

# Give Me Liberty!

## Topic

Liberty in Christ

## Theme

The ministry of the gospel is superior to the administration of the law of Moses.

## Desired Learner Response

The learner will appreciate his liberty in Christ and use it to do God's will.

## Materials

- Resources 1 and 4
- Flashlight

## Scripture Focus

2 Corinthians 3

## Summary

This lesson discusses how Paul answered his critics' charges that he and his message were false. He did so by referring to changed lives and by demonstrating that the ministry of the New Covenant is superior to that of the Old.

## Outline

- I. The New Covenant Minister's Credentials (2 Cor. 3:1–5)
- II. The New Covenant Ministry's Superiority (2 Cor. 3:6–18)
  - A. The New Covenant's quality (3:6)
  - B. The New Covenant's glory (3:7–11)
  - C. The New Covenant's permanence (3:12–18)

## Memory Verse

*"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17).*

## GETTING STARTED

### Absolute Freedom

**ASK:** Describe a world in which everyone is absolutely free to do whatever he wants to do. *Chaotic and dangerous.*

**ASK:** What problems would you see with such an arrangement? *Liberty without laws corrupts.*

Christian liberty is not a license to do whatever you want. It is the freedom to serve God faithfully. Paul addressed Christian liberty in his letter to the Corinthians.

### A License to . . .

**ASK:** If you could receive a *license* to do anything, what *license* would you choose? (Q1)

**ASK:** Why might some people think they have a *license to sin*? (Q2) *They think God will forgive their sins regardless of their heart's sincerity.*

Unfortunately, believers sometimes get in the habit of using their freedom in Christ to sin at will, knowing they can come clean with God later. But that is a whacky view of Christian liberty. Paul talked about using Christian liberty to seek to do God's will.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Answering the charge by some in the Corinthian church that he was fickle and insincere, Paul had described himself as acting with sincerity and in the power of God (2 Cor. 2:17). The same critics had also accused Paul of boasting. They would probably do so again, since Paul claimed that he was sincere. Anticipating this further criticism, Paul asked in 2 Corinthians 3:1, *Do we begin again to commend ourselves?* Then he showed that the gospel of grace is superior to the Old Covenant.

**QUIZ:** Distribute sheets of paper and pencils. Ask students to answer true or false in response to the following statements:

1. The Mosaic law showed Israel how to be saved by works. (F)
2. A person can be saved by sincerely trying to keep the Ten Commandments. (F)
3. God gave the law to Israel to reveal the people's sin and their need to be saved. (T)
4. Salvation depends upon grace plus works. (F)
5. The Bible teaches that the Mosaic law is binding upon Christians. (F)

Tell the learners you will give the quiz again at the close of the class session and that they may change their answers if they wish to do so.

## I. The New Covenant Minister's Credentials (2 Cor. 3:1–5)

First-century Christian workers usually carried letters of recommendation when they traveled from church to church. For example, in his letter to the Romans, Paul recommended Phebe to the church in Rome (Rom. 16:1, 2).

**READ:** Acts 18:24–27. **ASK:** Whom did the church at Ephesus recommend by letter to the church at Corinth? (Q3) *Apollos*.

**ASK:** What is the best recommendation a pastor can have? (Q4) *A fruitful ministry of changed lives*.

Because Paul didn't carry letters of endorsements from the apostles in Jerusalem, his critics claimed his ministry was unauthorized and invalid. Paul countered this charge in 2 Corinthians 3:1 by asking, *Need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you?* He was astounded that some members of the Corinthian church demanded such letters of recommendation. After all, God Himself had used Paul to found the Corinthian church!

Apparently, the Corinthians had accepted some false teachers on the basis of letters of recommendation (*to you*, 3:1). In turn the Corinthians had granted those teachers letters of recommendation (*from you*, 3:1).

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 3:2. **ASK:** Whom did Paul claim as his letters of recommendation? (Q5) *The Corinthian believers*.

