence of the Spirit; every believer can experience the divine presence and the glorious transformation through the Spirit. Paul's ministry mediates the Spirit whose role is to transform the lives of believers progressively into the image of Christ.⁴³

Freedom is a reversal of the state of affairs Paul has illustrated in Exodus 32–34. The transformation of God's people marks a decisive difference between the ministries of the old and new covenants. What was not available to God's people under

⁴² Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 197.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

the old covenant is freely available to those who turn to the Lord. Gordon Fee notes that with 2 Corinthians 3:18, “we reach the heights.” He writes, “No wonder Paul considers his opponents as mere peddlers of the word. They would lead God’s Spirit-people back into bondage, back under the now obsolete covenant that led to condemnation and dealt in death. Even though that covenant had glory, he allowed, it was nothing at all in comparison with the glory of the new.”⁴⁴

The second result for the believer who has turned to the Lord is transformation in God’s presence by the Spirit of God (3:18). Paul begins 2 Corinthians 3:18 with an inclusive “we” that includes both himself and his readers.⁴⁵ This is important to note because it is proposed that Paul only includes ministers of the new covenant as the reflections of God’s glory in the transformational process.⁴⁶ At issue is whether Paul only compares himself, along with other ministers, with Moses or if “we” contrasts the Israelites who have a veil shrouding their hearts with believers who have the veil taken away (see 3:15-16). If it refers primarily to a comparison between Moses and the minister of the new covenant, then it is the the new covenant ministers that reflect the knowledge of God to those around them.⁴⁷ The view that ministers are primarily in view greatly limits the application and significance of the passage for individual believers in Jesus Christ. Transformation is then mainly seen as an apostolic or ministerial prerog-

⁴⁴ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*.

⁴⁵ See the inclusive “we” in Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 397.

⁴⁶ Bellville, (*2 Corinthians*, 111), softens her earlier approach that applied this passage only to ministers of the gospel to possibly include all believers (*Paul's Polemical Use of the Moses*, 276). Furnish, (*II Corinthians*, 238), says it applies primarily to Paul and the Corinthians but that it can mean “all Christians.”

⁴⁷ See Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 112.

ative.⁴⁸ Fee argues persuasively that Paul concludes a similar defense of his apostolic integrity in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 by referring to his readers sharing in the giving and sealing of the Spirit as a pledge.⁴⁹ When speaking of the benefits of salvation Paul often includes his readers by using the first person plural (see 1 Cor 1:18, 30; 5:7; 6:14). Having effectively defended his ministry, the sense in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is that Paul includes all believers in the transformational process as one of the benefits of salvation.

Therefore, “but we all” (ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες, 2 Cor 3:18) refers to all believers and is in marked contrast to the people of Israel who could not participate in God’s transforming presence. Through Christ, all believers may enter God’s presence as did Moses when he went up on Mount Sinai and when he met with the Lord in the tent of meeting outside the camp (Exod 33:37-39). Garland expresses that the results are similar: “Beholding with an unveiled face the glory of the Lord causes us to be transformed into the same image.”⁵⁰

Much of the significance of the transformational process in 2 Corinthians 3:18 depends on the meaning of the rare verb κατοπτρίζομαι. The word can either mean to “be mirrored,” as in “to reflect,” or it can mean “to look into a mirror,” as in to “behold one’s self in a mirror.” The idea of the believer reflecting the glory of God necessarily implies that Paul is still contrasting himself and ministers with Moses. The reflection view presumes that unlike Moses, who veiled his face, Paul’s face is unveiled and he speaks openly so that he reflects the Lord’s glory to the people. The implication is that any

⁴⁸ See Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 282.

⁴⁹ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 314, n. 99.

⁵⁰ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 199.

believer can be a reflection of Jesus Christ to others in the world around them. The difficulty with this view is that it presupposes that transformation is somehow dependent upon how well the believer reflects the glory of God. It insinuates a human work rather than the transformational work of the Spirit. If there is very little reflection, then it is necessarily implied that there is little corresponding transformation into the “same image.”

