

LESSON 5: 2 CORINTHIANS 2:12-3:18

The Glorious Ministry of the Spirit

1. In 2:14, Paul gives thanks to God, “who leads us in triumphal procession in Christ.” In Roman times, notes the NIV study note for this verse, “a victorious general would lead his soldiers and their captives in festive procession, while the people watched and applauded and the air was filled with the sweet smell released by the burning of spices in the streets.” See 1 Corinthians 4:9-10. What picture is Paul giving us here? (See Romans 1:1; 7:25; 1 Corinthians 7:22.)
2. What does Paul mean when he writes that “everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him” spreads (v. 14)? What is the “aroma of Christ” and who are the two groups of people to whom Paul refers in verse 15? Finally, in verse 16, a more literal reading would be: “To the one we are the fragrance from death to death, to the other, the fragrance from life to life.” What does this mean (see John 3:16-19)? In what way can it be said that you, too, are the “fragrance of life”?
3. Why do you think Paul writes “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? (3:1)” What is the purpose of a letter of recommendation? What does Paul mean by writing that the Corinthians themselves are “our letter” and “a letter from Christ” (vv. 2-3)? What do you think is the significance of his distinguishing between letters “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts? (See Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26.) What kind of letter are you? Can it be that you may be the only letter from Christ that someone will ever read?
4. In 2:16, Paul had asked, “And who is equal to such a task?” To what task was he referring, and what answer does he provide in verses 3:4-6? What is the “new covenant” and what does Paul mean when he writes “not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (v. 6)? How should we understand and apply this verse?
5. What are the key words that are repeated in 3:7-11? What is being compared here? What point is Paul making, especially concerning his contrasts of “glory” then and now (vv. 10-11)? How is ministry more glorious under the New Covenant than under the Old?

6. Why are we bold (v. 12)? How is your boldness to be exhibited?

7. “We are not like Moses,” Paul writes in verse 13, “who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.” (See Exodus 34:29:35.) In what way does the veil remain when the old covenant is read? In what way is it taken away (v. 14)?

8. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom,” Paul writes in verse 17. In what way is this so? How free are you and what are you free to do?

9. What does verse 18 tell you about the goal of your life? What evidence do you see of this glorious transformation?