

**Paul's Sufficiency as a Minister of the New Covenant  
2 Corinthians 3:4-6**

Professing Christians frequently use their personal sense of inadequacy as an excuse not to share the gospel of Christ, but as we will see this morning those who have this personal sense of inadequacy are in the very best position to share the gospel of Christ with power; not of course their own power, but rather in the power of the Holy Spirit Himself as they in dependence on Him step aside and let Him do the work that only He can do.

This thought brings us back to 2 Corinthians and to our study this morning in **2 Corinthians 3:4-6**. But in order to fully appreciate these verses we need to go back to the verses we considered last week in **2 Corinthians 3:1-3**.

Paul in **2 Corinthians 3:1-3** was defending himself against an anticipated attack by his opponents in Corinth, whom he believed would accuse him of being an egotistical braggart, given to self-commendation, based on what he had said in **2 Corinthians 2:16-17**.

So how did Paul respond to this anticipated attack in **2 Corinthians 3:1-3**? Paul responded by explaining to the Corinthians that there was no reason for him to commend himself in light of the fact that they themselves were his living breathing letters of commendation written by Christ, not using ink but using the Spirit of the living God, not written on tablets of stone but rather on the tablets of human hearts or more specifically on the hearts of the Corinthians.

So now let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 3:1-3** and see if this is not so. **“Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? (2) You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; (3) being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”**

This was how Paul responded in **2 Corinthians 3:1-3** when he anticipated that his opponents, based on what he had said in **2 Corinthians 2:16-17**, would attack him as an egotistical braggart given to self-commendation. But obviously, based on what he had just said about his ministry among the

Corinthians, there was no need for him to do such a thing and that was Paul's point in **2 Corinthians 3:1-3**. But even in spite of this very hard-hitting response, Paul is not yet done responding to his opponents anticipated attack.

He will continue his response in **2 Corinthians 3:4-6**. So now let me read for you these particular verses and see if this is not so. **“Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. (5) Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, (6) who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

Are these verses a part of Paul's response to his opponents anticipated attack? Absolutely! But this time Paul will not be focusing on his living breathing letters of commendation, or in other words, on the Corinthians who made any other commendation unnecessary. But rather he will now be focusing on the whole topic of ministerial sufficiency in matters related to Christian service in **2 Corinthians 3:3-6**.

And this leads us to the question that we will be seeking to answer this morning. And what is that question? The question that we will be asking is this: What do we learn about ministerial sufficiency from the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6? This is the question that we will be seeking to answer.

And as we seek to answer this question, what is my hope for this message? My hope is that as we better understand ministerial sufficiency, we will find ourselves not only recognizing our inherent weakness but the gospel's inherent strength as we, in the name of Christ and therefore in the power of Spirit, go forth with the gospel boldly and courageously into this world that so desperately needs it. So, what is the first that we learn from the Apostle Paul about ministerial sufficiency?

First of all, we learn that those who are ministering the gospel of Christ and the truths of Christ should feel sufficient for these things (2 Corinthians 3:4). Certainly Paul and his companions did. Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 3:4**. **“Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.”** So is Paul telling us in **verse 4** that he felt confident in the ministry that he had enjoyed

among the Corinthians, his living, breathing letters of commendation? Absolutely!

Paul was not fearful and apprehensive when he approached the Corinthians with the gospel of Christ and the truths of Christ's Word. He was rock-solid confident believing that great things not only could happen, but also would happen, as we faithfully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. And hopefully the same thing is true for us when we approach individuals and look for opportunities to share the gospel of Christ and the truths of Christ. We cannot go into those situations timid and unsure. We must go into those situations trusting that God can use us to make a difference.

So where did Paul's confidence come from? Let us continue to read **2 Corinthians 3:4**. **"Through Christ toward God."** Clearly this gives us an indication that the confidence that Paul and his companions enjoyed came through Christ and toward God and not from them, but for right now the point that I am choosing to emphasize is that when we approach ministry we must do so with confidence. We cannot be thinking that good things are not going to take place. But this feeling of confidence that we have as we approach ministry certainly will have nothing to do with us. And this leads us to a second thing that we learn about ministerial sufficiency in **2 Corinthians 3:4-6**. And what is that second thing?