Since Paul had led the Corinthians to the Lord, they provided living evidence that his ministry was genuine. The testimony of changed lives is still the strongest recommendation of any ministry. Letters of recommendation were often confidential in the first century, but the Corinthians' testimony was accessible to *all men* (3:2).

Paul described Christ as the author of a living letter, which is the testimony of transformed lives. He regarded himself and his helpers as the pen God used to write the letter (*ministered by us*, 3:3) and the Holy Spirit as the *ink* (3:3). Further, God wrote His letter on *fleshly tables of the heart* instead of on stone tablets, as He had done in producing the Ten Commandments (3:3).

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. **ASK:** How obvious would the change in the Corinthians' lives have been to the lost around them? (Q6) *The Christian life was a stark contrast to the Corinthians' lives before their salvations*.

**ASK:** What should our family members, friends, neighbors, and associates be able to read clearly in our lives? (Q7) *Our love for the Lord and others*.

Paul believed he didn't need a letter of recommendation because his converts served as a far better recommendation. He directed his confidence in this fact toward God through Christ (3:4). His work in Corinth was a visible testimony to the fact that God had commissioned him.

**READ:** Acts 9:11–15; 22:17, 21. **ASK:** What had the Lord commissioned Paul to be? (Q8) *The apostle to the Gentiles*.



To defuse any charge that he was boasting, Paul refused to take credit for the Corinthians' changed lives. He strongly affirmed that he was unqualified to produce such a dramatic change, and he ascribed all the credit to God (2 Cor. 3:5). In this way, he assured his critics that God had supplied him with credentials for effective ministry. What higher form of recommendation could anyone want?

## **II. The New Covenant Ministry's Superiority (2 Cor. 3:6–18)**

After referring to a letter written on human hearts instead of on stone, Paul presented a threefold contrast between the ministry of the Old Covenant and the New.

### **A. The New Covenant's quality (3:6)**

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 3:6. **ASK:** What verses of Scripture can you refer to that teach that salvation is by grace through faith? (Q9) *Ephesians 2:8, 9.*

**ASK:** What does the New Covenant of grace give that the law could never give? (Q10) *Life.*

According to verse 6, the Mosaic Covenant followed the letter of the law and obligated Israel to obey its demands. However, because they were sinners, the people of Israel could not fulfill the law's demands. By contrast, the New Covenant operates in the power of the Spirit, Who brings sinners to the knowledge of God. The Old Covenant demanded death for violating the law, whereas the New Covenant offers life to sinners if they will trust Christ.

That God provided a fresh covenant indicates its superiority over the covenant it replaced. The Old Covenant was external; it was engraved in tables of stone (2 Cor. 3:3). The New Covenant is internal; it is engraved in the hearts of men and women. Sinners confronted by the Old were condemned to death (Gal. 3:10). Under the New Covenant all who trust in Christ as Savior receive life as a gift from God (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 2:8, 9).

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 3:7–9. **ASK:** What did Paul call the ministration of the law and the ministration of the Spirit? (Q11) *The ministration of death and the ministration of righteousness.*

**READ:** Romans 8:1–4. **ASK:** What does the Spirit accomplish in the lives of all who are set free from the law? (Q12) *Freedom and righteousness.*

**ASK:** What would you tell someone who believes people must follow certain rules to gain favor with God? (Q13) *God is concerned with the condition of one's heart. Because someone keeps rules does not mean his or her heart is right with God.*

### **B. The New Covenant's glory (3:7–11)**

**OBJECT LESSON:** Display a flashlight or a phone with a light. Ask someone to describe a time when he or she was in desperate need of a flashlight. Ask

the person how valuable the flashlight was at that moment? Turn on the flashlight, and hand it to the person who told the story. Ask the person to relate how valuable the flashlight seems at that moment.

