

# 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

2 CORINTHIANS - PAUL'S MINISTRY IN THE LIGHT OF THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT  
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[Another Overview Chart](#) on right side

## Overview of Second Corinthians

2Co 1:1-7:16	2Co 8:1-9:15	2Co 10:1-12:21
Character of Paul	Collection for the Saints	Credentials of Paul
Testimonial & Didactic	Practical	Apologetic
Past: Misunderstanding & Explanation	Present: Practical Project	Future: Anxieties
Apostle's Conciliation, Ministry & Exhortations	Apostle's Solicitation for Judean Saints	Apostle's Vindication of Himself
Forgiveness, Reconciliation	Confidence	Vindication
Gratitude		
Ephesus to Macedonia: Change of Itinerary Explained	Macedonia: Preparation for Visit to Corinth	To Corinth: Certainty and Imminence of the Visit
2Co 1:1-7:16	2Co 8:1-9:15	2Co 10:1-12:21

[2Corinthians written ~ 56-57AD - see Chronological Table of Paul's Life and Ministry](#)

Adapted & modified from [Jensen's Survey of the New Testament \(Highly Recommended Resource\)](#) & [Wilkinson's Talk Thru the Bible](#)

2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, ([NASB: Lockman](#))

- Greek** : ouch hoti aph' heauton hikanoi esmen (1PPAI) logisasthai (AMN) ti os ex heauton, all' e hikanotes hemon ek tou theou.
- Amplified**: Not that we are fit (qualified and sufficient in ability) of ourselves to form personal judgments or to claim or count anything as coming from us, but our power and ability and sufficiency are from God. ([Lockman](#))
- ESV**: Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ([ESV](#))
- KJV**: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;
- NET**: Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as if it were coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, ([NET Bible](#))
- NIV**: Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ([NIV - IBS](#))
- NLT**: It is not that we think we can do anything of lasting value by ourselves. Our only power and success come from God. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))
- Phillips**: and not because we are confident of our own powers. It is God who makes us competent administrators of the new agreement, ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to evaluate anything, this evaluation originating from ourselves, but our sufficiency has its source in God (Eerdmans)

**Young's Literal:** not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God,

**MNT** not that I am sufficient of myself to effect any thing by the strength of my own reason: but my sufficiency is from God.

**NTMS:ITEETRGT** not that of ourselves we are competent to decide anything by our own reasonings, but our competency comes from God.

**NEB** There is no question of our being qualified in ourselves: we cannot claim anything as our own. The qualification we have comes from God;

**MLB:BV** not because we possess self-sufficiency to regard anything as from ourselves, but because our sufficiency is God-given.

**NJB** it is not that we are so competent that we can claim any credit for ourselves; all our competence comes from God.

**REB** There is no question of our having sufficient power in ourselves: we cannot claim anything as our own. The power we have comes from God;

**MEV** not that we are sufficient in ourselves to take credit for anything of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

**GNB** There is nothing in us that allows us to claim that we are capable of doing this work. The capacity we have comes from God;

- **Not that we are adequate** 2Co 2:16 4:7 Ex 4:10 Jn 15:5
- **Adequacy** - 2Co 12:9 Ex 4:11-16 Jer 1:6-10 Mt 10:19,20 Lk 21:15 24:49 1Co 3:6,10 15:10 Php 2:13 4:13 Jas 1:17
- [2 Corinthians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ADEQUACY/SUFFICIENCY IN 2 CORINTHIANS	
2Co 2:16	Who is adequate?
2Co 3:5	We are not adequate
2Co 3:6	God is adequate
2Co 9:8	God's grace abounds
2Co 12:9	God's grace is sufficient

### WHO IS ADEQUATE FOR THESE THINGS?

There is an old saying "[give credit where credit is due](#)" and this is exactly what Paul did immediately after describing the changed lives of the Corinthians. O, how we need to imitate Paul's example if we too are blessed to see spiritual fruit in our ministries (His ministry through us). God's very Name is "**Jealous**" because He is a jealous God (Ex 34:14+) and He will not share His glory with another. Paul understood this attribute of Yahweh.

2 Corinthians 3:5-6 (and 2Co 12:9+) are in a sense the answer to Paul's earlier rhetorical question "to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And **Who is adequate for these things?**" (2Co 2:16+) Indeed, the question on the heart of every servant of the Living God ought to be "**Who is adequate ([hikanos](#)) for these things?**" to which we can humbly, dependently, truthfully and continually respond "**our adequacy is from God.**"

Clearly Paul understood the words of Jesus in John 15:5

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who (present tense - continually) abides in Me and I in him, he

(present tense - continually) bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do (ABSOLUTELY) nothing.

**Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves - Not(ou)** signifies absolute negation. Not even a small percent of our adequacy in the supernatural realm comes from ourselves! **Not that we are adequate** could be supplemented with the words "not that we have **arrived**." Believers are works in progress (progressive sanctification) and are constantly in need of sanctifying work of the Word of God (Jn 17:17, cf Eph 5:26+) and the Spirit (1Pe 1:2+, 2 Th 2:13+, Ro 15:16+, 1 Cor 6:11+, cf 1Th 5:23+)

There is a perfect parallel passage in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians...

But by the **grace** of God I am what I am, and His **grace** toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the **grace** of God with me. (1 Cor. 15:10+) (**Grace...grace...grace!** Amazing grace indeed!)

**Comment** - Grace is not just unmerited favor but is supernatural power for ministry.

**Swindoll** asks "How many ministers do you know who model that? How many Christians exhibit this kind of self-surrender? Paul's words stand in sharp contrast to a worldview that glorifies rags-to-riches stories of people pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps, taking extreme measures to be "discovered," or expending large amounts of time, money, and energy to toot their own horns. From Paul's perspective, it was not important that anybody see us, but that they see Him. The more we promote ourselves, the more we obscure the person and work of Christ. ([Insights on 1&2 Corinthians](#))

**THOUGHT**- Who Alone could make **inadequate** natural men **adequate** for supernatural work, the only work that will endure eternally, because it from Him, through Him and to Him (cf Jn 15:5). God grant each of us a heart attitude that continually desires that Jesus would be ever increasing in us and through us and that we would be ever decreasing (Jn 3:30+) as we are being transformed from glory to glory (2Co 3:18+).

**D L Moody** spoke to the importance of understanding and accepting the truth of our natural inadequacy for any divine (supernatural) work "If God calls a man to His work (EMPHASIZE "HIS WORK"), and will be with him in that work (AND HE WILL), he will succeed--no matter what the obstacles may be...Let us put ourselves in the hands of God (ED: "[THE GOOD HAND OF THE LORD](#)")"

**Henry Blackaby** would add "The reality is that the Lord never calls the qualified; He qualifies the called."

"Watch to see where God is working and join Him." (cf Jn 5:17,19,20)  
-- Henry Blackaby

**Guzik** on **not that we are adequate in ourselves** - Some people refuse to be used by God because they think of themselves as "not ready," but in a sense, we are never ready or worthy. If we were, the sufficiency would be in ourselves and not from God. ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Spurgeon** - Brethren, if Paul is not sufficient of himself, what are you and I? Where are you ... Do you indulge the dream of self-sufficiency? Be ashamed of your folly in the presence of a great man who knew what he said, and who spoke under the direction of the Spirit of God, and wrote deliberately, 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves.'....Our sufficiency is of God; let us practically enjoy this truth. We are poor, **leaking vessels**, and the only way for us to keep full is to put our pitcher under the perpetual flow of boundless grace (ED: DISPENSED BY THE SPIRIT OF GRACE - Heb 10:29b). Then, despite its leakage, the cup will always be full to the brim."

**Murray Harris** - Still speaking of this confidence (2Co 3:4) before God, he disowns any ability to form a competent judgment on the results of his own ministry or any personal right to lay claim to the results of what was in reality God's work. His qualification and source of competence for the work of the ministry, including the assessment of its success, were not natural ability or personal initiative but divine enabling. Paul's confidence came through Christ, his competence from God, and he says all this against the background of his opponents' claim to be self-sufficient. ([Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**P E Hughes** - The Apostle claims nothing for himself: his confidence is through Christ, directed not to self but to God. Indeed, as though to silence his accusers finally and completely, he disclaims in the plainest terms any measure of self-competence and asserts that such competence as was apparent in his ministry is derived solely from God. He is saying in effect what he had said explicitly on a previous occasion: "not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Co 15:10+). Only a man who, like the Apostle, is humbly awake to his own utter weakness can know and prove the total sufficiency of God's grace. This great truth echoes and re-echoes through our epistle (cf. 2Co 4:7ff.; 2Co 5:18f.; 2Co 6:4ff.; 2Co 7:5f.; 2Co 11:23ff.; 2Co 12:9f.; 2Co 13:3f.). He who has, through Christ, received all things from God looks with confidence, through Christ, to God. ([NICNT-2Cor](#))

**R C H Lenski** -The sufficiency referred to is a sufficiency "for these things" (2:17), those implied in 2:14-17 and again in 3:2, 3,

namely ability to achieve results such as have been described, results such as rightly fill us with the confidence we have. "We are not sufficient (with any sufficiency derived) from our own selves" to accomplish such work, such results that could lend us the confidence we have. ([Interpretation of Second Corinthians](#))

**William Barclay** suggests that "Paul is feeling that perhaps his claim that the Corinthians are a living epistle of Christ, produced under his ministry, may sound a little like self-praise. So he hastens to insist that whatever he had done is not his own work but **the work of God** (ED: **THE WORK OF GOD THROUGH HIM AS A "VESSEL OF HONOR, SANCTIFIED, USEFUL TO THE MASTER, PREPARED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK."** - 2 Ti 2:21+)."

As the Puritan pastor **Richard Baxter** (1615-1691) lay on his deathbed, someone encouraged him with a reminder of the good which so many had received from his preaching and writings. **Baxter** who clearly understood 2Co 3:5 replied "I was but a pen in God's hand, and what praise is due to a pen?" May his tribe increase for the glory of God! Amen

**Henry Blackaby** - Will God ever ask you to do something you are not able to do? **ED: AKA FOR WHICH YOU FEEL INADEQUATE!** The answer is yes--all the time! It must be that way, for God's glory and kingdom. If we function according to **our ability** alone, **we get the glory**; if we function according to **the power of the Spirit within us God gets the glory**. He wants to reveal Himself to a watching world (ED: cf Mt 5:16+, Php 2:15+)....If you feel weak, limited, ordinary, you are the best material through which God can work.

**Andrew Bonar** wrote..."It is **not great talents** God blesses," the godly Scottish pastor Robert Murray McCheyne reminded a young minister, "so much as **great likeness to Jesus**. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God"

**John MacArthur** comments "Though Paul had a brilliant and highly trained mind (Acts 26:24+), he did not depend on it. Nor did the apostle rely on his oratorical skills (cf. Acts 14:12+) to persuade people (1 Cor. 2:4+). Paul did not rely on his natural abilities to carry out his ministry, but instead ministered "**in demonstration of the Spirit and of power**" (1Co 2:4+; cf. 1Co 4:20+; 1Th 1:5+). So little trust did Paul place in his human abilities that he made the remarkable confession that he was unwilling to consider anything as coming from himself ([2Corinthians. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

**Vance Havner** was right when he said...Our weaknesses and God's strength form an unbeatable combination!

**Oswald Chambers** put it well...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 and resources.

[Jim Elliot](#) martyred at age 29 clearly understood the thrust of 2Cor 3:5 when he described himself and his co-workers as a **bunch of nobodies trying to exalt Somebody**."

**Paul Apple** outlines this section...

## **GOD MAKES US COMPETENT THROUGH THE SPIRIT TO REFLECT HIS GLORY IN NEW COVENANT MINISTRY**

### **Competent to Minister (2Co 3:4-5)**

#### **1. Assurance of Confidence**

- a. Possession of Confidence = "And such confidence we have"
- b. Provider of Confidence = "through Christ"
- c. Orientation of Confidence = "toward God."

#### **2. Source of Confidence**

- a. Negatively: Not from Relying on Self = "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves"
- b. Solely from Relying on God = "but our adequacy is from God" ([2Corinthians](#))

In the first epistle, **Paul** explained that God does not choose to work with those who are adequate in their own strength...

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many (Note: he does not say "not any", just not many) wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He

might nullify the things that are, 29 that no man should boast before God. (1Co 1:26, 27, 28, 29)

**Adequate** (2425) (**hikanos** from the root **hik-** = "to reach [with the hand]," "to attain", `reaching to', `attaining to'; hence, `adequate') refers to that which reaches a certain standard and in context refers to Paul who in his own strength and ability was not qualified to be an apostle or minister of God. **Hikanos** has been variously used from the time of the Greek tragic dramatists in the basic sense of **adequate** (sufficient for a specific requirement), **sufficient** (enough to meet the needs of a situation or a proposed end), **enough** (in or to a degree or quantity that satisfies or that is sufficient or necessary for satisfaction), **qualified** (fitted as by training or experience for a given purpose), **competent** (having the capacity to function or develop in a particular way) to do a thing or large enough.