Therefore, the word κατοπτρίζομαι refers to “beholding as in a mirror.” What is beheld in the mirror is an “image” (2 Cor 3:18b). The use of “image” (εἰκῶν) comes from the metaphor of looking into a mirror. An “image” is what is seen.⁵¹ The meaning of the mirror image is contained in 1 Corinthians 13:12: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.” The basic concept is to see into a mirror, not to reflect as a mirror. Furthermore, Paul goes on to clearly identify the “image” that is seen in the mirror in 2 Corinthians 4:4. He identifies it as: “the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” It is Jesus Christ who is the image of God and He mirrors the glory of God. Therefore, through the continuous perception of Christ, believers are “transformed into the same image” (τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα).⁵² The phrase, “From glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18) stresses the progressive aspect or the process of transformation. Christ, as God’s image, is progressively expressed in those who are transformed into the same image through the process of spiritual formation.

Even though Romans 12:2 uses the verb μεταμορφόομαι (transformed) to

⁵¹ See Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 318.

⁵² The accusative with the passive indicates that it is the “same image.” The accusative of the thing is retained with the passive of the verb μεταμορφόομαι. See Blass and Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Greek Literature*, 159 (4).

indicate a purely inner transformation effected by the renewing of the mind, there must be a visible element in view in 2 Corinthians 3:18. Thrall points out that Moses possessed a visible glory.⁵³ Therefore, for the Christian, the assimilation to Christ as the image of God produces a visibly Christlike character. Although it is not a reflection of the glory of God, it is an inner manifestation of the transformation of God that manifests itself through a visible expression of Christlikeness.

Paul adds a coda to complete his argument in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος). Paul clearly stresses that the agent of transformation is the Spirit.⁵⁴ There is nothing within the believer in Jesus Christ by which one can effect one’s own transformation. It is fully and completely the work of the Spirit. This is a distinctive mark that distinguishes the ministry which is of the Spirit from that of Moses and makes it tremendously more glorious.

⁵³ Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 285.

⁵⁴ The force of ἀπὸ is to denote cause or agency. See uses of ἀπὸ in Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 368.

CHAPTER 4
THE MINISTRY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The implications for the methods of ministry drawn out of the ministry which is of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:4-16 contribute directly to the spiritual formation of believers. Since the methods related to ministry correlate with the goal and the process of spiritual formation, the implications of 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 must be understood before the methods of ministry can be proposed. This chapter will further discuss the goal and the process of the transformation of the believer as a necessary expositional compass to Christian spirituality and varied spiritual approaches. The primary emphasis, related to process, will be the presence of God and how believers are to live in God's presence so as to be transformed into Christ's image. Methods of ministry, drawn out of 2 Corinthians 3:4-16, will then be proposed as they contribute to spiritual formation.

Christlikeness: The Goal of Transformation

The proper goal or result of Christian spirituality expressed in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is, "transformed into the same image (εἰκῶν)." In 2 Corinthians 4:4, the "same image" is identified as, "Christ, who is the image (εἰκῶν) of God." Therefore, the goal of spiritual formation is Christlikeness. To understand what it means to be conformed to the image of Christ (see Rom 8:29), it is necessary to comprehend Christ as the image of God, Christ as the last Adam, and the image of Christ in relation to the believer.

Christ: The Unique Image of God

Christ is the unique image of God. The word εἰκών means “image” in different senses.¹ For example, εἰκών makes reference to an “artistic representation” such as a painting or statue. In a natural sense, the word refers to a “reflection” or “apparition.” Ten times, εἰκών references the image of the beast in the Book of Revelation where it refers to an “idol.” However, only in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15 is εἰκών used of Jesus Christ as the essential image of God. Kleinknecht notes that εἰκών (“image”) in the ancient concept does not simply mean a representation, although it certainly includes this meaning; nor does it imply a weakening or a feeble copy of something. He writes, “[Εἰκών] implies the illumination of its inner core and essence.”² In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul states that Christ is “the image (εἰκών) of God.” Philip Hughes explains, “St. Paul is not simply saying that Christ is like God or reflects the character of God, or that through his incarnation he is the revealer of God to the world . . . for what is stated here is far more than a declaration of the function or effect of the incarnation.”³ Christ is the supreme and express image of God the Father; a concept that transcends the revelatory significance of the incarnation. Christ, as the image of God, is equal to the Father. In Him dwells all “the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). Christ, therefore, does not simply resemble (ὁμοίωμα) the Father in the sense of a likeness. He is of the same essence. Fienberg notes that the phraseology of 2 Corinthians

¹ H. Kleinknecht, “Εἰκών,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), vol 2, 388.

