**Be Encouraged – 2 Corinthians 3:17-18**

True Freedom

Turn with me the book of 2 Corinthians, we will be looking at chapter 3 verses 17-18. We have just come out of a series entitled “the difference between law and grace.” From verses 1-16 we have been looking at the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Why is this important? Because there will always be those who will try to get people into buying into a religious form or Christianity instead of a relational form of it.

Judaizers had infiltrated the Corinthian church telling them that not only had Jesus died for mankind’s sin, but now, to prove their Christianity they needed to follow the ordinances of the Old Testament. It was a mixture, a counterfeit gospel that didn’t fully rely on the work of Jesus on the cross, but also relied on the efforts of men. Both of these covenants are polar opposites of each other.

* Verse 1-3 – We are letter not written with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not written on stone but on human hearts.
* Verse 4-6 – What we have is not a covenant of written laws that leads to death, but a covenant of the Spirit of God that gives us life.
* Verse 7-10– the old way brings condemnation and has passed away, the new way makes us right with God and give us life and is eternally in place.
* Verse 12-16 – the old way relies on man efforts to save himself, but the new way is revealed when we look at Jesus and see our depravity in contrast to his abundant gift of grace.

I praise God that we are no longer under the commandments and the laws in order to find favor with God; today we are under grace through faith, not of works.

* **Let no one tell you that you can earn God’s favor by what you do, where you go, who you see, or what you give. It is all about Jesus**

We read a great example of what these Judaizers were doing to the church in **Acts 15:1-2, 6-11**:

*While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers\*: “Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.” 2 Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently.*

*6 So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. 7 At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: “Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. 8 God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. 10 So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers\* with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? 11 We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.”*

Thank God for people who are willing to declare the gospel, the underserved grace of Jesus. **Amen**. You can replace the idea of circumcision with all sorts of ideas; giving, praying for hours, reading your Bible, going to church, receiving your prayer language, meditation. If we make these things a prerequisite for salvation then we have missed the full implication of what Jesus did on the cross. Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:2-4**:

*2Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, then Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3I’ll say it again. If you are trying to find favor with God by being circumcised, you must obey every regulation in the whole law of Moses. 4For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God’s grace.*

* **If you are relying on some act to make you right with God, then you have basically told God that you don’t need Jesus**

It means that what he did on the cross no longer applies to you and you have discarded God’s grace. I have heard the term “fallen from grace” used in so many different ways; but the context is clear that it is when someone doesn’t believe in God’s grace and tries to come to God based on their accomplishments. Paul told the church in Philippi in **Philippians 3:2-3**:

*2Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. 3For we who worship by the Spirit of God\* are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort.*

When it comes to our salvation, there is nothing we can add to it. When it comes to God’s acceptance of us, we can do nothing to earn it. We have what we have because of Jesus and nothing else. All we can do is fully rely upon it, put our full weight upon it, lean on it as if our life depended on it.

Last week we saw that Moses, who was in the Old Testament/Covenant, kept his face covered because the glory of God was fading away from his face. And we saw that people still put on a veil of self-sufficiency, performance and a spiritual image so that people will think that they are Spiritual when in reality they are not. This veil needs to be removed by Jesus. Only when we see our sinful state and depravity and our needs for Jesus is this veil of self-sufficiency removed. And we need God’s help to do it, **Amen.** It is at this point that we are able to enter into a new life that Paul speaks to us about in our text this morning. So let’s read **2 Corinthians 3:17-18**:

*17For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.*

Let’s pray!

How many of you have every been on a treadmill? I have a love hate/hate relationship with this machine. In fact, did you know that the treadmill was invented in 1818 by an English engineer name Sir Williams Cubitt. He noticed how lazy the average prisoner was and therefore built a machine that would use their muscle power to both cure their idleness and produce useful work. Treadmills were initially used for punishment. (Not much has changed)

There are many today we are still running on a spiritual treadmill. It doesn’t matter how far or how fast you run, you will exert energy and effort, you will face aches and pain, yet not move an inch from where the treadmill is situated. You may feel good about yourself for a moment in time, but it will not last. In fact, one may torture themselves doing needless things; they become imprisoned in a religious form when in reality what God wants to do in us requires a lot less effort on our part and relies more on him.

* **There are many people still stuck in performance, in religious exercise, in the law; but Jesus wants to set us free.**

**Verse 17** tells us, *“Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”* **Galatians 4:6** reminds us:

*6And because we\* are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.”*

Where is God’s Spirit? Inside of us. The God that we serve wants to set people free. How many of us are glad that we have been set free? Amen. We have the privilege of living in a free country. In face, our nation was founded on freedom, and one of the iconic symbols of our freedom is located in Philadelphia known as the Liberty Bell. And do you know what is inscribed on it? **Leviticus 25:10**:

*“Proclaim liberty though out all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.”*

Do you know why we are for freedom? Because it is part of God’s nature.