**Hikanos** - 39x in 39v in **NAS** - Matt 3:11; 8:8; 28:12; Mark 1:7; 10:46; 15:15; Luke 3:16; 7:6, 12; 8:27, 32; 20:9; 22:38; 23:8f; Acts 8:11; 9:23, 43; 11:24, 26; 12:12; 14:3, 21; 17:9; 18:18; 19:19, 26; 20:8, 11, 37; 22:6; 27:7, 9; 1 Cor 11:30; 15:9; 2 Cor 2:6, 16; 3:5; 2 Tim 2:2. **Hikanos is rendered (NAS)** as - able(1), adequate(2), aloud(1), considerable(4), enough(1), fit(4), good many(1), large(1), large sum(1), length\*(1), long(5), long while(1), many(9), number(1), pledge(1), satisfy\*(1), sizeable(1), some(1), sufficient(1), very bright(1), worthy(2).

**Hikanos** - 27x in 27v in the **Septuagint (LXX)** - Ge 30:15; 33:15; Ex 4:10; 12:4; 36:7; Lev. 5:7; 12:8; 25:26, 28; Ruth 1:20, 21; 1Ki 16:31; 2Ki. 4:8; 2Chr 30:3; Job 21:15; 31:2; 40:2; Pr. 25:16; 30:15; Is 40:16; Jer. 48:30; Ezek. 34:18; Joel 2:11; Obad. 1:5; Nah. 2:12; Hab. 2:13; Zech. 7:3. For example...In **Exodus** we see the Israelites had to be restrained from bringing materials for the building of the Tabernacle..."For the material they had was **sufficient** (Hebrew word = *day* = sufficiency; Lxx = *hikanos*) and more than enough for all the work, to perform it." (Exodus 36:7)

**John the Baptist** alluded to his inadequacy when he declared that...

He (Jesus) who is coming after me is mightier than I, and am not **fit** (*hikanos* - adequate, competent) to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Mt 3:11)

Likewise the **Roman centurion, a Gentile**, understood his inadequacy declaring to Jesus...

Lord, I am not **worthy** for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. (Mt 8:8)

**In ourselves** (*aph' heauton*)...**from ourselves** (*ex heauton*) - **A T Robertson** explains that the idea of these two prepositional phrases is...

"*starting from ourselves* (reflexive pronoun = *heauton*)...He says it over again with preposition *ex* (out of). He has no originating power for such confidence."

**Pulpit Commentary** adds that Paul...cannot bear the implication that any "confidence" on his part rests on anything short of the over-whelming sense that he is but an agent, or rather nothing but an instrument, in the hands of God. He has, indeed, the capacity to form adequate judgments about his work, but it does not come from his own resources (*aph' heauton*) or his own independent origination (*ex heauton*). ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Consider** (3049) (**logizomai** from **lógos** = reason, word, account) means to reason, to reckon, to calculate, to take into account, to deliberate, to weigh. **Logizomai** refers to a process of careful study or reasoning which finally arrives at a conclusion. **Logizomai** was a term frequently used in the business community of Paul's day meaning to impute (put to one's account) or credit to one's account (the classic example being Abraham's faith "*reckoned*" or imputed as righteousness - *logizomai* used 11x in one chapter! = Ro 4:3+, Ro 4:9+, Ro 4:10, 11+, Ro 4:22-24+ cp Ro 4:4-8). Utley says *logizomai* "reflects Paul's logical presentation of truths and followed by encouragement to think through the issues clearly."

**Logizomai** is related to our English term **logic** which deals with the methods of valid thinking, reveals how to draw proper conclusions from premises and is a prerequisite of all thought. Paul says that his "logic" tells him that apart from God's supply of wisdom and power, he did not trust in anything coming from himself but recognized that his own adequacy was totally inadequate!

**THOUGHT** Are we imitators of Paul (1Cor 11:1+) in God's ministry to and through us? Do we understand that any "fruit for eternity" (Jn 4:36, 15:16) is His fruit borne by His Spirit through us?

**Paul** has a similar thought using a "**clay pot**" metaphor in chapter 4...

But we have this treasure (the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ , cp 2Co 4:5, 6) in **earthen vessels** (lowly, common, cheap, breakable, expendable, replaceable **clay pots** that were used for mundane household chores), so that the surpassing greatness of the power (**dunamis** - sometimes translated as "miracles") will be of God and not from ourselves (2Corinthians 4:7)

**Wiersbe** wisely reminds all of us who would seek to serve the Living God that "We must be empty before we can be full. The opposite of this is self-sufficiency. Our sufficiency is not of ourselves (2Co 3:5). The world promotes self-sufficiency, yet God dwells with the person whose heart is broken (Is 57:15). This does not mean false humility or cowardice; it means a proper attitude toward self, realizing how weak and sinful we are apart from Christ. Compare the two men in Luke 18:9-14+) ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Anything as coming from ourselves** ("*to take credit for anything as coming from ourselves*" NAB; "*It is not that we think we can do anything of lasting value by ourselves*" - Original edition of NLT) - "**Coming**" is not in the original Greek but is added by the translators. Paul is saying in essence that apart from God's adequacy, His Spirit's empowerment and His sufficient grace, a believer can do nothing of lasting, eternal value in the his or her own strength.

**A W Pink** paraphrases it as "we are not sufficient of ourselves to think a godly thought." And he adds "If insufficient of ourselves to even think a good thought, how much less can we perform a good deed." All that is good in us is but a stream from the fountain of Divine grace, and naught but an abiding conviction of that fact will keep us both humble and thankful. God it is who inclines the mind and will unto any good, who illumines our understandings and draws out our affections unto things above.

**Jesus** stated the same principle declaring...

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides (present tense - continually, as one's lifestyle or habitual practice) in Me and I in him, he bears (present tense) much fruit, for apart from Me you can do (absolutely) nothing. (Jn 15:5, contrast "nothing" with the antithesis = "all things" in Php 4:13+).

**John Piper puts it bluntly:** As far as moral capacities are concerned, man without Christ can only say one thing honestly: I am nothing; God be merciful to me, a sinner.

## **SAVIOR SUFFICIENCY NOT SELF SUFFICIENCY**

**But (alla)** introduces a distinct **contrast** (see discussion regarding the value of recognizing **contrasts**). Contrasts generally show a "change of direction" and in this case the change is from our adequacy in the spiritual realm and God's adequacy. In other words Paul presents describes man's inadequacy for spiritual work which then is the preparation for God's supernatural sufficiency.

**THOUGHT** - Dearly beloved, do you have flaws, imperfections, blind spots, weaknesses, etc? Do not let these thoughts discourage or deter you from joining Him in His work! We do well to recall that if God had to depend on perfect people to accomplish His perfect work, He would never ever get anything done. On the other hand, our limitations and imperfections should motivate us to depend all the more on the always sufficient supply of God's grace and power. Later in this same epistle Paul prayed to have the "thorn" in his side removed which prompted Jesus to explain the paradoxical spiritual principle of the exchange of His strength for our weakness...

"My grace is (present tense = continually, always) **sufficient** (arkeo) for you, for power is (present tense = an ongoing process [cp progressive sanctification], continually being) perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me (may rest upon me even as God's Shekinah glory cloud resided on the OT tabernacle). Therefore I am (present tense = continually, always) well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2Co 12:9+, 2Co 12:10+) (See [Spiritual Paradox in the Christian Life](#))

**Our adequacy is from God - From God** is literally "out of" God. In defending His calling as an apostle Paul wants the Corinthians to understand that he is not sufficient in himself to fulfill his calling as a preacher, a teacher (2Ti 1:11+), an apostle of Christ Jesus (2Ti 1:1+) and a minister of Christ Jesus (Ro 15:16+)! And beloved neither are we! Paul is saying that in his ministry anything and everything (without exception) of eternal value is **from** God and **through** God which recalls his great doxology (expression of praise) in Romans...

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Ro 11:33-36+)



**Adequacy** (2426) ([hikanotes](#) from **hikanos** = able, sufficient) is used only here in Scripture (no uses in Septuagint) and means [sufficiency](#), [competency](#), ability, [capacity](#). In short, **hikanotes** describes a state of being qualified for ministry. Possessing enough to meet the needs of ministry. Fitness and capability for ministry.

In first Corinthians Paul emphasizes his dependence on God declaring that

we (1Co 3:6) are **God's fellow workers**; you are God's field, God's building. According to **the grace of God which was given to me** (cp "God's adequacy" to accomplish God's Work), as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1Co 3:9-11)

Paul amplifies this idea of "fellow workers" with God writing that...

by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but **I labored** even more than all of them, **yet not I**, but **the grace of God with me**. (1Co 15:9+, 1Co 15:10+)

In Romans 8 Paul reminds his readers that "If God is for us (cp His adequacy for our inadequacy), who is against us?" (Ro 8:31+) so that "in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him (cp through His adequacy) Who loved us." (Ro 8:37+).

**Warren Wiersbe** remarks should encourage every saint - "The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you and the power of God cannot use you....Men like Charles Spurgeon and George Whitefield were gifted orators whose words carried power, but they did not depend on their natural talents. They trusted the Spirit of God to work in the hearts of their hearers, and He did. Those who minister the Word must prepare and use every gift God has given them—but they must not put their confidence in themselves (**Ed**: or their supposed "adequacy"). ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**"Our sufficiency is of God."**

John Berridge

(Read this incredible saint's short biography)

O Lord, with shame I do confess  
My universal emptiness,  
My poverty and pride;  
I cannot keep Thee in my sight,  
Nor can I think one thought aright,  
Unless Thy Spirit guide.

I cannot from my idols part,  
Nor love the Lord with all my heart,  
Nor can myself deny;  
I cannot pray, and feel thee near,  
Nor can I sing with heavenly cheer,  
Unless the Lord be nigh.

Since Adam from God's image fell,  
On spiritual things we cannot dwell;  
The heart is turned aside;  
And none can raise to life the dead  
But He Who raised Himself indeed,  
And for dead sinners died.

Then let this mighty Jesus be,  
An all-sufficient Help for me,  
Creating power and will;  
Thy grace sufficed saints of old;  
It made them strong and made them bold,  
And it suffices still. (Amen!)

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**Pastor Rob Salvato** has an discussion of several Biblical characters that illustrate the provision of God's adequacy for their inadequacy...

When **Moses** was called by God to go to Pharaoh, he objected declaring...

Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." (Ex 4:10+)

God responded

Who has made man's mouth? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak. (Ex 4:11+)

This same pattern (human insufficiency and divine sufficiency) is seen in Joshua whom God called to lead Israel into the promised land after the death of Moses. Joshua's reaction was fear and a sense of inadequacy. God responded with a declaration of assurance that...

No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage. (Josh 1:5-6a)

During the days of the Judges, Gideon was called to be Israel's deliverer, but he too responded with a declaration of his inadequacy...

Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Jdg 6:15+)

Gideon's insufficiency was met with the Lord's sufficiency...

And the Lord said to him, 'But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man. (Jdg 6:16+)

The prophet Isaiah sees the thrice holy God and sees himself as a lowly sinner exclaiming...

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." (Isa 6:5)

Then one of the seraphim of the LORD touched Isaiah's lips with a burning coal from the altar declaring...

Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven. (Is 6:7)

And when the Lord ask "Whom shall I send?", Isaiah responds (Is 6:8) and the Lord says "Go and tell this people..." (Is 6:9)

Once again we see the provision of God's adequacy for Isaiah's "woe is me" inadequacy.

The prophet Jeremiah also expressed his inadequacy declaring...

Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth. (Jer 1:6)

Jeremiah's inadequacy was met by the Lord's assurance of His adequacy...

But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD. (Jer 1:7,8)

In all these examples when God's call came to the individual, their human **insufficiency** became the platform for God's **sufficiency**.

The declaration of their inability in the calls of Moses and Jeremiah are reminiscent of the great **D L Moody** who was the "Billy Graham" of His day. He was led to Christ by a shoe salesman and eventually preached to millions of people and leading hundreds of thousands to Christ. But **D L Moody** had a problem -- His grammar was not good and he often mispronounced words so that people would even laugh at Him. In spite of his inadequate grammatical background, Moody determined to rely on the Lord's adequacy. After one of his messages a seminary student approached him and said

"Mr. Moody I counted 18 grammatical errors in the first 5 minutes of your mess."

Moody responded

"Young man I am using all the grammar I got for God's glory!! What are you doing with yours?"

The Moody's of the World inspire us all, because in their lives we see God using someone like that and it makes us think that He could use us. ([The All Sufficiency of Christ](#))



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In a Forbes article about Harry Quadracci and the Quad/Graphics printing company, Phyllis Berman writes about the kind of employees the company hires.

A good many people whom society would dismiss as losers have been given a chance at Quad/Graphics, and they are grateful. "We hire people who have no education and little direction," Quadracci explains. "They are the kind of people who look at their shoes when they apply for a job. They join the firm not for its high wages—starting salaries on the floor are only about \$7.50 an hour—but because we offer them a chance to make something out of themselves."