² *Ibid.*, 389.

³ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origen and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 26.

4:4 deals not so much with Christ as the incarnate Savior, but with Christ as the incarnate Son.⁴ Jesus is equal with God because He exists as the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15).

However, the truth that Jesus Christ is the image of God is twofold. On the one hand, as essential and eternal deity, Christ is equal with the Father and is the supreme and express image of God. On the other hand, Christ bears the created image of God which characterizes all true humanity. The discussion related to the conformation of believers to the image of Christ and the restoration of the corrupted image of God centers in the created image of God which Jesus Christ bore as a son of Adam (see Luke 3:38).

Christ: The Last Adam

Jesus’ incarnation supremely imaged God. In a distinctive way Jesus Christ bore the image of God as the “last Adam” who is a “life-giving spirit” (1 Cor 15:45). Jesus’ work of redemption is both compared and contrasted to Adam’s work of rebellion in Romans 5:12-21. By the transgression of one man, Adam, sin entered into the world with the effect that all humans are condemned (Rom 5:16). In nature, Adam is fallen in sin. But while Adam is guilty of offence against God, Christ provides the gift of righteousness (Rom 5:17,18). In the same way that Christ provides the gift of righteousness as the last Adam, through Christ comes sanctification.

Lindsey writes concerning God’s purpose for the first Adam, “God’s purpose for Adam was a beautiful, holy life, a life in which Adam would receive intellectually the truth of God, relate emotionally to the love of God, respond volitionally to the will of

⁴ Charles Lee Feinberg, "The Image of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (1972), 245.

God, and, in all this, realize and reflect the beauty of God.”⁵ But, in Adam, the moral likeness to God was marred, corrupted, and now exists in an impaired state. Motivated by sin and self to follow the counterfeit life designed by Satan, all humans fall short of God’s intended purpose (See Rom 3:23). However, as the sinless virgin-born son of Mary, Jesus Christ lived an absolutely holy life without that nature to sin which characterizes everyone in Adam since the fall.

Therefore, as the last Adam, Christ sums up all God purposes for humanity. As the perfect vessel of the natural image of God, Jesus modeled God’s intended purpose for all humankind. While self-love replaced love for the Father in the first Adam, Jesus expressed love for the Father (see John 14:31). Adam disobeyed God while Jesus expressed obedience to the will of the Father (see John 8:29). Whereas Adam believed the lie of the serpent, Jesus continually responded to the truth of God which He prayed would sanctify believers (see John 17:2). While independence characterizes everyone in Adam, the last Adam declared that He did nothing of His own initiative (See John 8:28). Modeling true humanity before God, Jesus was fully and completely dependent upon the Father. For the first time since the Garden of Eden, a man—Jesus Christ—was free to be truly human as God intended. Christ sums up all that humanity is to be. What ought to be true of every person is uniquely true in Jesus Christ. His whole life, character, and work bear the stamp of the image of God intended for all human beings.

The answer to humankind’s need in relation to Adam is found in Jesus Christ. In the incarnation, Jesus Christ expressed in human terms what God is like and demonstrated true humanity as God intends in accord with His image. Although marred and

⁵ F. Duane Lindsey, "Essays toward a Theology of Beauty; Part 3: The Beautiful Christian Life," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131, no. 524 (1974), 314.

corrupted, the divine image in humankind is restored through Jesus Christ. Feinberg states that the “principle emphasis in Pauline anthropology is the restoration of the image”⁶ according to the pattern of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christ is the pattern for redeemed humanity. The purpose of spiritual formation is the restoration of the image of God in conformity with the image of Christ.

The Believer’s Christlikeness

By the Spirit of God a person comes to know God (2 Cor 3:16; 1 Thess 1:5; Rom 8:2) and learns to live in His presence in a way as to constantly be renewed into God’s image (2 Cor 3:18). In spiritual formation, the effects of the fall are reversed. Paul uses language in 2 Corinthians 3:18 similar to the entire redemption process described in Romans 8:29: “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed (συμμόρφους) to the image (εἰκόνας) of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.” Gordon Fee theologically synthesizes Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 by writing:

As Adam was created in God’s εἰκὼν (“image/likeness”), but rolled that image in the dust, so the second Adam truly bears that likeness with all its resplendent glory. And we, too, now bear that likeness as we are “in Christ,” or in the words of this passage, as “we are transformed into the same likeness from glory to glory,” precisely because the goal is that we be finally “conformed into the likeness of his Son.”⁷

The Process of Transformation

The process of transformation from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18) entails both the presence and the agency of the Spirit as well as implying how believers are to live in

⁶ Feinberg, "The Image of God," 247.

⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 318.

the presence of God so as to be progressively transformed into the image of Christ. This section will describe the role of the Spirit, the progressive aspect of spiritual formation, and how believers are to live in God's presence so as to experience spiritual formation.

The Role of the Spirit of God

The concept of the presence of God by way of the Spirit is implicit in the apostle Paul's defense of his ministry and thereby his gospel message in 2 Corinthians 3. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 3:4 that his confidence is "in the presence of God" (πρὸς τὸν θεόν)⁸, and he further delineates that both conversion (3:16) and spiritual formation transpire in God's immediate presence (3:18).

The Spirit is the Presence of God. Paul specifically uses the Old Testament motif and imagery of God's presence to express the transformational work of the Spirit.⁹ The Spirit of God is shown by Paul to be none other than the fulfillment of the promise that God would once again be present with his people (see 2 Cor 6:16; cf. Exod 29:45). The stiff-necked rebellion of the old covenant people at Mount Sinai had forfeited the presence of God in their immediate midst. Therefore, God promised Moses that His presence would go with him (Exod 33:14), but it was a veiled glory in respect to the congregation. Although it was the practice of Moses to enter God's presence in the tent of meeting outside the camp, neither the immediate presence of God nor His resulting transformation was mediated to the congregation under the old covenant. Under the new

⁸ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, ed. Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 52. Martin understands the phrase to denote the sphere in which Paul's ministry is exercised. In keeping with heavy emphasis in 2 Corinthians 3 on the presence of Spirit, the phrase is best understood and translated as "in the presence of God." (See footnote #11 on page 26 of this paper).

⁹ See Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 844.

covenant, however, the Corinthians and all believers are understood to be the recipients of God's Spirit (Ezek 36:27) in that they are "inscribed" by "the Spirit of the living God" on "tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:3). Later in 2 Corinthians, Paul draws on the old covenant motif of God's presence specifically as he reminds his readers, "For we are the temple of the living God" (6:16). Under the new covenant, the transformational presence of God that was withheld from the old covenant people is readily available to those who "turn to the Lord" (2 Cor 3:16). Every person who comes to Christ in salvation has a personal encounter and experience of the living God by way of the Spirit. Furthermore, by the Spirit, God's presence has returned to his people to indwell them (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19).¹⁰

Moses' encounter and experience of God in the tent of meeting is an archetype for every believer in Jesus Christ. All believers today enjoy the privileges that in Moses' day were limited to a few. Erwin W. Lutzer points out that in the Old Testament people were asked by God to stay away from His presence.¹¹ They were to stay away from Mount Sinai and stay away from the holy of holies. Only certain representatives of the nation, such as Moses and the high priest, could draw near. But thanks to the work of Christ on the cross, believers now "have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith," (Heb 10:19-22). Every believer in Jesus Christ is invited to an ongoing personal encounter of God's transformational presence.

¹⁰ Ibid., 845.

¹¹ Erwin W. Lutzer, *Getting Closer to God: Keys to Spiritual Intimacy from the Life of Moses* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2000), 188.

The Spirit is the Transformational Agent of God. In Paul's writings, the Spirit is most frequently spoken of in terms of agency.¹² For example, revelation comes through the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10) and Paul's preaching is accompanied by the power of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:4). In 2 Corinthians 3: 18, Paul expresses that spiritual formation is effected in God's presence by His Spirit. He writes, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." Paul clearly expresses that spiritual formation is the work of the Spirit. Just as Paul's adequacy for ministry was not from himself but from God (2 Cor 3:5), one cannot accomplish one's own transformation.