**ASK:** What changed the perceived value of the flashlight? *The demand for it changed.*

Paul next contrasted the abiding glory of the New Covenant to the fading glory of the Old. He admitted that the glory of the Old Covenant *was glorious*, but he insisted that it was also transitory (2 Cor. 3:7). We must not assume that Paul was relating the Old Covenant to darkness and the New to light; rather, we should understand that he was comparing light and greater light. The beam of a flashlight seems brilliant when someone is walking in a forest at night, but in broad daylight it seems dim. Similarly, the glory of the Old Covenant pales in comparison to the glory of the New Covenant (3:9–11).

### C. The New Covenant's permanence (3:12–18)

Since the gospel offers sinners the opportunity to be saved by grace based on Christ's shed blood, Paul boldly proclaimed this good news (3:12). After God gave His law to Moses on Mount Sinai, glory shone on Moses' face, but it faded the longer Moses was out of God's presence. Moses covered his face with a veil to keep Israel from seeing this fading glory (3:13; see Exodus 34:33). Just as the glory on Moses' face was temporary, so the Old Covenant was temporary. However, the glory of the gospel never fades.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 3:12, 13. **ASK:** What should believers do with the glory of the New Covenant? (Q14) *Proclaim it. Share it boldly.*

The Israelites of Moses' day failed to see that the Old Covenant was temporary and that Christ would usher in a greater glory (3:14). In Paul's day when many Jews read the law and other Old Testament passages, they were in darkness. Today, too, they are in darkness if they fail to see that the Mosaic law was done away in Christ.



According to verse 15, a veil of unbelief hangs over the hearts of Jews who read the books of Moses. They fail to see the truth in the many passages that point to Jesus Christ. When Jesus and two of His disciples walked to Emmaus, He chided them about this kind of failure. *O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken*, He remarked (Luke 24:25). Then, beginning with the books of Moses and continuing through the Old Testament, He showed how He fulfilled Old Testament messianic prophecies. That night those disciples' *eyes were opened, and they knew him* (24:31).

The same enlightenment awaits the nation of Israel. Paul informed the Corinthians: *When it [the nation of Israel] shall turn to the Lord, the veil [blindness] shall be taken away* (2 Cor. 3:16). In his epistle to the Romans, Paul tied this event to the fullness of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:25–27).

Opinions vary about the meaning of *the Lord is that Spirit* in 2 Corinthians 3:17. Some commentators believe this statement proves the deity of the Holy Spirit.



Some believe it shows the unity of Christ and the Spirit in the Godhead. Some claim *Spirit* should have a small s and, thereby, identify the Lord Jesus as the spirit of the New Covenant. They point out that in Him there is freedom from the law. In any case, the verse teaches, *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*. Paul taught the same truth in Romans 8:2: *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death*.

Liberty in the Lord 2 Corinthians 3:17	
Opportunities	Limitations
	

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 4. **ASK:** What opportunities does liberty in Christ afford the believer? (Q15) (Record learners' answers on the left half of the resource.) *Opportunities to enjoy His blessing, to get to know Him, to experience victory over sin.*

**ASK:** What limitations come with liberty in Christ? (Q16) (On the right side of the resource, record learners' answers.) *We cannot sin freely. We cannot live without regard to fellow believers. We cannot elevate our personal preferences and demand that others follow them.*

**QUIZ:** Repeat the quiz you gave at the beginning of class. Reveal the correct answers.

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

Use the following activities to help your learners apply the truths about liberty, grace, and the superiority of the New Covenant.

### Abuse of Freedom

**ASK:** Have you used your salvation as a license to sin? (Q17)

**ASK:** Have you ever sinned because you knew you could confess the sin after the fact? (Q18)

Challenge the learners to view Christian liberty as an opportunity to serve God, not indulge the flesh.

### Setting Captives Free

**ASK:** What have the lost learned about God from your conduct? (Q19)

**ASK:** What will you do this week to help a good-works-for-salvation advocate realize his or her need to be saved by grace? (Q20)

### Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: By God's grace I can use my liberty in Christ to do God's will.

Encourage your learners to memorize 2 Corinthians 3:17. Give them an opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.

Waves of Grace	
By God's grace I can ...	7.
1.	8.
2.	9.
3.	10.
4.	11.
5.	12.
6.	13.