Like this businessman, God delights in calling workers who look at their shoes when they apply for the job. God gives great responsibility to people whom the world thinks little of. (Contemporary illustrations for preachers, teachers, and writers: Baker Books, 1996)

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### Filled With The Spirit

Our sufficiency is from God. —2 Corinthians 3:5

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3

Bible scholar C. I. Scofield once visited a psychiatric hospital in Staunton, Virginia. The superintendent, who was giving him a tour, pointed out a powerfully built young man who seemed to be the picture of health.

Scofield asked, "Wouldn't that man be very difficult to manage if he became violent?"

"Yes," said the superintendent, "but he never exerts his power. His delusion is that he has no strength! He is always asking for medicine and complaining of weakness."

Scofield later commented, "How many in the church are like that! Divinely gifted with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, they lack the faith, knowledge, and consecration to use it. People are always praying for power. There is power enough. What they need is the willingness to be used in any humble position, and the faith to exercise the strength God has given."

There are many splendid goals we could reach if we would cease our timid excuse-making and just let the Holy Spirit fill and control our lives. Because of our relationship to Christ and the indwelling Spirit, we have all the strength we need to do His will (2 Cor. 3:5).

By: Henry G. Bosch ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, fill us with Thy Spirit's might  
That we may live as in Thy sight;  
On all Thy children lay Thy hand  
That they may live as Thou hast planned.  
—Lloyd

The human spirit fails unless the Holy Spirit fills.

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**Imperfect Leaders** - God's ways are not our ways. We tend to equate leadership with lordship; He equates leadership with servant hood. We want strength so we can help God with His work; He makes us weak so He can demonstrate His power. We advertise our credentials so others can be more sure of us; He lets us fail so they can see that apart from God we're not much at all.

We are inclined to focus on personalities, to be impressed by the intellect, education, and strength of a leader's will. Followers begin to believe that a particular leader can do no wrong. Such adulation, however, is nothing more than humanism—making a human being the measure of all things. What's worse, it's idolatry—centering our devotion on someone other than God.

So God lets leaders fall off their pedestal. Failure, indecision, and underachievement bring them to a humbling realization of their own inadequacy—and can cause followers to lose their illusions and overdependence on those leaders. This is a good reminder that all of us—leaders and followers alike—walk through life on "feet of clay." Ultimately, the only good thing about any one of us is the goodness of God. That's why we need to recognize that "our sufficiency is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5). — by David H. Roper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

If you rely upon God's strength  
And live a life that's true,  
Then what you do in Jesus' name  
Will be His work through you.

—D. De Haan

**Only as we see our weakness  
can we draw upon God's strength.**

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**A Deep Dependence** - Five for Fighting is the stage name of a recording artist who soared to popularity after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. He sings the song “Superman (It’s Not Easy),” a ballad that imagines what it must be like to be a superhero. Yet he struggles with the inadequacy of his strength to cope with the world’s complexities.

People seemed to identify with the song’s theme. Real life proves we are insufficient to battle the overwhelming burdens that confront us. Even those who want to be self-sufficient can’t manage life in their own strength.

As followers of Christ, we have a resource that even Superman could never claim. In our relationship with God, we find a sufficiency for life that can overwhelm our inadequacies and enable us to live victoriously. This was Paul’s encouragement to our hearts when he wrote to the believers at Corinth. He said, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God” (2Co 3:5). That makes all the difference in the world.

Left to ourselves, we will be forced to live with the reality that we can never be adequate to grapple with life. But in God’s strength we find all we need to navigate the storms of life in this turbulent world.— by Bill Crowder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

All that I need He will always be,  
All that I need till His face I see;  
All that I need through eternity,  
Jesus is all I need.  
—Rowe

**We must experience our weakness  
to experience God’s strength.**

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**Doing the Work of God** - When I was a pastor I used to have a recurring nightmare. I would rise to preach on Sunday morning, look out at my congregation—and see no one in the pews!

It doesn’t take a Daniel (Da 2:1,19) or a dream therapist to interpret the vision. It grew out of my belief that everything depended on me. I mistakenly believed that if I did not preach with power and persuasion, the congregation would fade away and the church would fold. I thought I was responsible for the results of God’s work.

In the Gospels, we read that some people asked Jesus, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” (John 6:28). What audacity! Only God can do the works of God!

Jesus’ answer instructs us all: “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (v.29). Whatever we have to do, then, whether teaching a Sunday school class, leading a small group, telling the gospel story to our neighbor, or preaching to thousands, it must be done by faith. There is no other way to “work the works of God.”

Our responsibility is to serve God faithfully, wherever He has placed us. Then we’re to leave the results to Him. As Jesus reminded His disciples in John 15:5, “Without Me you can do nothing.”— by David H. Roper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The work of the Lord for us has been done—  
Jesus has paid the supreme sacrifice;  
Our service for God has only begun—  
And nothing we do can help pay the price. —Hess

**Christ’s work on the Cross  
equips us to do good works for Him.**

## COMPARISON OF OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

THE OLD COVENANT	THE NEW COVENANT
LAW	GRACE
WORKS	FAITH
WORK	REST
FOCUS IS ON EXTERNALS	FOCUS IS ON INTERNALS
LAW IS EXTERNAL	LAW IS INTERNAL
FLESH EMPOWERED	SPIRIT EMPOWERED
LIVING UNDER THE LAW BEARS FRUIT FOR DEATH E.G., STEALS JOY	LIVING BY THE SPIRIT BEARS FRUIT FOR LIFE E.G., PRODUCES JOY
DEMANDS WORKS OF THE FLESH	FULFILLS DEMAND IN FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST
PRACTICAL EFFECT ON LIVING... BONDAGE SLAVERY	PRACTICAL EFFECT ON LIVING... LIBERTY FREEDOM
BRINGS SPIRITUAL DEATH	BRINGS SPIRITUAL LIFE
MINISTRY OF CONDEMNATION (Law condemns the sinner)	MINISTRY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (Grace redeems the sinner)
PICTURE OF CHRIST	PERSON OF CHRIST
A PALE SHADOW (Shadow)	THE EXACT IMAGE (Substance)
INAUGURATED AT MT. SINAI	CONSUMMATED (RATIFIED) AT MT. ZION
MOSES MEDIATED	CHRIST MEDIATES
SEPARATE & DISTINCT FROM ABRAHAMIC COVENANT	EXTENSION & AMPLIFICATION OF ABRAHAMIC COVENANT
TEMPORARY	EVERLASTING

EARTHLY TENT TEMPORAL	HEAVENLY TABERNACLE ETERNAL
SINS COVERED (Yom Kippur once a year)	SINS FORGIVEN (Sent away forever)
CONTINUAL SACRIFICES CAN NEVER TAKE AWAY SINS (Blood of animals)	ONE SACRIFICE TAKES AWAY SINS FOR ALL TIME (Body and blood of Christ)
CANNOT CONVEY A CLEAR CONSCIENCE	CONVEYS A CLEAR CONSCIENCE
CONDITIONAL COVENANT	UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT
<u>GOAL OF LAW</u> REMINDER OF SIN DISCOVERS SIN CONDEMNS SINNER TUTOR LEADS TO SAVIOR	<u>GOAL OF NEW COVENANT</u> REMISSION OF SIN DEFEATS SIN CONDEMNS SIN TUTOR NO LONGER NECESSARY
LAW WRITTEN ON STONE "I WILL DO"	LAW WRITTEN ON HEART "I WILL DO BY HIS SPIRIT"
DESIRE TO OBEY BUT NO INTERNAL POWER	DESIRE TO OBEY RESURRECTION POWER WITHIN
DON'T COME TOO CLOSE	DRAW NEAR WITH CONFIDENCE
NO HOPE TO HOLD US	A SURE HOPE TO HOLD FAST TO & TO HOLD US FAST

**2 Corinthians 3:6 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. ([NASB: Lockman](#))**

**Greek :** os kai hikanosen (3SAI) hemas diakonous kaines diathekes, ou grammatos alla pneumatos; to gar gramma apoktennei (3SPAI), to de pneuma zoopoiei (3SPAI).

**Amplified:** [It is He] Who has qualified us [making us to be fit and worthy and sufficient] as ministers and dispensers of a new covenant [of salvation through Christ], not [ministers] of the letter (of legally written code) but of the Spirit; for the code [of the Law] kills, but the [Holy] Spirit makes alive. [Jer. 31:31.] ([Lockman](#))

**ESV:** 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. ([ESV](#))

**KJV:** Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

**NET:** who made us adequate to be servants of a new covenant not based on the letter but on the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ([NET Bible](#))

**NIV:** He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ([NIV - IBS](#))

**NLT:** He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant. This is a covenant not of written laws, but of the

Spirit. The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** It is God who makes us competent administrators of the new agreement, and we deal not in the letter but in the Spirit. The letter of the Law leads to the death of the soul; the spirit of God alone can give life to the soul. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** who also made us sufficient as those who minister a testament, new in quality, not of the letter [of the law] but of the Spirit, for the letter [of the law] kills, but the Spirit makes alive. (Eerdmans)

**Young's Literal:** who also made us sufficient to be ministrants of a new covenant, not of letter, but of spirit; for the letter doth kill, and the spirit doth make alive.

- **Made:** 2Co 5:18-20 Mt 13:52 Ro 1:5 1Co 3:5,10 12:28 Eph 3:7 4:11,12 Col 1:25-29 1Ti 1:11,12 4:6 2Ti 1:11
- **New Covenant:** 2Co 3:14 Jer 31:31 Mt 26:28 Mk 14:24 Lk 22:20 1Co 11:25 Heb 7:22 Heb 8:6-10 Heb 9:15-20 Heb 12:24 Heb 13:20
- **Not of the letter** - Ro 2:27-29 Ro 7:6
- **For the letter kills** - 2Co 3:7,9 Dt 27:26 Ro 3:20 4:15 Ro 7:9-11 Ga 3:10-12,21
- **But the Spirit:** Jn 6:63 Ro 8:2 1Jn 1:1
- **Gives life:** Jn 5:21 Ro 4:17 1Co 15:45 Eph 2:1,5 1Pe 3:18
- [2 Corinthians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

1 Corinthians 11:25+ In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the **new** ([kainos](#)) **covenant** in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Luke 22:20+ And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the **new** ([kainos](#)) **covenant** in My blood.

Matthew 26:28 for this is My blood of the **covenant**, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

Romans 8:2+ For the law of the **Spirit** of life in Christ Jesus has set you **free** from the law of sin and of death.

### THE ALL SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST

**Who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant** - God made us adequate when we were delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son." (Col 1:12), which describes our standing (position) in Christ, not our practice. In the present context **adequate** (qualified) speaks primarily of Paul's practice of his position. Paul acknowledges that he was **made adequate** to proclaim the good news of the New Covenant to the Corinthians (his practice).

In Colossians **Paul** praises God "giving thanks to the Father, Who **has qualified** us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. (Col 1:12). The **aorist tense** of qualified signifies effective action at a point in time, past completed action ~ the act of making them fit or qualified = that moment when God saved us. By the past completed act (aorist tense) of Jesus crucifixion and our co-crucifixion with Him (Ro 6:6+, Gal 2:20+), believers are **worthy** because "**worthy** is the Lamb Who was slain" (Re 5:12+) and they are now in Christ (See **in Christ** and **in Christ Jesus** and **in Christ**). When an individual by faith receives what was prepared from the foundation of the world, they are made **sufficient** in Christ and thus **qualified** to enter the Holy of Holies by the blood of the Lamb, **qualified** to receive full possession of their inheritance which will be realized in the future and qualified to minister to and for the Most Holy God.

Before Christ made Paul adequate to be His **instrument** (Acts 9:4, 5, 6, 15, 16), Paul sought to make himself "adequate", writing in his letter to the Philipians...

If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (Php 3:4, 5, 6-note, Php 3:7+)

God has rendered us fit, made us sufficient, made us competent, qualified us making us to be fit and worthy and sufficient. The omnipotent God, the "Sufficient One", which in fact is a Name of God in the Greek translation (Septuagint) of the Hebrew OT books of Job and Ruth where the Greek word for adequate, **hikanos**, is used to translate His Name **Shaddai** (see study) or **Almighty**. For example in chapter one of Ruth Naomi has suffered the loss of her husband and two sons and is making her way back to her home

in Bethlehem. In her great grief and loss she declares to her two Moabite daughters-in-law...