Spiritual transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul reminded the Philippians of God's role: "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6). He further reminded his readers of the important truth that it is "God who is at work" (Phil 2:13). One cannot bring about one's own spiritual formation. The Galatians were guilty of believing they could change themselves by way of human effort or by keeping the law so Paul chided them, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal 3:3). It is foolish and futile to attempt one's own spiritual transformation. Since spiritual formation is expressed as the work of the Spirit, it raises the issue of the Christian's role in spiritual formation specifically addressed in the next section.

The Believer's Growth in Christlikeness

One might conclude that spiritual formation happens automatically. This

¹² Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 829.

could very well be the erroneous concept that accounts for many unchanged lives in the Body of Christ. Christians refuse to participate in the transformational work of the Spirit because they do not feel that participation is necessary or do not understand their personal role. Paul's statement that "we all are being transformed" (2 Cor 3:18) is often understood as a blanket truism that equally applies to every believer no matter what one's commitment is to the process of spiritual formation. Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 clearly militates against this kind of passivity in the spiritual life. In these two verses Paul stresses the believer's growing in Christlikeness and the believer's contemplation.

While Romans 8:29 expresses the purpose of restoration, confirmation to the image of God's Son which effectively restores the divine image, 2 Corinthians 3:18 stresses the progressive aspect. "From glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18) indicates a growth in Christlikeness. The phrase denotes a splendor that steadily grows, in contrast to the short-lived glory of Moses' face (see 2 Cor 3:13). Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that Christ is the "image" of God and in 2 Corinthians 4:6 declares that God has shown into the hearts of believers so that through that "light" one might see God's glory, which is located "in the face of Jesus Christ." Therefore, the image in the mirror is unmistakably Jesus Christ who displays God's glory. Unlike the Hebrews who were unable to behold the face of Moses and behold the glory of God, on account of the veil, every believer is free to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. As one "contemplates" (κατοπτρίζομενοι) Christ, one is changed more and more into His very likeness.

The Believer's Contemplation. It is evident that Paul has in mind contemplating Christ both in the "word of God" (2 Cor 4:2) and in the gospel message (see 2 Cor

4:3-4). Warren Wiersbe aptly explains, “When the people of God look into the Word of God and see the glory of God, the Spirit of God transforms them to be like the Son of God (Rom 8:29).”¹³ Wiersbe, drawing from Paul, has in mind both the living and the written Word of God. Jesus is the living Word of God who became flesh and “pitched his tent” among humankind (John 1:14). In response to God “pitching his tent” with them, the apostle John declares, “We saw His glory” (John 1:14). John’s language is suggestive of when Moses met with God face to face in the tent of meeting and experienced the transformational presence of God and God’s glory. John most likely has in mind the particular glorious event of the transfiguration of Christ of which Matthew writes, “And [Jesus] was transfigured (μεταμορφόομαι) before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light” (Mat 17:2).

God has marked out the ultimate outcome of the Christian life, conformation to the image of His Son. Yet Lindsey writes, “God has also designed the pathway along which the believer is to walk daily as he moves toward future conformation to the image of Christ. This pathway leads through a progressive growth in grace as the Spirit of God employs the Word of God to reproduce the Son of God in a son of God.”¹⁴

Living in the Spirit’s Transforming Presence. Even though Christians live among those who have veils on their hearts, every believer can experience the transforming presence of God with an unveiled face. Every believer in Jesus Christ is free to pursue the divine presence and the glorious progressive transformation unto the image of

¹³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines of the New Testament*, Electronic Edition Libronix Digital Library System ed. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992).

¹⁴ Lindsey, "The Beautiful Christian Life," 316.

Christ. But the pursuit of Christlikeness does not happen automatically. The writer to the Hebrews exhorts believers to “Pursue sanctification” (Heb 12:14). In 2 Corinthians 3:18, the pursuit is expressed as the continuous perception of Christ. Believers are to contemplate (κατοπτριζόμενοι) Jesus Christ as in a mirror. As one contemplates Christ, one is changed by the Holy Spirit progressively into the likeness in the mirror—Jesus Christ.