We learn that those who are ministering the gospel of Christ and the truths of Christ should feel insufficient in and of themselves to minister these things (2 Corinthians 3:5). Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 3:5**. **"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves."** Clearly Paul is making sure that there is no confusion in the minds of his readers about what he had just written concerning his felt sense of sufficiency. He wanted to make sure that his readers understood that any sense of sufficiency that he enjoyed did not come from himself but wholly and completely from God.

If we want not only to feel sufficient but also to be sufficient, it begins with us recognizing our insufficiency (Exodus 4:10-17; Judges 6:15; Isaiah 6:5).

Certainly this was true of Moses, the unparalleled leader of the nation of Israel, who when God approached him to lead the nation of Israel out from Egypt said to God, **"Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither**

recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” Do you see any sense of self-adequacy in Moses? No! What about Gideon? How did he respond when God approached him for service? What did he say? **“O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Mannasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house.”** Do you see any self-adequacy in Gideon? No! What about Isaiah? How did he respond when God approached him for service? What did he say? **“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.”** This is what he said. Do we see any sense of self-adequacy in Isaiah? No!

Just to drive this point home a little bit more, let me read for you something written by a man named Oswald Chambers. **“God can achieve his purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance on them. All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because their unusual dependence on him made possible the unique display of his power and grace. He chose and used somebodies only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities.”**

So where are we this morning? Are we in this place of insufficiency? Hopefully we are for until we come to this place of insufficiency in all matters related to us and what God wants to accomplish in and through us, we will never truly be adequate for our mission of going into this world to make disciples and baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to do all that Christ has commanded us, for ultimately we cannot be sufficient through Christ toward God unless we have come to appreciate our own insufficiency.

So how can we on the one hand feel sufficient for the work that God has given us and yet at the same time feel insufficient in and of ourselves? This leads us to a third thing that we learn about ministerial sufficiency in **2 Corinthians 3:4-6**. And what is this third thing?

We learn that those who are ministering the gospel of Christ and the truths of Christ need to be God-sufficient (2 Corinthians 3:5b-6). Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 3:5b-6**. **“... But our adequacy is from God, (6) who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter**

**but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”** These are very powerful words and we will certainly take a few minutes to make sure that we understand exactly what Paul meant by them. So let us begin with the last words of **verse 5, “... But our adequacy is from God.”**

Truly, only a man such as Paul, who is humbly aware of his complete weakness, can know and prove the total sufficiency of God. And this is why Paul, after he said, **“Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves,”** was then able to say at the end of **verse 5, “...But our adequacy is from God.”**

And this truth is extremely comforting. There never will be anything that God calls us to be or to do that God will not make us adequate for. In other words, God will never lead us where His grace will not be able to keep us. Amen?

And this certainly was proven to Paul and his companions when it came to being servants of the new covenant. How do we know this? Let me now go on to read for you the first part of **2 Corinthians 3:6. “Who has made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter [in other words, not of the Mosaic law] but of the Spirit.”**

In other words, as Paul and his companions looked to God for their sufficiency, God powerfully equipped them for success as servants of the new covenant. How did God do this? The answer is within the nature of the new covenant itself in contrast to the old covenant, and in order to understand this contrast we need to know a little bit about biblical covenants.

There are many different covenants in the Scriptures, or in other words, promises between God and man. But there are a few different covenants there are particularly important in respect to the matter of salvation.

The Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:7; 18:10-19) and the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:12-16; 23:5) contained God’s promises to Israel concerning salvation and its accompanying blessings. In the Abrahamic covenant God promised a people, a land full of incredible blessings, and the Messiah. In the Davidic covenant God promised David a greater son than Solomon, who would be King over a glorious earthly kingdom, and ultimately bring salvation and blessing to Israel and to the world.

This is what was promised in regard to matters related to salvation in these very well known Old Testament covenants, but the question that was still outstanding was how would the blessings of these promises be received? And this question leads us to two other additional Old Testament covenants.