Do not call me **Naomi** (= pleasant); call me **Mara** (means bitter), for the Almighty (**Shaddai**; **Lxx = hikanos**) has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the **Almighty** (Lxx = hikanos with definite article "the" = "the Adequate One") has afflicted me? (Ruth 1:20, 21-see commentary)

**Comment:** Now keeping in mind the meanings of *hikanos* (which include words like sizeable, considerable, competent, ample, adequate, enough, large enough or sufficient), take those meanings and plug them into Naomi's use of the Name of God. Naomi although feeling a great sense of (real) loss in essence is saying "My God is *the Sufficient One*", "*the One Who is large Enough*", "*the Adequate One*", etc. It is as if by calling God **Shaddai** (rarely used outside of Genesis, Job and Ruth), Naomi is expressing her trust in Him even in the midst of the great pain of personal loss. Would it be true of us in our daily lives that we too could all see God as ample, adequate, competent, large enough, sufficient, etc when we are experiencing adversities, afflictions, unexpected trials and tests. Open the eyes of our heart LORD to see You as you truly are -- "Large Enough" for any and every trial and affliction we will ever encounter. In Christ. Amen.

Naomi's use of **Shaddai** (only in Ru 1:20, 21) is not by accident, for to know a specific **Name** of God is to know His **character** and His **attributes** inherent in that Name. And so surely Naomi knows **Shaddai** as the God with Whom we have to do, Who allows suffering, but in that suffering is the ever **Faithful** One Who is always "enough" (cp 1Co 10:13-note). He is "enough" in Himself. He is **Self-sufficient**. He has everything and He needs nothing. He is "enough" for each us if we are in covenant with Him for then we have all in Him, and we have enough in Him, enough to satisfy our deepest desires, enough to supply the defect of everything else in our life and enough to secure to us happiness for our immortal souls. This is the God with Whom Naomi although experiencing bitter circumstances was still intimate.

**THOUGHT** - Beloved, do you know God intimately as Shaddai, ever sufficient for your every insufficiency? Have you come to the point in your personal relationship with God that He is enough? Is He sufficient to meet all your needs? (This is a "*secret*" that we must all learn in the God's "classroom" of affliction and abundance. Do you have a tender, teachable heart? Meditate on how Paul obtained the *secret* in Php 4:11, 12-note, Php 4:13-note) Can Shaddai be trusted to fulfill the promises of His Word? What in your life looks impossible? Beloved, in Shaddai it is "Him-possible"! But have you surrendered your burdens and cares fully to the Lord? Are you willing to wait upon Him to fulfill His promises?

GOD'S ADEQUACY NOT OUR INADEQUACY!

**Made...adequate** (2427)(**hikanoo** = see study of related word **hikanos** = sufficient, enough) means to make or render fit, to make adequate, to make capable, to make sufficient (as fulfilling a specific requirement) or to render competent or worthy. **Hikanoo** is in the aorist (past completed action) tense, indicative mood (mood of reality). God really rendered Paul fit for ministry. Similarly He made (**not** "is going to make") us adequate. Do you believe this?

## THE SECRET OF JOY IN SUPERNATURAL SERVICE

**John the Baptist** is the prototype of the man or woman God uses greatly (see our Lord's own assessment of John = Mt 11:11) and so we should not be surprised that he had an strong sense of His insufficiency in the presence of His Sufficient Savior declaring...

And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and **I am not fit** (not worthy = NET; Greek = **hikanos**) to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mk 1:7-8+)

Indeed, if we would desire to be sufficient as servants of Shaddai, we would do well to learn and practice the "secret" of John the Baptist who declared...

He **must** (present tense - continually) **increase** (present tense - continually), but I *must* (continually - present tense) **decrease**. (John 3:30-commentary)

**Comment:** First, note the order. Not **me** decreasing to make room for **Him**. No, Christ increasing, for the more I see Him high and lifted up, the more I am driven downward, which is the root meaning of the Greek



word for **humility** (see notes). Then I am in the perfect position (at the foot of the Cross - Beloved of God, pause for a moment, close your eyes and praise the Name of Jesus as you play [Grace Flows Down by Christy Nockels](#)) to receive His adequate grace (Jas 4:6-commentary). And we do well to continually remember that **humility of mind** (note) was the very substance of our Savior's sacrificial service (Read Php 2:3, 4-note, Php 2:5, 6, 7-note, Php 2:8-note, Mt 11:29, Jn 12:24 Mk 10:45)!

Second, note the use of the **present tense** in all the verbs, which speaks of a continual attitude and action. John did not see this "spiritual equation" as optional but as mandatory to one who would be meet for the Master's use! In other words "**must**", "**increase**" and "**decrease**" call for this to be a disciple's lifestyle - Jesus progressively, incessantly increasing, the "big I" ever decreasing. Herein lies the secret of supernatural service to the Savior! Paul understood this vital dynamic of Christ increasing and Paul decreasing. As Jesus became more and more preeminent in his heart and ministry, his self assessment progressively "**decreased**"! May our matriculation in the school of faith and affliction cause each of us to go toward "the rear of the class" rather than toward the "front of the class" (in our own estimation)!

#### PAUL'S ESTIMATION OF HIMSELF OVER TIME

55 AD	1 Corinthians 15:9+	The least of the <b>apostles</b>
61 AD	Ephesians 3:8+	The very least of all <b>saints</b>
63-66 AD	1 Timothy 1:15	Foremost of <b>sinners</b>

**A W Pink** comments on John's humility in Jn 3:30 (in [Christ Magnified by His Forerunner](#) - scroll down)...

Blessed climax was this to the lovely modesty of John, and well calculated to crush all party feeling and nip in the bud any jealousy there might be in the hearts of his own disciples. In principle this is inseparably connected with what he had just said before in the previous verse (Jn 3:28, 29). The more I "decrease" the more I delight in standing and hearing the voice of that blessed One who is Altogether Lovely ([Play Here I am to Worship](#) - "You're Altogether Lovely").

And so conversely. The more I stand and hear His voice, the more will He "increase" before me, and the more shall I "decrease." I cannot be occupied with two objects at one and the same time. To "decrease" is, we take it, to be less and less occupied with ourselves.

The more I am occupied with Christ, the less shall I be occupied with myself. Humility is not the product of direct cultivation, rather it is a by-product. The more I try to be humble, the less shall I attain unto humility.

But if I am truly occupied with that One who was "meek and lowly in heart," if I am constantly beholding His glory in the mirror of God's Word, then shall I be (continually) "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Co 3:18-commentary).

**Ron Mattoon** - If we are going to be what Christ wants us to be, we must be empty of selfish desires and totally yielded to the will of God. **It's the man that bows the lowest in the presence of God that stands the straightest in the presence of sin.** Someone said, "Swallowing pride is good for you. It won't give you calories or indigestion." Benjamin Whichcote said, "None are so empty as those who are full of themselves." If we are to have victory in our life, **SELF** needs to be removed from the throne of our heart and Christ needs to be enthroned. He must increase and I must decrease (John 3:30).

**Dave Guzik** - **He must increase, but I must decrease**...should be the motto of every Christian, especially leaders among God's people. Jesus should become greater and more visible, and the servant should become less and less visible. ([John 3 Commentary](#))

**James Boice** alluding to John 3:30+ describes the **sufficiency of God** in the life of a man who was **wholly insufficient** in himself...

This should be our pattern. If we are to witness for Jesus Christ, we must first of all forget ourselves—our likes, our dislikes, our needs, our personal interests, our free time, even at times our work or our ambitions—and we must think first of the other person and of his need for the Savior. (Php 2:3, 4+) **What is it that will make a person forget himself in order to point to Jesus?** Only an awareness of Jesus' worth and glory!

Some years ago an African convert became a great witness to Jesus in spite of the fact that he suffered from the painful disease known as elephantiasis. This is a terrible thing in many tropical countries. It causes the skin of a person to become coarse, thick and enlarged. This poor Christian had elephantiasis in his legs, so it was extremely difficult for him to walk. Nevertheless, he thought nothing of making his way around the village to introduce others to the one who had transformed his life.

After a period of several months, during which he had visited all of the huts in his village, this man began to take the Gospel to another village that lay two miles away through the jungle. Every morning he started out painfully on his monstrous legs, and every night he returned, having visited as many of the homes in the second village as possible. After visiting these homes he remained in his own village for several weeks before becoming restless again.

He asked the missionary doctor if another village which he knew of and had visited as a child had heard the Gospel. The missionary said it had not. The African Christian wanted to take the good news there, but the missionary advised against it because the village lay more than 12 miles away over dangerous jungle paths. The burden so grew upon this Christian that one day he slipped away quietly before dawn. The missionary learned later that the elephantiasis convert had arrived in the new village some time after noon, his legs bruised and scratched, and had begun immediately to tell the people about Jesus.

He went to everyone in the village. Then at last, when the sun was sinking low in the sky, he began his dangerous trip back along the jungle paths toward home. At midnight he arrived, bleeding and almost unconscious, at the house of the missionary doctor who tended to him and dressed his feet.

Here was a man who had been sent by God to point men and women to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was effective because he had forgotten himself in serving his King. (Witnessing the Progress of Revival - [Reformation and Revival Vol 2. 1993](#))

#### DOES GOD NEED OUR ABILITY?

Obviously, God does not need our **ability** (adequacy) but He does desire our **availability**. You've heard the acronym **F.A.T.** - Faithful, Available, Teachable.

Are you available? Do you possess a humble sense of inadequacy regarding your natural ability to carry out His supernatural work? Do you believe that what God calls you to accomplish, He will enable you to complete? Then you are in a good position to be used by God in His Kingdom work.

Oh, to be nothing, nothing,  
Only to lie at His feet,  
A broken and emptied vessel,  
For the Master's use **made meet**.

Emptied that He might fill me  
As forth to His service I go;  
Broken, that so unhindered,  
His life through me might show.  
-- Georgiana Taylor. ([Play hymn](#))

**Brian Bell** speaks transparently when he says "We often work overtime to get people to notice us. We want to show them how adequate we are, how competent, how gifted, how important. {Dr. Bell...hmmmm!} It's not important that they see us, only HIM! *"Often our impressive qualifications and accomplishments only obscure the view!"* ([2 Corinthians 3 Sermon Notes](#))

#### "Waiting Tables" in God's Household

**Servants** (ministers) ([1249](#))(**diakonos** see related words **diakoneo**, **diakonia**) is of uncertain origin. Some say it is from **dia** (through) + **konis** (dust) which denotes one who hurries through the dust to carry out his service. (Thayer and others doubt this derivation for technical reasons). **Vine** says that **diakonos** is probably from **diako** which means to hasten after, to pursue and so to run on errands. "Then the root idea is one who reaches out with diligence and persistence to render a service on behalf of others. This would imply that the deacon reaches out to render love-prompted service to others energetically and persistently." (Hiebert) This word group (**diakonos**, **diakoneo**, **diakonia**) focuses on the rendering or assistance or help by performing certain duties, often of a humble or menial nature, and including such mundane activities as waiting on tables or caring for household needs, activities that to many would seem to be without dignity (not true of course in God's eyes, Pr 15:3, Rev 22:12-[+](#)). In summary, the basic idea of this word group is that of humble, submissive, personal service, with less emphasis on a specific office or a particular function. **John MacArthur** adds that "**Diakonos** has the idea of "serviceability," or "usefulness." Those who serve Christ are called to excellence in their usefulness to His cause. ([MNTC-2 Cor](#))

As **Matthew Henry** once said "Those whom God will employ are first struck with a sense of their unworthiness to be employed. **Ed**: And their inadequacy to accomplish His Work without His working in and through us).

A Presbyterian pastor in Melbourne, Australia introduced **J. Hudson Taylor** by using many superlatives, especially the word **great**. Taylor stepped to the pulpit and quietly said, "*Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master.*"

**Richards** observes that "A survey of NT passages using the **diakoneo word group (diakonos, diakoneo, diakonia)** reveals how we can serve others and what "ministry" involves. It will include the following activities: caring for those in prison (Mt 25:44), serving tables (i.e., meeting physical needs) (Ac 6:2), teaching the Word of God (Ac 6:4), giving money to meet others' needs (2Co 9:1), and all the service offered by Christians to others to build them up in faith (1Co 12:5; Ep 4:12-note). Although Paul and other apostles are called **ministers**, and although there was the office of **deacon** in the early church, there is a sense in which **every believer is a minister** and is to use his or her gifts to serve others

This call for every believer (note "**each one**" below) to be a minister is especially emphasized by Peter in his summation of spiritual gifts...

As **each one** has received a special gift, employ it in **serving (diakoneo)** one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever **serves (diakoneo)**, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1Pe 4:10,11+)

A good picture of the meaning of this word group is found in the use of **diakoneo** to describe Peter's mother-in-law who was healed by Jesus "and she immediately got up and **waited (diakoneo)** on them." (Lk 4:39)

**Bridges** rightly observes that "Service to God through service to mankind is the only motivation acceptable to God for diligence and hard work in our vocational calling.