The practical application for the believer rests in the meaning of what it means to contemplate Christ as a way of life. The exercise of the spiritual disciplines has been correctly identified as essential in the transforming work of the Spirit. However, the spiritual disciplines are not the *means* of producing godliness or transformation into Christlikeness, but rather are interactive *participations* with the Holy Spirit who is transforming the believer. Otherwise, the disciplines become toil of human effort. The key to contemplating Christ as a way of life is implicit in Paul’s defense of his ministry in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11. Leading up to his pronouncement of the transformation of all believers (2 Cor 3:18), Paul expounded the Scriptures. Verses 7-11 contain an exposition of the Old Testament narrative concerning Moses and the veil. Verses 12-16 follow with the application for believers. Therefore, Paul’s method is significant. Paul places the power and the presence of the Spirit in conjunction with the intention of the Scriptures.

Jesus said to the Jews who were seeking to kill him, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me” (John 5:39). The people of God are to contemplate Christ in the written Word of God. Jesus also prayed on behalf of His disciples, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17). In the truths of God’s Word, believers contemplate Christ as

in a mirror and are transformed from glory to glory into His image.

Whether it's through the spiritual disciplines, spiritual direction, spiritual temperaments and pathways, or one of the other various spiritualities, the practical objective remains constant. Believers are encouraged to look into the Word of God to perceive Christ. For in God's Word, Christ is perceived in a way that it is paramount to living in God's transformational presence.

Ministry: The Method of Transformation

In the defense of his ministry, Paul reminds the Corinthians that he serves as a minister of the new covenant directed by the power of the Spirit. Several distinctions are set forth which indicate that the letter and the Spirit (see 2 Cor 3:6) are two different ways of serving God under two different covenants. One is characterized by operating in the flesh, depending on one's own abilities and resources to accomplish so-called successful ministry. The other is marked by complete dependence upon the Spirit of God who produces effectiveness and brings competency in ministry that has eternal results. Paul's ministry mediates the Spirit whose role is to transform the lives of believers progressively into the image of Christ. The purpose of this section is to explicate both the adequacy and method according to the ministry which is of the Spirit.

Adequacy in Ministry

The apostle Paul's answer to his rhetorical question in 2 Corinthians 2:6, "Who is adequate for these things?" draws a distinction between two sources of ministerial adequacy or competency. Paul answers the rhetorical question by implying that the old covenant ministers are "adequate in [themselves]" (2 Cor 3:5) while the new covenant minister does not "consider anything as coming from [one's] self" (3:5). Paul

wants his readers to thoroughly understand that the only resource from which he, or any effective servant of Christ, can draw is the infinite reservoir of grace provided by God's present and empowering Spirit. Ray Stedman reminds his readers that the new covenant ministry could be described as, "nothing coming from me [and] everything coming from God."¹⁵ The new covenant ministry is not dependent upon one's own abilities, resources that can be mustered, degrees conferred, or support gained. Adequacy in ministry comes from God alone by the power of the Spirit who graciously provides. Paul's point is that competency in ministry lies chiefly in God whom he represents.

Method in Ministry

In addition to what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:4-18, he reveals much about his method of ministry. Paul's method is centered in both the written and the living Word of God, in Scripture and in Christ. Plus his ministry derives its impetus from the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the intention of Scripture. His method for defending his ministry and message is a lucid exposition of Exodus 32-34 which culminates with a declaration of the transforming work of the Spirit unto the likeness of Christ. This section will discuss the implications concerning methods for transformational ministry in terms of Scripture, Christ, and the power and presence of the Spirit.

Transformational Ministry is Scripture-Centered. Paul provides a model for ministry in his exposition of Exodus 32-34. The model illustrates that the expositional preaching and teaching of Scripture is essential for spiritual formation. Paul

¹⁵ Ray C. Stedman, *Authentic Christianity: A Fresh Grip on Life* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1984), 57.

mounted a careful argument from Scripture to support his claims to ministry and validate ministry as transformational. Although not exclusive to spiritual formation, the careful exegesis of Scripture in the original languages and solid biblical exposition is crucial. The increasing popularity of “talks” on general themes, sprinkled with biblically phrased words, in order to respond to “felt needs” are powerless to facilitate the spiritual transformation of believers.

Of course, not everyone involved in the ministry of spiritual formation needs to be trained in the exegesis of Scripture. However, spiritual formation groups, spiritual direction, the spiritual disciplines, and the like must be centered in the Word of God. All materials and curriculum must be doctrinally sound and developed by faithful exegetes of Scripture. Too many popular writings and teachings related to spiritual formation are not Word-centered. Dotted with biblical texts and references, they lack the lucid exposition of Scripture necessary for transformation. But most of all, serious study of the Scriptures by those involved in the ministry of spiritual formation is a prerequisite to all methods. Jesus prayed on behalf of His disciples, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17). The Word of God fashions Christlikeness in the believer. Paul commended the Thessalonians for receiving the Word of God, “which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thess 2:13).

