

Tap in
2 Corinthians 3:4-6
Dr. Paul Cannings

A. His Strength (v. 4):

1. Confidence through Christ - Because Paul's ministry has significantly impacted the hearts of the Corinthians (3:1-4), Paul states that his complete dependence resulted **from** who Christ is for the glory of God (Colossians 3:17).

2. Confidence through Christ towards God Everything Paul did that bore fruit in the lives of the Corinthians was because of who Christ is. This is what led them to experience **the** influence of the power of God's supremacy in their lives.

a) There was the character of Paul's apostolic ministry: he was God's agent in disseminating in every place the knowledge of Christ in an unadulterated form (2:14–17). The second demonstrable fact was the effectiveness of his service—that is, the very existence of a Christian church in Corinth demonstrated the reality of his apostleship (3:1–3). But beyond his being God's agent everywhere and Christ's amanuensis at Corinth, Paul's confidence was secure because it was **διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, that is, it resulted from his union with Christ, or, more specifically, it came as a gift from Christ.

3. Not that we are adequate in ourselves – When considering all that the Lord has done in the hearts of the Corinthians, pleasing God in this manner was not something that Paul could have done by himself.

4. To consider anything as coming from ourselves – When Paul gave what took place serious contemplation, he acknowledged that nothing took place because of who he is.
5. Adequacy is from God – The ability to function at a high level of sufficiency only occurred because of God’s powerful influence in and through Paul’s life.

a) The new covenant (ASV; cf. Mt 26:28; Heb 8:8, 13) requires a “new man” (Eph 2:15; 4:24) who is a “new creature” (II Cor 5:17). This regenerated person has a “new name” (Rev 2:17), observes a “new commandment” (I Jn 2:7, 8), sings a “new song” (Rev 14:3), looks for “new heavens and a new earth” (II Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1) where the “new Jerusalem” (Rev 21:2) is and where all things are “new” (Rev 21:5) The contrast between the letter killeth and the spirit giveth life is not a contrast between extreme literalism and a free handling of Scripture (as in the allegorical method of interpretation); the contrast is rather between the Law as a system of salvation requiring perfect obedience (cf. Rom 3:19, 20; 7:1-14; 8:1-11; Gal 3:1-14) and the Gospel as God’s gift of grace in Christ. Even the Law, however, could lead a soul of Christ (cf. Gal 3:15-29); but degenerate Judaism had turned it into a lifeless mass of forms (Cf. Isa 1:10-20; Jer 7:21-26). The new age of “grace and truth” (Jn 1:17), already anticipated in the OT (cf. Ezk 37:1-14; 47:1-12), is now fully realized in the dynamic dispensation of grace (Cf. Jn 4:23; 6:63; Rom 2:28; 7:6).^[1]

B. Fill Up (v. 6):

1. Who made us adequate – The powerful influence of God, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Paul’s life, empowered him to be competent as a minister.

a) Paul's confidence was founded not on human resources but on divine ones. He was confident in the Corinthians because the Holy Spirit had worked in them. Their faith rested on God's power (1 Cor. 2:1–5). Likewise his own sufficiency and competence in the ministry was derived wholly from God (cf. 1 Tim. 1:12).^[2]

2. Servants of new covenant – Paul describes himself as a slave for the purposes of Christ who is the Helper of God.

a) Paul's emphasis on the New Covenant implies that his opponents were ministers of the Old Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was a written revelation of the righteousness God asked of Israel (e.g., Ex. 19–23). It was accepted with an oath of obedience and a blood sacrifice (Ex. 24). When Israel proved unable and unwilling to remain faithful to that covenant, God graciously intervened and promised a New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; 32:40), new (*kainēs*) both in time and in quality. It was inaugurated by Christ in His sacrifice on the cross (Luke 22:20), and is entered into by faith (Phil. 3:9) and lived out in dependence on the Spirit (Rom. 7:6; 8:4). (However, the physical and national aspects of the New Covenant which pertain to Israel have not been appropriated to the church. Those are yet to be fulfilled in the Millennium. The church today shares in the soteriological aspects of that covenant, established by Christ's blood for all believers [cf. Heb. 8:7–13].)^[3]

3. Letter – To only possess the Law by being well versed in the Law only exposes the sin in our lives (Romans 3:19–20), and the wages of sin is death.

a) The legalists, of course, told people that any person could obey the Law and become spiritual. A legalistic ministry has a way of inflating the

egos of people. When you emphasize the grace of God, you must tell people that they are lost sinners who cannot save themselves. Paul's testimony was, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). No one is sufficient of himself to minister to the hearts of people. That sufficiency can only come from God.^[4]

b) As you read this chapter, note the different names that Paul used for the Old Covenant and the New Covenant as he contrasted them. In 2 Corinthians 3:6, "the letter" refers to the Old Covenant Law, while "the spirit" refers to the New Covenant message of grace. Paul was not contrasting two approaches to the Bible, a "literal interpretation" and a "spiritual interpretation." He was reminding his readers that the Old Covenant Law could not give life; it was a ministry of death (see Gal. 3:21). The Gospel gives life to those who believe because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.^[5]

4. Spirit gives life – Christ came to give life and life abundantly (John 10:10). The Spirit, who is the Helper of Christ (John 14:16-17), works within us "both to will and do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). So continually the Holy Spirit, because of the work that God blessed Paul to do in these believer's lives, transformed their lives to experience all that eternal life provides as result of Christ death and resurrection.

a) But the life Paul describes here is not biological, but ethical, spiritual life, and the roots of the idea go back to the prophet Ezekiel: "I will put my Spirit in you *and you will live*" (Ezek. 37:14). Moral renewal through the infusion of God's Spirit was the hope of the prophets and is the reality of the new covenant community.^[6]

b) The second stage of renewal is the progressive transformation of believers into the image of Christ as they gaze on and then reflect the glory of the Lord, this whole process being the work of the Spirit (2 Cor.

3:18). This is a renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2) or the attitude of the mind (Eph. 4:23) and corresponds to the strengthening (Eph. 3:16) or renewal (2 Cor. 4:16) of the inner person by the Spirit. ^[7]

^[1] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*](#) (2 Co 3:6). Moody Press.

^[2] Lowery, D. K. (1985). [2 Corinthians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 560). Victor Books.

^[3] Lowery, D. K. (1985). [2 Corinthians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 560–561). Victor Books.

^[4] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 638). Victor Books.

^[5] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 638). Victor Books.

^[6] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon](#). (Vol. 3, p. 210). Zondervan.

^[7] Harris, M. J. (2005). [The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (pp. 273–274). W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press.