

**Confession #2:**  
**We've Drifted into Legalism instead of  
True Spirituality**

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**Text:** 2 Cor. 3<sup>1</sup>

**Date:** April 10, 2011, 5pm

**Series:** Confessions of an Imperfect Church (2 Corinthians)

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

*2 Corinthians 3:17*

**Introduction:** Open your Bible this morning to **2 Corinthians**. We continue in a new series of messages that is a wake up call to our church.

One of the key verses in 1 Corinthians 3 is verse 17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

In chapters 3-6, Paul is going to give his view of the ministry. He’s already shown how weak he is. He’s going to make a case to the proud Corinthians that God doesn’t need our strength to build a ministry for Him. We need His strength. Paul says in **verse 5**, “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God”

Corinth was a fantastic metropolis. Many amazing things were built.

**2 Cor. 3:1–18** (ESV) — “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? 2 You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. 3 And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered 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. 4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 **Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God,** 6 who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? 9 For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. 10 Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. 11 For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. 12 Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, 13 not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

outcome of what was being brought to an end. 14 But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. 15 Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. 16 But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

I. What’s **Legalism** look like?

A. Legalism is **man-centered**. There is a superficial exterior. The false apostles were preaching Christ, but using all the Judeaizing and Pharisaical ways that Christ had set them free from. They knew it’s so much easier to depend on lists instead of listening to Christ.

**2 Cor. 3:1–3 (ESV)** — “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? 2 You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all.”

These men were not authentic. Paul said in **2:17**, “For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.”

He was contrasting his ministry with the false ministers at Corinth who were building their ministry in their own power and in their own authority.

***Clarification:*** Unlike the Corinthian teachers, Paul is not man-centered. He does not need the credentialing of human beings. He’s not saying that letters of recommendation are wrong. Apollos used letters of recommendation at times. But Paul had planted this church. This was more about Paul not being in “the club”.

B. Our commendation should be that others are becoming more and more like Christ.

**Verse 3**, “And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered 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.”

We can all fall into the legalistic trap of thinking we have man’s approval, we therefore have God’s approval. We’ve got to remember that our fruit is the ultimate test of our authenticity. “By their fruit you shall know them”.

Man-centered ministries are nothing new. Legalism depends on men and movements and the approval of men. If you step out of line, you get blackballed.

**Application**—The Spirit of God is the one who sets apart ministers for the Body. He puts all the parts in place and gives them the power to function. All true ministers are so by the gifting of the Holy Spirit. It is not necessary to have a formal educational degree, but it is also not wrong to have one. What is most important is that a minister is ready to labor until the point of exhaustion for Christ. A rigorous degree in biblical theology will help immature men to mature. I'm all for a good biblical education.

1. In contrast, Paul says his sufficiency is not of himself but of God.

C. Legalism depends on guilt trips and a ministry of condemnation.

1. The false teachers had an emphasis on an old covenant ministry of condemnation. Guilt trips, heavy obligations, domineering and control were the methods of getting the right outcome.
2. Paul in contrast exposes this death trap of legalism. He says “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”. Paul’s only hope for a good outcome in Corinth was not possible through human strength, but only through the miraculous power of the Spirit of God.

D. Legalists know the Word of God, but do not walk with the God of the Word.

E. Legalists stress conformity, not regeneration.

1. Regeneration brings freedom, because the Spirit of God is now in control!
2. All who are led by the Spirit, they are the children of God (vs. 17)
3. Regeneration brings with it a sanctifying process of inward transformation (vs. 18)

II. What does True Spirituality at Tabernacle look like?

A. We must exalt Christ and receive our commendation through fruit bearing in one another’s lives.

B. We must put off judging one another and emphasize the Spirit-filled life.

C. We must not be content that we know the Word, but ask how am I being transformed into Christ’s image.

D. We must diligently promote and understand the new birth.

1. Urging people to “turn to the Lord”
2. Living out the joy of spiritual transformation