The process of spiritual formation necessitates the priority of the Word of God. All meditations, applications, and processes must be carefully drawn out of the truths of Scripture. The first priority in the process of spiritual formation is the study of the Bible.

Transformational Ministry is Christ-Centered. Recounting his time with

the Corinthians, Paul explained, “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). As a result of his ministry among the Corinthians, Paul could later conclude, “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 from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). Paul’s ministry was Christ centered, which resulted in the progressive transformation of the Corinthians to Christlikeness.

The goal in spiritual formation is transformation to the image of Christ. Despite differences in personality types, preferred spiritual pathways, and varied temperaments, the objective is clear. The goal is not to develop one’s personality, facilitate behavioral modification, or manage sin. Christlikeness reverses the marring effect of sin and brings about a resultant change of behavior and character.

Transformational ministry is Christ-centered. Jesus told the Jews, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me” (John 5:39). Contemplating Christ in the Scripture fashions the believer into the image of Christ (see 2 Cor 3:18). In the ministry of spiritual formation, therefore, one of the primary responsibilities of the minister is to bring people to a transforming knowledge and perception of Christ. Jesus Christ must be presented as revealed in Scripture.

Inferred in both Scripture-centered and Christ-centered ministry, is the minister’s responsibility to teach believers how to study the Bible and contemplate Christ in a transformational way. The apostle Paul considered his ministry to be transformational, so should every minister. Ministers must recognize the transformational nature of their own

ministry and guide believers in facilitating their spiritual formation. Spiritual formation unto the likeness of Christ is not automatic and must not be neglected as a ministry priority.

Transformational Ministry is in the Power and Presence of the Spirit.

Unlike the ministry of the old covenant, Paul’s ministry of the new covenant mediated the Spirit whose role is to transform the lives of believers progressively into the image of Christ. The ministry of the gospel must derive its impetus and method from the power and the presence of the Spirit. “The Spirit,” Paul says in the context of the new covenant ministry, “gives life” (2 Cor 3:6). He recognized his ministry as in the “presence of God” (2 Cor 3:4) and understood his adequacy for ministry as coming from God (2 Cor 3:5). Despite the contrasts between the old and new covenants in 2 Corinthians 3:4-18, the argument from beginning to end has to do with the activity of the Spirit—both in Paul’s ministry and the lives of the Corinthians as a result of that ministry. It is by the Spirit of God that God’s new covenant people are brought into God’s presence so as to contemplate Christ and be transformed into His likeness (2 Cor 3:18).

The only resource, from which any effective servant of Christ can draw, is the infinite reservoir of grace provided by God’s present and empowering Spirit. Adequacy and sufficiency in ministry is not dependent on one’s own abilities or resources. Too many ministers strive in their own strength to develop plans and programs of their own making. Kingdoms may be built and pews filled, but self-effort stifles the transformation of believers into the likeness of Christ.

Like Jesus Christ, Paul modeled complete dependency on the power and the sufficiency of the Holy Spirit. He understood the source of his strength. In a like

manner, Paul exhorted the Corinthians to “Be imitators (μιμητής) of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). In order for believers in one’s charge to grow in Christlikeness, one must model growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus stated, “A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). A notable lack of spiritual growth among the members of the congregation could be a symptom of a lack of growth among the leaders. Ministers who desire the people in the congregation to be more like Christ must model growth and dependency on Christ.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

Several types of spirituality positively influence the spiritual formation of evangelical believers. These include: (1) classic spirituality which includes a renewed interest in the spiritual disciplines, contemplative spirituality, and spiritual direction, (2) psychological spirituality which emphasizes personality types and sacred pathways, and (3) evangelical spirituality which offers a healthy balance of doctrine, experience and practice. Although each of these have particular strengths and weaknesses, the greatest need entails an expositional compass bearing that gives direction to the specific goals and processes of spiritual formation. Paul's defense of his ministry, and thereby his message, in 2 Corinthians 3:4-18 offers the expositional compass. This expositional compass will be summarized in this chapter in relation to the goal and process of transformation as well as its implications for methods in ministry.