* **God wants to break us free from tyranny, from harsh, cruel and unfair control of sin.**

Isn’t’ that what controls many today? **Romans 6:12** tells us:

*12 Do not let sin control the way you live;\* do not give in to sinful desires.*

Sin controls people. Lives have been ruined, marriages destroyed and families dismantled because of sin. Jesus wants to set people free from its power. In Luke 4:18 He quotes **Isaiah 61:1** and states:

*1The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.*

God wants to set people free. And so how does he do it? How does he free us from sin? First, he dies for the penalty of our sin and grants us complete forgiveness so that we are set free in our standing with God. Second, he sends us help, a comforter; the Spirit of God who works in us and lead us into a Spirit-filled life that relies less on our effort and more on his power. **Romans 8:9** Paul tells us”

*9 But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you.*

This is a freedom secured by the Spirit of God. We no longer are slaves to sin. Yes, our old way of life will pop up from time to time, but we don’t have to stay there; we have been set free; the Spirit of God is alive in us and will once again remind us of our right standing with God and empower us to live a new and different kind of life. Sin no longer has to be our feared tyrant. Once the Spirit of God comes and lives in us, we are set free.

A great biblical scholar (Stedman) put it this way:

The man who is free is one who does not have any reputation to defend, no image to hide behind, nothing to preserve in himself.

* We are free from looking at ourselves and trying to measure up to some spiritual standard.
* We are free from comparing our Christian walk with others and wondering if we are doing enough
* We are free from trying to do enough to prove that we deserve salvation.
* We are free from jumping through religious hoops and exercises in order to catch God’s eye.
* We are free from wondering whether or not God is still angry with us and is holding things against us.
* We are free from the fear that some sin can come into my life and take my salvation away from me.
* We are free.

And most importantly, we are free to live a new life based on a better covenant, based on love and grace, based on Jesus and not myself. What kind of life is it? **Verse 18** goes on tells us, *“So all of us who had the veil removed can see and reflect the glory of God.”* We get to live a life that reflects the glory of God. We get to live a life that looks like Jesus. We get to live a life that is full of love. So what does that mean?

* **The less occupied with myself I become and the more I look to Jesus, the more I will see and do the things of God.**

When the veil of self is removed, we will be able to see and do the things that Jesus did. It is said that (Ironside):

“We become like that which we contemplate; if you want to be like Christ, look at Jesus. If you want to grow in grace, contemplate Jesus.”

God has allowed us to see the difference between a life stuck in sin, trying to prove ourselves to God, and a life that is free, by the grace of God, to look into the face of God and see who he is and allow it change us. We are becoming more like Jesus with every face to face look we take of Jesus. And how do we learn about him? How are we able to see him? We are able to see him and look into his face through the Word of God and with the Spirit of God.

The more time I spend in the Word of God, the more I will see him. The more time I spend allowing the Spirit to speak to me in line with God’s Word, the more I will hear his voice and experience his touch.

* **The more I look to Jesus, the more his glory will shine through me.**

And what does that glory look like? The end of **verse 18** tells us, *“And the Lord, who is the Spirit, makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.”* Did Jesus obey his father out of fear? Or did he obey his father out of love?

How many of us men, as we were growing up, wanted to be like our dad’s? Or how many of us here wanted to be like someone we loved? Do you known what happens when we fall in love with Jesus (not the idea, but the person of Jesus)? We begin to act like him, we begin to do the things that he does, we say the words he speaks, and we become a more loving person. It is a natural reaction or response that is birthed out of effortless adoration.

And guess what; what we tried to do through our efforts, we end up doing as the Spirit reveals Jesus and helps us fall more deeply in love with him. What is that? **Romans 13:10** says:

*10 Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God’s law.*

We end up doing those things that brought right standing with God through the Old Testament, but instead we do them because we have the Spirit of God living in us, and it is a natural Christian life; a Christian life that is lived with one focus yet accomplishes so much because it isn’t us doing it; it is Jesus living in us and through us. That is true freedom, church.

Verse 18 says that we are changed from glory to glory into his glorious image. The word “change” here is the Greek word we get “metamorphosis” form. It has the idea of change from the inside out. The word “image” here means “a statue, a copy, a representation.” We become just like Jesus from the inside out. And it is all done by the Spirit of God who grants us this freedom to see and do. That is a much better life isn’t it? That is freedom.

The law of compliance couldn’t give us this. Only Jesus could. **Amen**. Let’s pray!