Were it not for Paul's letter, we would never know that **Onesiphorus** had served Paul and the church (see 2Ti 1:16, 18-note). But the Lord knew and will reward him and He will reward you for your faithful service "**on that day**"

for God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered (diakoneo) and in still ministering (diakoneo) to the saints (Heb 6:10-note)

**Hiebert** writes that **diakonos**...

refers to a servant in relationship to his activity, one who renders a service to another for the benefit of the one being served. Unlike the word for slave (doulos) diakonos implies the thought of voluntary service. It is used of the "servants" at the wedding in Cana (John 2:5, 7, 9). They were individuals who had voluntarily assumed this activity out of good will for the bride and groom. Among these various Greek words this one has the nearest approximation to the concept of a love-prompted service. Thus basically the word "deacon" denotes one who voluntarily serves others, prompted by a loving desire to benefit those served....

The non-technical usages of this word group (**diakonos, diakoneo, diakonia**) extend beyond the narrow limits implied in the English word "deacon," which designates an ecclesiastical office. These Greek words provide a spiritually rich concept of service. For a true understanding of the biblical import of the term "deacon" this high concept of "deacon service" must be retained.

The basic concept underlying the word "deacon" is that of a voluntary, love-prompted service for the benefit of others. It is a service that desires the true welfare of those ministered to. "Deacon service" may well involve prosaic, material "table service," but it should go beyond such service and seek to further the highest spiritual welfare of others.

The work of the deacon, related to the local church and to the whole cause of Christ, must be spiritually motivated and be Christ-centered. It finds its motivation and encouragement in the self-sacrificing example and call of Christ. "The diakonos is always one who serves on Christ's behalf and continues Christ's service for the outer and inner man; he is concerned with the salvation of men." It is a demanding and consuming service, but it has Christ's sure promise of reward: "If any one serves Me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26).

Since service associated with the **diakoneo word group (diakonos, diakoneo, diakonia)** necessarily involved dependence, submission, and constraints of time and freedom, the Greeks regarded a **diakonos, et al** as a degrading and dishonorable occupation. Service for the public good was honored, but voluntary giving of oneself in service of one's fellow man is alien to Greek thought. The highest goal before a man was the development of his own personality. That last sentence is strikingly contemporary, and is mindful of the fact that a culture that is largely focused on SELF (cp 2Ti 3:1,2-note) will find little value in menial, mundane

**servant hood.** To the Greeks, **diakonia service** was not dignified. Thus they lauded ruling and not service as the proper goal of man. The formula of the sophist ("wise man") expressed the basic Greek attitude "How can a man be happy when he has to serve someone?" Judaism had no philosophy of ministry involving the mundane, menial sense of a **diakonos**, instead adopting a philosophy of service similar to the Greeks. If service was rendered, it was done as an act of social obligation or as an act to those more worthy (this too sounds very "modern"). In short, a superior would not stoop to become a servant! Such an attitude, which conforms so closely to man's natural prejudices, causes the Lord's Servant attitude and actions to stand out even more (cp Jn 13:3, 4, 5). Clearly, Jesus' examples teach us that the word group **diakonos, diakoneo, diakonia** does not describe the activity of a lesser to a greater, but in fact is to be the lifestyle one privileged to be called a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Jesus** declared "If anyone serves (**diakoneo**) Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant (**diakonos**) also be; if anyone serves (**diakoneo**) Me, the Father will honor him. (John 12:26)

The word group (**diakonos, diakoneo, diakonia**) differs the other Greek word group, **douleuo (doulos)** which also means to serve, in that the former word group connotes "service" on behalf of someone while the latter speaks of "service" as a slave under or subordinate to someone (as a bondservant or bonds slave to the "lord" or "master"). As Richards says...

In Greek thought, both types of service were shameful. The duty of the Greek person was to himself, to achieve his potential for excellence. To be forced to subject his will or surrender his time and efforts for the sake of others was intensely distasteful, even humiliating. But Jesus came to serve, not to be served. In giving Himself for others, Jesus set the pattern for a transformed value system. In Christ, serving is the highway to greatness. In Christ we achieve our full potential by giving, not by grasping. ([Richards, L O: Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Regency](#))

In fact, in the first five NT uses of **diakonos** (Mt 20:26, Mt 23:11, 23:11, Mk 9:35, Mk 10:45, cp Jn 12:26), Jesus counters the wisdom of the world, by elevating the menial role of the **diakonos**, declaring such a one to be on the pathway to greatness in His kingdom. As discussed, it is not surprising that servant hood would be associated with kingdom greatness for this was the goal of incarnation of the King Himself, as stated in Mk 10:45 (verb **diakoneo**). It follows that for a man or woman to be a servant is to be walk in the steps of the Lord. The corollary is that for one to achieve true greatness, he must humble himself and serve others.

**John Calvin** thus rightly noted that "The highest honour in the church is not government but service. (adding)...We shall never be fit for the service of God if we look not beyond this fleeting life.

**John Blanchard** phrases it this way "Christian service has been dignified by Deity.

**J C Ryle** writes that "The world's idea of greatness is to rule, but Christian greatness consists in serving (cp Mk 10:45).

**Vance Havner** - There are no trivial assignments in the work of the Lord.

**Henrietta Mears** - Serving God with our little is the way to make it more; and we must never think that wasted with which God is honoured or men are blessed.

The the word group **diakonos, diakoneo, diakonos** differs the other Greek word group, **douleuo (doulos)** which also means to serve, in that the former word group connotes "service" on behalf of someone while the latter speaks of "service" as a slave under or subordinate to someone (as a bondservant or bonds slave to the "lord" or "master"). As Richards says...

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**Ministry** (including "**mission**" as shown in the reference below) is not the activity of an elite class, but the mutual caring of a band of brothers. Luke records that

Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their **mission** (**diakonia**), taking along with them John, who was also called Mark. (Acts 12:25+)

Such service is personal and practical, rather than institutional. **Adiakonos** is one who by choice and position has come to be under the authority of his Master and who therefore serves others in love and gratitude. Paul had been called and set apart to be a servant, Luke quoting Paul who testified...

I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the

**ministry** (diakonia) which I received from the Lord Jesus (Ministry was not Paul's idea but God's!), to testify solemnly of the Gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24<sup>+</sup>)

**Martha** is an example of service of a menial nature but without the proper attitude, Luke recording that

Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him, and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving (diakonia) alone? Then tell her to help me. (Lk 10:40+)

The word group **diakonos, diakoneo, diakonia** involves compassionate love towards the needy within the Christian community. Paul and Luke in the Acts use the word to designate those who **preach the gospel** and **have care of the churches**, even as Paul instructed Timothy to...

**be sober** in all things, **endure** hardship, **do the work** of an evangelist, **fulfill** your **ministry** (diakonia) (2Ti 4:5+)

**Comment** - All the verbs in red are commands -- this signifies that Timothy must be totally dependent on the indwelling Spirit to supernaturally enable him to obey these supernatural commands and not to trust in or rely on his fallen flesh, his "natural" ability or power! This applies to all disciples of Christ! His power, not ours!!!

Therefore, the word group **diakonos, diakoneo, diakonia** describes an office or ministration in the Christian community viewed with reference to the labor needed for others.

What Paul said to **Archippus** in the closing section of Colossians applies to every believer...

**Take heed** (aorist imperative = Don't delay! Do this now! The charge is urgent! Obey by depending on the Spirit not the flesh!) to the **ministry (diakonia)** which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it. (Col 4:17<sup>+</sup>)

Every believer is called by His Lord to the role of a servant, and one of the surest ways we can serve Christ is to serve the saints in His behalf (see Mt. 25:34-40).

## UNDERSTANDING THE NEW COVENANT

**Of a new covenant** - The word **new** (**kainos**) means **brand new**, of a kind that has never existed. It is new is quality in comparison to the Old Covenant. The irony is that the New Covenant was promised in the Old Testament, a promise made by **Jehovah** and given as a prophetic hope to the Jews who were at that time in captivity in Babylon in a seemingly hopeless state (in wrath He remembered mercy = Hab 3:2b)...

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a **New Covenant** (Lxx of "New" = **kainos** = "fresh", brand new, radically unlike the Old) with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 2 not like the (Old) 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 (cf Ex 24:3,7+ = Israel's promise "we will do!") My covenant which they broke (Old Covenant - Mosaic Law given at Mt Sinai), although I was a husband to them," (See Israel Wife of Jehovah) declares the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make (**karath** = cut) 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. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Je 31:31-34+).

Jesus inaugurated this **New Covenant** when He shed His blood on the Cross (Lk 22:20+; 1Cor 11:25+; 2Co 3:6, Heb 8:8+, Heb 8:13+; He 9:15+). This covenant is **new** in several ways: It is a better covenant (He 7:22+), an infallible (faultless) covenant (He 8:7+), an everlasting/eternal covenant (He 13:20+), a covenant grounded on better promises (He 8:6+). The fact that the Old and the New cannot be "mixed" is repeated in all 3 synoptic gospels to emphasize the distinctive, unique nature of the New Covenant (Mt 9:17+ Mk 2:21, 22+, Lk. 5:36-38+). The **new** commandment of love has its basis in Christ's own love (Jn 13:34, 1Jn 2:7, 8+; 2Jn 1:5). Those who enter the New Covenant are **new** creations in Christ (2Co 5:17+). In the New Covenant Jews and Gentiles are now one **new** man in Christ (Ep 2:15+, Ga 6:15+). New Covenant believers are to put on their **new** nature (Ep 4:24+).

In the first place, The Bad News of the Law versus the Good News of grace

Run, John, Run! The Law commands  
But gives me neither feet nor hands.



Far grander news the Gospel brings  
It bids me fly and gives me wings!

**Broomall** on **new** things - 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” (2 Cor 5:17). This regenerated person has a “**new** name” (Rev 2:17), observes a “**new** commandment” (1 Jn 2:7, 8), sings a “**new** song” (Rev 14:3), looks for “**new** heavens and a **new** earth” (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1) where the “**new** Jerusalem” (Rev 21:2) is and where all things are “**new**” (Rev 21:5) ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

"The **Old Covenant** is Paul trying to do his best on behalf of God.

The **New Covenant** is God doing his best through Paul.

-- Ray Stedman

The respected pastor **Ray Stedman** emphasizes that "This is a very important subject. It is my deep conviction that this is the one truth above everything else in the Bible that God wants his people to learn. If I had to list the most important truth in the Word of God, aside from the deity of Christ, I would say it is this truth -- the **New Covenant**, the new provision for life that God has given His people. But the one thing I find most missing in the church across the world today is the knowledge and understanding of this new way to live...Therefore, this New Covenant that Paul talks about is entirely different than anything the world knows anything about. The world would say that Paul was a success, and the great apostle that he was, because he was doing his very dedicated best to give himself totally to mobilize all his resources and his considerable abilities to serve God with all his heart. But if you asked Paul, he would never say that. He would say that there was nothing coming from him (cp 1Co 15:10-note). And he is not just being modest; he means that. "I don't make that kind of a contribution at all," he says, "everything is coming from God. The ability that is evident in my ministry, the changes that occur in people's lives because of what I am and where I go have nothing to do with my natural skills or ability. It's all coming from God at work in me." The Old Covenant is Paul trying to do his best on behalf of God. The New Covenant is God doing his best through Paul. What a difference that is! That is the great truth we need to learn. ([Have you got What it Takes? - 2Corinthians 3:1-11](#))

**Guzik** - The ancient Greek word for **covenant** (**diatheke**) had the ordinary meaning of a “last will and testament.” Paul’s use of the word reinforces the sovereignty of God, because it is not a negotiated settlement, but a divine decree.. The word covenant describes “An ‘arrangement’ made by one party with plenary power, which the other party may accept or reject, but cannot alter ... A covenant offered by God to man was no ‘compact’ between two parties coming together on equal terms.” (Moulton and Milligan). This new covenant presents the terms by which we can have a relationship with God, centered on Jesus and His work for us. ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Andrew Murray**, the gifted nineteenth century writer emphasizes the importance of understanding of the **New Covenant** writing "Blessed is the man who truly knows God as his God; who knows what the (New) Covenant promises him; what unwavering confidence of expectation it secures, that all its [covenant's] terms will be fulfilled to him; what a claim and hold it gives him on the Covenant-keeping God Himself. To many a man, who has never thought much of the Covenant, a true and living faith in it would mean the transformation of his whole life. The full knowledge of what God wants to do for him; the assurance that it will be done by an Almighty Power; the being drawn to God Himself in personal surrender, and dependence, and waiting to have it done. **All this would make the (New) Covenant the very gate of heaven.** May the Holy Spirit give us some vision of its glory. ([Murray, Andrew: Two Covenants](#)) (See discussion of Covenant: Why Study It?)

**James Denney** also appeals to us to seek a greater understanding and appreciation of the New Covenant. Commenting on our present passage, Denney writes...

With the words “**ministers of a new covenant**” we enter upon one of the great passages in Paul’s writings, and are allowed to see one of the inspiring and governing ideas in his mind. “Covenant,” even to people familiar with the Bible, is beginning to be a remote and technical term; it needs to be translated or explained...

By the death of Jesus a new spiritual order was established; it rested on the forgiveness of sin, it made God accessible to all, it made obedience an instinct and a joy; all the intercourse of God and man was carried on upon a new footing, under a new constitution; to use the words of the prophet and the apostle, God made a New Covenant with His people....