The first being the “old covenant,” or in other words, the “mosaic covenant.” In the “old covenant,” or in other words “in the Mosaic covenant,” God, in effect, said that the blessings of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants were for the righteous (Exodus 24:7-8). Let me read for you **Exodus 24:7-8**. **“Then he took the book of the covenant [or in other words, the Mosaic Law] and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’ (8) So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”**

So what covenant did God enter into with the people of Israel that day? He entered into what we might call the “Mosaic covenant,” or in other words “The Old Covenant.”

And what was the significance of this covenant? It provided a means by which the people of Israel and the world could be saved, or in other words, could enter into the blessedness of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.

But there is a serious problem with this isn’t there? The law was external written on tablets of stone only able to expose man’s sinful heart but not able to change it.

Therefore, in light of this, there had better be a better covenant through which people can enter into the blessedness of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants than the Old Covenant or in other the Mosaic covenant, and there is.

And it is called the new covenant. The new covenant is the means by which people are saved and are able to enter into the blessings of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

So, now let me read for you this covenant from **Jeremiah 31:31-33** as a way of reminder. **“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will**

**make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, (32) not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares the Lord. (33) 'But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares the Lord, 'I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'"**

Do you see the difference between the two covenants? The old covenant was external and left the heart unchanged. The new covenant was internal providing the recipients of it an entirely new heart written upon by the Spirit of God Himself.

So, what was the point of this covenant? The new covenant was given to provide a basis of salvation that had nothing to do with us, but rather had everything to do with God and what He was prepared to do on our behalf (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

Has this covenant yet been ratified with blood as the old covenant was ratified with blood? Yes, it has, but not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with the precious blood of Christ. Let me read for you **1 Corinthians 11:24-25**. **"And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' (25) In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'"**

When Christ gave up His life and shed His blood on the cross of Calvary, He ratified the new covenant promised to the nation of Israel in Jeremiah 31:31-33 (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

So if Christ has, in fact, ratified this covenant by the blood of His cross, how do individuals enter into the blessedness of that covenant and consequently into the blessedness of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants as well and be saved?

The blessedness of the new covenant, as well as all other promised blessings related to salvation, are received through faith in Christ (Acts 4:12). Let me

read for you **Acts 4:12**. “**And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.**”

So can the Law save us? No! The Law cannot save us. In fact, no person can be saved through the Law. This is why Paul at the end of **2 Corinthians 3:6** said, “**For the letter kills,**” but unlike the Law that is external and devoid of any internal life giving ministry of the Spirit, the new covenant working through the gospel of Christ unleashed the Spirit of God in a potentially life-giving ministry. This is why Paul at the end of **2 Corinthians 3:6** said, “**But the Spirit gives life.**”

So, what would you rather be, a servant of the Law or a servant of the new covenant? I would think the answer is easy. It is far better to be a servant of the new covenant! And how does one become a servant of the new covenant?

We become servants or ministers of the new covenant when we by faith embrace Christ and in obedience to Christ seek to spread His gospel. And hopefully this is true of each one of us in this room.

Therefore let us, knowing this and in light of this message this morning, go forward with confidence boldly proclaiming the gospel of Christ, that even in spite of our personal inadequacies, knowing that God is not looking for gifted people or people who are self-sufficient. He is looking for inadequate people who will give Him their weakness as they in obedience to Christ and in the power of the of the Holy Spirit move forward with the gospel of Christ and the truths of God’s Word.

If God is calling you, do not hide behind your weakness. I don’t know what He may be calling you to do – it may be a worldwide mission. It may be joining E.E or going out with our “go” ministry. Or it may be teaching a Sunday School class, it may be ministering to children, it may be reaching out in the neighborhood, or it may be stepping up at work. But whatever He is leading you to do, don’t hide behind your weakness. Your weakness is the ground for His calling. Follow God, and He will use your weakness as an occasion for His power.

May God give us the grace to trust Him for His sufficiency as we in our weakness seek to be faithful ministers of new covenant and Christ's gospel.

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