The Goal of Spiritual Transformation

All valid approaches to spirituality and spiritual formation must emphasize the appropriate objective. Notably expressed in 2 Corinthians 3:18, the goal of spiritual formation targets the formation of Christlikeness in the believer. Paul writes that all believers are "being transformed into the same image [of Christ]" (2 Cor 3:18). Paul stresses this same goal in Romans 8:29, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren."

Spiritual formation reverses the effects of the fall. Jesus Christ expressed in human terms what God is like and demonstrated true humanity as God intends in accord with His image. Although marred and corrupted, the divine image in humankind is restored through Jesus Christ by the Spirit.

By the Spirit of God a person comes to know God (2 Cor 3:16; 1 Thess 1:5; Rom 8:2) and learns to live in a way as to constantly be renewed into God's image—the image of Christ. Therefore, Christ is the pattern for redeemed humanity. The purpose or goal of legitimate spiritual formation is the restoration of the image of God in conformity with the image of Christ.

The Process of Spiritual Transformation

Along with the goal, the expositional compass in 2 Corinthians 3:18 expresses the process of spiritual formation. Believers are being “transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18). Under the new covenant, the transformational presence of God that was withheld from the old covenant people is readily available to those who “turn to the Lord” (2 Cor 3:16). Every person who comes to Christ in salvation experiences a personal encounter with the living God by way of the Spirit.

Moses' encounter and experience of God in the tent of meeting is an archetype for every believer in Jesus Christ. Thanks to the work of Christ on the cross, believers now “have confidence to enter the holy place” (Heb 10:19). Every Christian is invited to an ongoing personal encounter of God's transformational presence.

However, the process of spiritual formation is not automatic. Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 militates against passivity in the spiritual life. Progressive transformation unto the image of Christ transpires when believers actively contemplate Christ

(2 Cor 3:18). Unlike the Hebrews who were unable to behold the face of Moses and behold the glory of God, on account of the veil, every believer is free to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul has in mind the contemplation of Christ in both the “word of God” (2 Cor 4:2) and in the gospel message (see 2 Cor 3:4-6). Valid spiritualities encourage believers to study the Scriptures in order to perceive Christ. In God’s Word, Christ is perceived in a transformational way enabling the believer to live in God’s transformational presence.

The Ministry of Spiritual Transformation

In defense of his ministry in 2 Corinthians 3:4-16, Paul reminded the Corinthians that he served as minister of the new covenant directed by the power of the Spirit. Several distinctions were set forth which indicated that the letter and the Spirit (see 2 Cor 3:6) are two different ways of serving God under two different covenants. One is characterized by operating in the flesh, depending on one’s own abilities. The other is marked by a complete dependence upon the Spirit of God who produces effectiveness in ministry that has eternal results—the transformation of believers into the likeness of Christ. Adequacy in ministry comes solely from God by the power of the Spirit who graciously provides.

Paul reveals much about his method of ministry in 2 Corinthians 3:4-18. Related to the goal of Christlikeness and how the process of transformation transpires, Paul modeled effective transformational ministry. His method for defending his ministry and message involves a lucid exposition of Exodus 32–34. The model illustrates that the expositional preaching and teaching of Scripture is essential to facilitate the transformation of believers. This betrays the greatest weakness in writings and teachings concern-

ing spiritual formation today. Too many popular writings, though sprinkled with biblical references, lack a lucid and careful exposition of Scripture. A serious and careful study of the Word of God is a prerequisite to all methods of ministry related to spiritual formation.

Finally, effective ministry related to spiritual formation necessitates the example of the minister. Like Jesus, Paul modeled complete dependency on the power and the sufficiency of the Holy Spirit. Paul recognized his ministry as transpiring in the presence of God (2 Cor 3:4) and understood his adequacy for ministry as coming from God (2 Cor 3:5). In his first letter, Paul exhorted the Corinthians to “mimic” him (1 Cor 11:1). The minister cannot guide the believer into the unfamiliar. The effective minister exemplifies growing in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. God entrusts the minister of Jesus Christ with the noble responsibility of guiding believers into progressive Christlikeness, by means of the power and transforming presence of the Spirit.

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