Paul had lived after the strictest sect of the old religion, a Pharisee; touching the righteousness which is in the law he could call himself blameless; he had tasted the whole bitterness of the legalism, the formality, the bondage, in which the Old Covenant entangled those who were devoted to it. It is with this in his memory that he here (beginning in verse 6 through verse 18) sets the Old and the New in unrelieved opposition to each other.

His feeling is like that of a man who has just been liberated from prison, and whose whole mind is possessed



and filled up with the single sensation that it is one thing to be chained, and another thing to be free.

In the passage before us, this is all the Apostle has in view. He speaks as if the Old Covenant and the New had nothing in common, as if the New had merely a negative relation to the Old, as if it could only be contrasted with it, and not compared to it....

The essence of the Old, to a Pharisee born and bred, was its documentary, statutory character: the law, written in letters, on stone tablets or parchment sheets, simply confronted men with its uninspiring imperative; it had never yet given any one a good conscience or enabled him to attain to the righteousness of God.

The essence of the new, on the other hand, was spirit; the Christian was one in whom, through Christ, the Holy Spirit of God dwelt, putting the righteousness of God within his reach, enabling him to perfect holiness in God's fear....

**The mark of the Old, as opposed to the New, is legalism.**

**The mark of the New, as opposed to the Old, is spirituality or freedom.**

They differ as **law** differs from **life**, as **compulsion** from **inspiration**. ([James Denney - The Two Covenants in the Expositor's Bible](#))

Beloved, let me encourage you to be diligent to seek to grow in your understanding and appreciation of the liberating truths of the New Covenant. Take some time and study the chart contrasting the Old and the New Covenants (Compare Old with New). Read slowly through 2Corinthians 3 meditating on the great advantages Paul lists for the New versus the Old (See the table below). Ask God to open the eyes of your heart that you might understand in a deeper, life changing way, the riches of the inheritance we as NT believers have because we now live in the glory of the New Covenant. Beloved, if you are "wrestling" with legalism in any of its subtle, deceptive, enslaving forms or if you are not experiencing the inestimable riches of your freedom in Christ, you will find that as God gives you a deeper understanding of the New Covenant, His Spirit will set you free in a way you have heretofore never experienced. Note that we not talking about more "head" knowledge of the New Covenant but of a "heart" transformation (going from glory to glory - 2Co 3:18+) and obedience motivating knowledge to walk in newness of life now made possible by the Spirit of the Living God (cp 2Co 3:17+).

As **C H Spurgeon** notes that "**ALL God's dealings with men have had a covenant character**. It hath so pleased him to arrange it, that he will not deal with us except through a covenant, nor can we deal with him except in the same manner."

**New** (2537) (**kainos**) is an adjective which refers to that which is new in kind = "fresh", unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of. **Kainos** describes something that was not previously present and in describing the covenant as "new" clearly implies that the "old" one has been replaced. **A T Robertson** says **kainos** in this context conveys the sense of "fresh and effective...Only God can make us that." (Amen!) **Vine** adds that **kainos** "denotes "new," of that which is unaccustomed or unused, not "new" in time, recent (Greek = "neos"), but "new" as to form or quality, of different nature from what is contrasted as old.

Paul uses the related noun **kainotes** translated **newness** (Freiberg defines it as "*depicting something not only recent and different but **extraordinary***") in Ro 6:4-note and Ro 7:6-note. Believers now have a brand new Life (Christ - Col 3:4-note) with a brand new Source of power (the Spirit) to live out that life to the full (cp Jesus' desire for all believers - Jn 10:10b)! Beloved in Christ, may His New "**extraordinary**" life be a genuine reality in your daily walk with Christ. Amen!

Kainos in the Corinthian letters - 1 Co. 11:25; 2 Co. 3:6; 2 Co. 5:17

**Covenant** (1242)(**diatheke** from **diatithemi** = set out in order, dispose in a certain order <> from **dia** = two + **tithemi** = to place pictures that which is placed between two, an arrangement between two parties) literally conveys the idea of a testament, as in one's last will and testament. Most of the NT uses of **diatheke** refer to God's declaration of His will concerning His self-commitment, promises, and conditions by which He entered into relationship with man. **Covenant** as defined by the Scriptures is a [solemn and binding](#) relationship which is meant to last a life time.

## SOME BACKGROUND ON THE CONCEPT OF COVENANT

**Covenant** has profound implications and is the most solemn, intimate contract known in the Bible. Covenant was considered immutable and binding among the ancients, and thus was **not entered into lightly**. After pieces of the sacrificial animal were laid opposite one another, the individuals who were cutting covenant would walk between the flesh. This walk represented the so-called **walk into death** indicating their commitment to die to independent living and to ever after live for their covenant partner and to fulfill the stipulations of their covenant agreement (See this practice in Jer 34:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17. See esp Jer 34:18,19). Furthermore, this **walk into death** was a testimony by each covenant partner that if either broke the covenant, God would take their life, even as had been done to the sacrificial animal. In short, we see the gravity of entering into and then breaking covenant. Thus covenant was a pledge to death, a pledge cut in **blood**. In covenant the shedding of **blood** demonstrated as nothing else could the intensity of the commitment (life is in the blood - Lev 17:11, 14). By cutting covenant the two parties were bound for life. Thus the shedding of **blood** in the cutting of covenant underscored the gravity and binding nature of the transaction. Both the Old and the New Covenants were inaugurated with blood (Lk 22:20, 1Co 11:25). The practice of cutting covenant is found throughout history with traces or remnants of covenant truth in every quarter of the globe. (See Introduction to Covenant and Summary of Major Biblical Covenants)

Without question the best way to truly understand covenant is to study these Biblical truths for one's self. And the best course available is the 11 week course of [Covenant \(click to download 20 page Pdf of Lesson 1 - the overview\)](#) produced by Precept Ministries International. This study will transform your **life**, your **marriage**, and your **ministry**. As one of my old medical school professors used to say "*you can't not know*" these truths about covenant. They are too important. Covenant is what the entire Bible is about, beloved. You can't not know!

In our modern society and even in the evangelical church, we have for the most part forgotten the profound significance of **covenant** in Scripture and thus we have difficulty grasping the profound, practical implications of the New Covenant. Yes, many can list the covenants but few understand the symbolism and seriousness of the concept of covenant. Today men make "covenants" but add stipulations in "fine print" which allow one to "get out" of the agreement with relative ease. Even the marriage covenant has all but lost its holy character in our post-Christian, "*abiblical*" society, as evidenced by the fact that many couples now live together without entering into a marriage covenant, a covenant ordained by God and one which He honors and blesses.

#### Related resources:

- [Covenant: As It Relates to Marriage](#)
- [Covenant: Why Study It?](#)
- [Covenant: Introduction](#)
- [Lesson 1 Covenant: Summary Table](#)
- [Lesson 2 Covenant: The Exchange of Robes](#)
- [Lesson 3 Covenant: The Exchange of Armor and Belts](#)
- [Lesson 4 Covenant: Solemn and Binding](#)
- [Lesson 5 Covenant: A Walk Into Death](#)
- [Lesson 6 Covenant: The Oneness of Covenant](#)
- [Covenant: Oneness Notes](#)
- [Lesson 7 Covenant: Withholding Nothing from God](#)
- [Lesson 8 Covenant: Abrahamic versus Mosaic](#)
- [Lesson 9 Covenant: New Covenant in the Old Testament](#)
- [Lesson 10 Covenant: Why the New is Better](#)
- [Lesson 11 Covenant: Abrahamic vs Old vs New](#)
- [New Covenant in the Old Testament](#)
- [Name change](#)
- [Covenant Meal](#)
- [Friend a covenant word \(notes\)](#)
- [Covenant memorial](#)
- [Phylacteries in OT](#)
- [Commingleing of blood \(notes\)](#)
- [Common life of covenant](#)
- [Striking of hands](#)

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**Not of the letter but of the Spirit** - **Not** (ou) signifies absolutely not servants of **the letter**. **The letter** ([gramma](#)) is not the same as the **letter** or epistle in 2Co 3:1+ (Gk = [epistole](#)). In context **letter** refers to the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Law, often referred to as the Ten Commandments. Note the striking contrast (but) is between **letter** and **Spirit**, the former brings death and the latter gives

life.

**The letter** - Referring to the Law or the Old Covenant. Other synonyms Paul uses for the Law in this same chapter include "**ministry of death**" (2Co 3:6) and "**ministry of condemnation**" (2Co 3:9). Some commentators feel that in introducing the Law, Paul is addressing false teachers in Corinth who were teaching one must add Old Covenant Law to the New Covenant grace, an untenable mixture for spiritual life.

The **Holy Spirit** was promised in the Old Testament as God's gift in the New Covenant...

Moreover, I will give you a **new** ([kainos](#) = brand new) heart and put a **new** ([kainos](#) = brand new) spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes (GOD'S SOVEREIGN PROVISION), and you will be careful to observe My ordinances (MAN'S SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY - SEE [100/100](#)). (Ezekiel 36:26, 27+, cp Ezek 37:14+ Ezek 39:29, Isa 32:15)

**Comment:** Jesus amplified the promise of the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49 Acts 1:8 Jn 14:16-18, 23; Jn 16:7-15), and this promise was partially fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4+). The ultimate fulfillment of the promise (given initially to Israel and Judah - Jer 31:31) will be when the Messiah returns to establish His kingdom on earth (Millennium) at the end of the Great Tribulation (see Ro 11:26, 27-note, cp Zechariah 12:10-14+, Zechariah 13:1, 8,9+).

**Brian Bell** explains that "The Law was never given to impart life because it produced a legal relationship between God and man. It basically said, "keep these laws if you want to maintain relationship with God." God was the Judge and man was the criminal, forever in default before the bar of God's judgment. The OT law was deadly because it killed Hope (just frustrated man), killed life (for it only brought condemnation), and killed strength (for it could only "tell" a person what to do, but gave them no power to "do it!") The New Cov. Was much different! It is a relationship of Love! It is no longer a Judge-criminal relationship; but now a Father-son relationship! It changes a man not imposing a new law but by changing his heart! It not only tells man what to do but gives him power to do it (via the Holy Spirit) The Old Cov. wasn't a bad thing; it was a step on the way! "When the sun rises the lamp is no longer needed!" Some still bring the lamp out in the sun though! ([2 Corinthians 3 Sermon Notes](#))

In Romans 6 Paul previews the new relationship (for those who have entered the New Covenant by grace through faith) believers have with the Law explaining...

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. (Ro 6:14+)

Then in Romans 7 Paul went to explain...

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. (Ro 7:4,5+)

**Comment:** Notice the effect of the Law in verse 5 - it arouses the fallen flesh. The practical application is that when we make a list of do's and don'ts we are potentially falling into a subtle trap of legalism and arousing our old flesh nature instead of overcoming it!

**Henry Alford** - The letter (mere formal and literal precept of the law) kills - as in Romans 7 where it brings knowledge of sin, its guilt and its punishment. The reference is not to natural death, which is the result of sin even where there is no law. ([The New Testament for English Readers](#))

**James Denney** is likely correct when he writes that "All that Paul says in the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians about the **working of the law**, in its relation to the flesh, is represented in "**the letter kills.**" The **power of the law** to create the consciousness of sin and to intensify it; to stimulate transgression, and so make sin exceeding sinful, and shut men up in despair; to pass sentence upon the guilty, the hopeless sentence of death, — all this is involved in the words ("the letter kills"). ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**John MacArthur** writes that the letter kills because "It results in a living death. Before Paul was converted, he thought he was saved by keeping the law, but all it did was kill his peace, joy, and hope; and it results in spiritual death. His inability to truly keep the law sentenced him to an eternal death ([MNTC-2 Cor](#))

**A W Pink** comments that beginning in 2Co 3:6 Paul presents "a series of contrasts...between the two covenants, that is, between Judaism and Christianity. That which pertained to the former is called "the letter" that relating to the new, "the spirit," i.e., the one was mainly concerned with that which was external, the other was largely fraternal: the one slew, the other gave life—this was one of the leading differences between the Law, and the Gospel. ([Gleanings in Exodus](#))

Ray Stedman asks...

**Have you ever found what a law, a demand, does to you?** Have you ever realized how it hits you? I was talking with a young man just a week ago who told me about an experience he had. He got up one morning and was thinking about his dad, how much he meant to him, how he loved him, and how aware he was suddenly, that morning, of all the things his dad had done for him. His heart was filled with a sense of gratitude, so he determined that after breakfast he would go out, without his dad having to say anything, and, out of the sheer delight of pleasing him, mow the lawn and wash the car. So he came down to breakfast, and just as he was about to leave the table, his dad said to him, "Son, before I get back today I would like to have you mow the lawn and wash the car. I really want you to do this. I don't want to come back this evening and find that you haven't done it." Then he left for work. This young man said, "It changed the whole picture. It just turned off all the incentive and motivation in my heart. I did it, but I had no further delight in it."

**The outward law, making its demand upon us, as Paul describes in Romans 7, always awakens a sense of rebellion.** (ED: See what the Law does to the flesh in Ro 7:5+) We all have it; we all dislike being told what to do. That is what the external law invariably does:

It kills motivation. Many of us never seem to learn that lesson. We are constantly trying to order people around, make them do things out of pressure, little realizing that that is absolutely the kiss of death to all sense of desire and motivation within someone. This young man realized that there was already a strong motivation, the most powerful of all, in his heart. He was all ready to do these things, to delight in doing them, to feel a sense of life in doing them, when it was a matter of gratitude for what his father's love and grace had meant to him.

That is almost an exact picture of what Paul is saying to us here. The Law, the demand of God in the Ten Commandments, perfectly right and just demands, things we ought to do, nevertheless always hits us at that point of our rebellion. We don't like to be told that we have to do these things.

But the new covenant is different. There God has found a way into our hearts. There He approaches us with the record of His love, of His willingness to die on our behalf, of His freedom to forgive us and to set us free from the guilt of our past -- the immediate past as well as the ancient past. More than that, to make us aware that He loves us, that we are approved of Him, that He, in Christ, has already taken us into His family and we stand dear to His heart, cherished by Him. Having learned all that about us, then He tells us to serve Him in whatever way our hearts delight in doing, and we go about it with an entirely different motivation. ([Have You Got What it Takes - 2 Corinthians 3:1-11](#))

**The Pulpit Commentary** has an interesting note that 2Co 3:6 "is one of the very numerous "texts" which have been first misinterpreted and have then been made, for whole centuries, the bases of erroneous systems. On this text more than any other, [Origen](#), followed by the exegetes of a thousand years, built his dogma that the Scripture must be interpreted **allegorically**, not **literally**, (see [Rise of Allegorical Interpretation](#)) because "the letter" of the Bible kills (Ed: [Origen](#) falsely reasoned that the "literal letter" killed, missing the fact that Paul's use of the word "letter" referred not to a letter [as of the alphabet] but to the Old Covenant, the Law). The misinterpretation is extravagantly inexcusable, and, like many others, arose solely from rending words away from their context and so reading new senses into them. (ED: THE ESSENCE OF [Allegorical Interpretation](#)) The contrast is not between "the outward" and the inward sense of Scripture at all. "The letter" refers exclusively to "the Law" ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** has a similar comment noting that "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. Paul was not suggesting that the Law was a mistake or that its ministry was unimportant. Far from it! Paul knew that the lost sinner must be slain by the Law and left helplessly condemned before he can be saved by God's grace. John the Baptist came with a message of judgment, preparing the way for Jesus and His message of saving grace. **A legalistic ministry brings death.** (Ed: See [Ray Stedman's excellent message on Legalism](#) - how not to walk by the Spirit) Preachers who major on rules and regulations keep their congregations under a dark cloud of guilt, and this kills their joy, power, and effective witness for Christ. Christians who are constantly measuring each other, comparing "results," and competing with each other, soon discover that they are depending on the flesh and not the power of the Spirit. There never was a standard that could transform a person's life, and that includes the Ten Commandments. Only the grace of God, ministered by the Spirit of God, can transform lost sinners into living epistles that glorify Jesus Christ. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

Jesus declared this same truth in John 6

It is the Spirit Who gives life; the flesh profits **NOTHING** ("the flesh counts for nothing" - *ou me* - double

negative = absolutely NOTHING!); the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life ("are spirit-giving and life-producing"). (John 6:63)

**MacDonald explains:** These people (the Jews in John 6) had been thinking in terms of Christ's literal flesh, but here He told them that eternal life was not gained by eating flesh but by the work of the Holy Spirit of God. Flesh cannot give life; only the Spirit can do this. They had taken His words literally and had not realized that they were to be understood spiritually. And so here the Lord Jesus explained that the words that He spoke were spirit and they were life; when His sayings about eating His flesh and drinking His blood were understood in a spiritual way, as meaning belief in Him, then those who accepted the message would receive eternal life.

**Andrew Murray** has some interesting comments on the Holy Spirit as related to this section (2Co 3) - see [The New Covenant: A Ministration of the Spirit](#) and [The Ministry of the New Covenant](#)

Paul contrasts the **letter** and the **Spirit** in Romans 2 explaining the need for "spiritual circumcision" (See Excursus on Circumcision)...

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly (externally, keeping kosher, going to the "temple", etc = these are all external and gain no "merit" with God, cp Ro 3:28+), nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh (Because he is not describing physical circumcision of the flesh but spiritual circumcision of the heart = what God's Spirit does when we are born again). But he is a Jew (not by physical lineage, but by spiritual new birth) who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, **by the Spirit**, not **by the letter** (the Law - the Law was not given to save men but to show men they needed salvation by grace through faith, e.g., Ro 3:19+, Ro 3:20+, Gal 3:22-24+); and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Ro 2:28, 29+).

In Romans 7 Paul again contrasts the **letter** (law) and the **Spirit**...

But now (now that we have been born again by grace through into the New Covenant) we have been released (aorist tense = past completed action. The idea is that the Law has been rendered inoperative in our life - we are now under grace, not under the burden of law - Ro 6:14+) from (set free from the dictatorship of and bondage of) the **Law**, having died (aorist tense = past tense, completed act = Death speaks of separation which paradoxically took place when we were born again) to that by which we were bound (the Law), so that we serve (present tense = our general demeanor or lifestyle, a service motivated by love, empowered by the Spirit) in newness of the **Spirit** and not in oldness of the **letter** (~ the Law). (Ro 7:6+).

**Comment: In newness** means New Covenant believers are now in a "spiritual atmosphere" or environment that has never existed. Without being too mystical, believers are to "breathe in" this **newness of the Spirit**. We now need to learn to walk in the "atmosphere" of this **newness**. Then we can serve in this same **newness**. Remember you now exist in the sphere of **newness** of the Holy Spirit so don't fall into the trap of volitionally (you making a choice, a bad one at that, of) placing yourself back up under the law in any form (Read Ro 7:5+ - Beware, because legalism arouses the flesh even in believers! Beware of making a list of "do's" and "don'ts", especially the latter! Romans 7:5 says you will only succeed in arousing the old flesh and you will experience defeat and frustration in your Christian life! Learn to walk by the Spirit and you then you will not fulfill the desires of your dirty, rotten flesh! Gal 5:16+)

**For (gar)** - Introduces Paul's explanation for the superiority of the Spirit over the "letter". As an aside, whenever you see a **for**", take a moment to carefully observe the text and try to determine what the author is explaining (for more discussion see **inductive Bible study** and **term of conclusion**)

**The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life** - The letter, the Law, (present tense - continually) kills. It kills because it gives a standard (law) which fallen man cannot keep, and the result is sin. As Ro 6:23+ says "the wages of sin is death." In Romans 7:11+ Paul writes that "sin ([hamartia](#)), taking an opportunity ([aphorme](#) - base of operations) **through the commandment** (OLD COVENANT - THE LETTER - THE LAW), deceived ([exapatao](#)) me and through it **killed** me."

Note what the passages teach about the letter, the old covenant, the law, the ten commandments...

Deuteronomy 27:26+ '**Cursed** is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' (THEY AGREED TO BE OBEDIENT - EVEN THOUGH GOD CALLS FOR TOTAL OBEDIENCE! cf "we will do" in Ex 24:3,7+)

Romans 3:20+ because **by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified** (declared righteous) in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. (IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PERFECTLY KEEP THE LAW AND



THUS NO ONE CAN BE "DECLARED RIGHTEOUS" BY TRYING TO KEEP THE LAW! NOTE PURPOSE OF LAW HERE = MAKE SIN KNOWN - JUST AS IN Ro 7:7. THE LAW IS LIKE A STRAIGHTEDGE AND WHEN WE COMPARE OURSELVES TO THE STRAIGHTEDGE WE SEE HOW CROOKED OUR LIVES REALLY ARE!)

Romans 7:7-11+ What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law (SAME EFFECT AS DESCRIBED IN Ro 3:20 ABOVE); for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." 8 But sin, taking opportunity (BASE OF OPERATIONS FOR AN EXPEDITION - SIN SETS UP A "BASE CAMP" AND LAUNCHES OUT IN ITS EVIL WORK IN OUR HEART) through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind (THE FORBIDDEN "FRUIT" BECOMES MORE ATTRACTIVE BECAUSE IT GIVES US THE CHANCE TO ASSERT OUR SELF-WILL!); for apart from the Law sin is dead (NOT ACTUALLY DEAD, BUT DORMANT, AND STIRRED TO ACTIVITY BY THE LAW - cf Ro 7:5+ - AND THIS "ACTIVATED" SIN OVERWHELMS THE SINNER!). 9 I was once alive apart from the Law (BECAUSE HE HAD AN EXTERNAL CONCEPTION OF IT DECEPTIVELY THINKING HE COULD KEEP IT AND GAIN RIGHTEOUSNESS); but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died (THAT IS PAUL REALIZED HIS EXTERNAL SPIRITUALITY WAS DEAD AND WORTHLESS BEFORE GOD!); 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life (IT WOULD HAVE GIVEN SPIRITUAL LIFE IF IT COULD HAVE BEEN KEPT PERFECTLY BUT THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE!), proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me (LAW DECEIVED HIM INTO BELIEVING HE COULD GAIN SPIRITUAL LIFE AND APPROVAL BEFORE GOD BY KEEPING THE LAW - PAUL TRIED AND FAILED!) .

Galatians 3:10-11+ (QUOTING Dt 27:26) For as many as are of the **works of the Law** are **under a curse**; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." 11 Now that no one is justified (DECLARED RIGHTEOUS) by the Law before God is evident; for (EXPLAINS WHY IT IS EVIDENT), "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (IN OTHER WORDS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS ATTAINED BY FAITH, NOT BY WORKS OF THE LAW.)

**Guzik** - The **letter** of the law came by the old covenant. It was good in itself, but it gave us no power to serve God, and it did not change our heart; it simply told us what to do. The indwelling Spirit then becomes for us a law written on our hearts. He is in us to guide us and be our "law." It isn't that the Holy Spirit replaces the written law, but completes and fulfills the work of the written law in our hearts. The Spirit gives life, and with this spiritual life, we can live out the law of God. Therefore, we can't throw away or neglect our Bibles (which some might say is the letter) because now we have the Spirit. Instead, the Spirit makes us alive to the letter, fulfilling and completing the work of the letter in us. We also shouldn't think this is permission to live our Christian life on experiences or mystical interpretations of the Bible. Experiences and allegories in the Bible have their place, but each must be proved true and supported by studying the literal meaning of the Bible. The Spirit and the letter are not enemies, but friends. They don't work against each other, and one is incomplete without the other. ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**Bob Utley on the letter kills** - This seems to relate to the primary purpose of the Mosaic law. It was given not to give life, but to accentuate and reveal our sinfulness (cf. Ro 7:9–11; Gal. 3:10). The Law brings condemnation (cf. Ro 5:13), wrath (cf. Ro 4:15), and death (cf. Ro 7:19; 2 Cor. 3:6. See George E. Ladd's *A Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 495–510). The place of the law is also clearly seen in Ro 3:20; 5:20; 10:4; Gal. 3:24–25. The relationship between the NT believer and the OT Law has been a greatly confused issue. It seems to me, based on all the passages of the NT, that the Christian is not under OT law (cf. Ro 6:14; Gal. 5:18). This is not because the OT law has passed away, but because the NT Christian fulfills the OT law in his love relationships with God and others (cf. Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:14). The purpose of the law is to bring fallen mankind to Christ, so as to redeem them. However, just because the OT law is not a means of salvation does not mean it is not God's will for humanity in society (cf. Mt 5:17; Ro 8:4).

**James Denney** explains the phrase **the Spirit gives life** writing that "The Spirit of Christ, given to those who receive Christ in the Gospel, is an infinite power and an infinite promise. It (this promise of the Spirit) includes the reversal of all that the letter (law) has wrought. The sentence of death is reversed; the impotence to good is counteracted and overcome; the soul looks out to and anticipates not the blackness of darkness for ever, but the everlasting glory of Christ. When the Apostle has written these two little sentences — when he has supplied "**letter**" and "**spirit**" with the predicates "**kill**" and "**make alive**," in the sense which they bear in the Christian revelation — he has gone as far as the mind of man can go in stating an effective contrast. But he works it out with reference to some special points in which the superiority of the new to the old is to be observed (In the remainder of chapter 3 - see table below). ([2 Corinthians 3](#))

**[ONCE FOR ALL](#)**



[Philip Bliss](#)

Free from the Law, O happy condition  
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission,  
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,  
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.

Once for all, O sinner, receive it,  
Once for all, O friend, now believe it;  
Cling to the cross, the burden will fall,  
Christ hath redeemed us once for all.

2 Now we are free, there's no condemnation,  
Jesus provides a perfect salvation;  
"Come unto Me," O hear His sweet call,  
Come, and He saves us once for all. [Chorus]

"Children of God," O glorious calling,  
Surely His grace will keep us from falling;  
Passing from death to life at His call,  
Blessed salvation once for all. [Chorus]

Beloved, note **gives life** is in the **present tense** which is profoundly practical for in so doing he is saying that the Spirit continually vivifies and revitalizes our lives! Do we really understand what this means and how great is our daily need for the Spirit's sufficient provision? I think not (speaking for myself at least)!

**THOUGHT** - O, to understand the profundity of the phrase "the Spirit gives life". Father, open the eyes of our slow to understand hearts that we might be enabled to taste and see the practical implications of Thy Spirit continually working in us, daily, moment by moment, giving us new life in Christ Jesus Thy Son. Amen.

To reiterate in **Jesus** taught that...

It is the Spirit who **gives life** ([zoopoieo](#) in present tense - continually gives life); the flesh profits **nothing** (not one thing! ever!); the words (rhema - spoken words - how important it is that preachers and teachers speak the actual Words of life to their hearers!) that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life

**THOUGHT** - Practical application - Where are these words today? Obviously in the Bible - are you daily going to the Scriptures, not because you "have to go" but because you "desire to go"? Don't be caught in the trap of reading "x" amount of Scripture each day. Instead slow down and meditate on a small section, asking the Spirit to teach you and then to empower you to obey what you read, an obedience motivated by love not law.

**Comment:** While the immediate context speaks of life brought about by causing a spiritually dead sinner (Ep 2:1-note) to be born again (new birth, regeneration = Jn 3:3, 5, 6, 8+), the Spirit **"gives life"** in another way. As taught elsewhere in the NT, the Spirit gives us the power to daily live our new life in Christ (eg, Gal 5:16+ , Gal 5:25+; cp Ro 8:2+, Ro 6:4+, Ro 8:13+). The Spirit gives life abundantly (Jn 10:10b) as He transforms us from one degree of glory to another (2Co 3:18+).

**Alford** on **Spirit gives life** "not merely **life eternal**, but the **whole new life** of the man of God (see Ro 6:4, Ro 6:11; Ro 8:2note). ([The Greek Testament](#))

**Letter** ([4121](#)) ([gramma](#) from [grapho](#) = to engrave or to write) is that which is drawn or written, i.e. a letter of the Greek alphabet. **Louw-Nida** = Any kind of written document, whether in book or manuscript form, with focus upon the content. a written statement of financial accounts, especially of debts ("promissory note") (Lk 16:6). Gramma - 12v- Lk. 16:6; Lk. 16:7; Jn. 5:47; Acts 26:24; Acts 28:21; Ro 2:27; Ro 2:29; Ro 7:6; 2 Co. 3:6; 2 Co. 3:7; Gal. 6:11; 2 Ti 3:15

**Kills** (present tense - continually kills)([615](#)) ([apokteino](#) from [apo](#) = intensifies meaning + [kteino](#) = slay) means to put to death or to kill outright. **Apokteino** uses by Paul - Ro 7:11+; Ro 11:3; 2 Co. 3:6; Eph 2:16; 1Th 2:15

**Spirit** ([4151](#))([pneuma](#) from [pneo](#) = to blow, to breathe) in context (see 2Co 3:17) refers to the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, Who had caused them to be born again (Jn 3:5-8+). He gives spiritual life to

spiritually dead souls and then He daily, continually energizes their new spiritual life. So many forget this latter truth or fail to rely on His energizing power as Paul alluded to in Gal 3:3+ "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected (aka "progressive sanctification") by the flesh?"

**Gives life** (present tense - continually gives life)([2227](#)) (**zoopoieo** from **zoos** = alive + **poieo** = to make) means to revitalize, make alive, give life, quicken, vivify, reanimate, restore to life. Most of the NT uses refer to God's ability to give life to men, either by resurrecting them from physical death or by regenerating them from spiritual death. In 1Co 15:36 Paul uses zoopoieo figuratively to picture the sprouting of a seed in his defense of the doctrine of the resurrection.

**Zoopoieo** - 11x in 10v in the **NAS** - come to life(1), give life(1), gives...life(1), gives life(4), impart life(1), life-giving(1), made alive(2).

John 5:21 "For just as the Father raises the dead and **gives** them **life**, even so the Son also **gives life** to whom He wishes.

**Comment:** Note the co-equality of the Father and Son in this passage. This passage says God has power to give life to the physically dead but even better He has the power to give life to the spiritually dead! (cp Jn 4:14, 6:27, 33, 35 11:25 14:6 17:2)

John 6:63 (see **above**)

Romans 4:17-note (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who **gives life** to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

Romans 8:11-note But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also **give life** to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all **will be made alive**.

1 Corinthians 15:36 You fool! That which you sow does not **come to life** unless it dies;

1 Corinthians 15:45 So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam (Christ) became a **life-giving** spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:6 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**.

Galatians 3:21 Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to **impart life**, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.

1Peter 3:18-note For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but **made alive** in the spirit;

**Zoopoieo** - 6x in 6v in the non-apocryphal Septuagint - Jdg 21:14; 2Ki 5:7; Neh 9:6; Ps 70:20; Eccl 7:12; Job 36:6

Nehemiah 9:6 "You alone are the LORD. You have made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host, The earth and all that is on it, The seas and all that is in them. You **give life** to all of them And the heavenly host bows down before You.

Psalms 71:20 You who have shown me many troubles and distresses **will revive** me again, And will bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

Ecclesiastes 7:12 For wisdom is protection just as money is protection, But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom **preserves the lives** of its possessors.

Job 36:6 "He does not **keep** the wicked **alive**, But gives justice to the afflicted.

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**QUESTION** - [What does it mean that the letter kills, but the spirit gives life \(2 Corinthians 3:6\)?](#)

**ANSWER** - 2 Corinthians 3:6 says, "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." With these words, Paul summarizes the key difference between the Old and New Testaments: the first covenant was based on obedience to the written law (the "letter"), but the second covenant is based on the blood of Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

There are two parts to this answer, as we look at both the letter and the Spirit.

**First, what does Paul mean by “the letter kills”?** Simply that the [Old Testament Law](#), which is good and perfect (Psalm 19:7), reveals all people as law-breakers (Galatians 3:10). The law “kills” in that the penalty for breaking God’s law is eternal death in hell (Ro 6:23; Revelation 21:8). As God told Moses the lawgiver, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book” (Ex 32:33+). Even if you sin only once in your whole life, it’s the same as breaking all of God’s laws (James 2:10+), just as breaking only one link in a chain breaks the whole chain.

The written law—“**the letter**”—was chiseled in stone by the finger of God and is the unchanging standard by which all are judged. The law cannot give us righteousness or eternal life in heaven (Galatians 2:16). It can only condemn us as sinners, and the sentence is death. Heaven is where perfection is required (Mt 5:20, 48; Mt 19:16–21), and “the law made nothing perfect” (Hebrews 7:19).

**Second, what does Paul mean by “the Spirit gives life”?** Simply that the Holy Spirit rescues us from our hopeless situation. God saves us from death and grants us eternal life when we are [born again](#) through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:6), and, later, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are Spirit and they are life” (John 6:63).

The Holy Spirit was active in the [Incarnation](#) of our Savior (Luke 1:35). It was through the Holy Spirit that Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice to God for our sins (Hebrews 9:14). The Spirit is the cause of the new birth (John 3:3–8). It is the Spirit who lives in believers (John 14:17), seals them (Ephesians 1:13), and sanctifies them (Romans 15:16).

Jesus came to give us an abundant life, or life “to the full” (John 10:10). **The Holy Spirit living in believers is how Jesus fulfills that promise.** The abundant Christian life is marked by the [fruit of the Spirit](#), which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). The Old Testament Law could not produce any of that fruit; only the Holy Spirit can, as He lives in us.

**The Spirit gives life in that He enables us to reach God’s ultimate goal for us, to be transformed into the glorious image of God’s own Son** (2 Corinthians 3:18; also see Romans 8:28–30). Until the day that we see Christ, **the Spirit intercedes with God on our behalf**, ensuring our continued forgiveness and preserving the promise of God (Romans 8:26–27).

“The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6). Elsewhere, Paul teaches the same truth: “But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (Ro 7:6). [GotQuestions.org](#)

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**Thomas Watson...God’s Spirit has a VIVIFYING virtue.** “The Spirit gives life” (2Cor. 3:6). **As the blowing in an flute makes it sound, so the breathing of the Spirit causes life and motion.** When the prophet Elijah stretched himself upon the dead child, it revived (1Ki 17:22); so God’s Spirit stretching himself upon the soul, infuses life into it. As our life is from the Spirit’s operations, so is our liveliness: “the Spirit lifted me up” (Ezek. 3:14). When the heart is bowed down and is listless to duty, the Spirit of God lifts it up. He puts a sharp edge upon the affections; he makes love ardent, and hope lively. The Spirit removes the weights of the soul and gives it wings: “Before I was aware, my soul became like the chariots of Amminadab” (Song 6:12). **The wheels of the soul were pulled off before, and it drove on heavily—but when the Spirit of the Almighty possesses a man, now he runs swiftly in the ways of God, and his soul is like the chariots of Amminadab.** ([The Godly Mans Picture](#))

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**IS YOUR SERVICE “WANT TO” OR “HAVE TO”?** - A group of ministers attending an evangelistic conference gave testimonies as to how they came to know Christ. Most spoke of dramatic conversions. One pastor, however, had been born into a Christian home and had grown up in the church. “It seems from my earliest years I have always known and loved the Lord,” he said. The other clergymen couldn’t identify with this, since most of them remembered a definite time and place when they trusted in Jesus. The first minister quickly added, “But I do remember when ‘have to’ became ‘want to.’”

Yes, that’s the key to knowing that our faith is real. The Holy Spirit fills us with a love for God that creates a desire to keep His commands for Christian living, not from force but from the impulse of a renewed heart. That’s what Paul meant when he said that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

If our service for the Lord is all “have to” but no “want to,” we have probably become legalistic, having substituted adherence to man-made rules for loving obedience to God’s commands. We need to ponder again the great price Jesus paid for our redemption. God exposed His heart of love for us. He inflicted on His beloved Son the punishment we deserve so that we could be forgiven. As we confess our sins and ask the Holy Spirit to fill us, we’ll experience afresh His marvelous love. And this will bring us back to the place where “want to” replaces “have to.” —D. J. De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by](#)

**Legalism weighs us down.  
Love lifts us up.**

**Filled With The Spirit** - Bible scholar C. I. Scofield once visited a psychiatric hospital in Staunton, Virginia. The superintendent, who was giving him a tour, pointed out a powerfully built young man who seemed to be the picture of health.

Scofield asked,

“Wouldn’t that man be very difficult to manage if he became violent?”

“Yes,” said the superintendent, “but he never exerts his power. His delusion is that he has no strength! He is always asking for medicine and complaining of weakness.”

Scofield later commented,

“How many in the church are like that! Divinely gifted with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, they lack the faith, knowledge, and consecration to use it. People are always praying for power. There is power enough. What they need is the willingness to be used in any humble position, and the faith to exercise the strength God has given.”

There are many splendid goals we could reach if we would cease our timid excuse-making and just let the Holy Spirit fill and control our lives. Because of our relationship to Christ and the indwelling Spirit, we have all the strength we need to do His will (2Cor 3:5).

— by Henry G. Bosch ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, fill us with Thy Spirit's might  
That we may live as in Thy sight;  
On all Thy children lay Thy hand  
That they may live as Thou hast planned. —Lloyd

**The human spirit fails  
unless the Holy Spirit fills.**

SUMMARY OF 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-18	
THE OLD COVENANT	THE NEW COVENANT
Written with ink on tablets of stone 2Cor 3:3	Written with the Spirit on tablets of human hearts 2Cor 3:3
Adequacy from Self 2Cor 3:5	Adequacy from God 2Cor 3:5
The Letter (law) Kills (3000 @ Sinai – Ex 32:28) 2Cor 3:6	The Spirit gives Life (3000 @ Pentecost – Acts 2:41) 2Cor 3:6
Ministry of Death (glory...fading) 2Cor 3:7	Ministry of the Spirit (more glory) 2Cor 3:8
Ministry of Condemnation 2Cor 3:9	Ministry of Righteousness 2Cor 3:9
No glory (~glory of moon) 2Cor 3:10	Glory that surpasses (~glory of sun) 2Cor 3:10

Fading Glory: Temporary 2Cor 3:11	Remains in Glory: Permanent 2Cor 3:11
Reading of Old Covenant hearts veiled 2Cor 3:14,15	Turn to the Lord Veil is removed in Christ 2Cor 3:16
(By implication Bondage)	Where Spirit of the Lord is Liberty 2Cor 3:17
Glory fading on Moses' face No Internal Transformation 2Co 3:13	Glory going to glory on saints' faces Continual Internal transformation by the Spirit 2Cor 3:18