

— Adequate Means Confident —

2 Corinthians 3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? 2 You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 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)

Do you ever wonder why you are where you are? Does your assignment seem too great for your perception of who you are? What causes you to question your adequacy? Sometimes just the sheer enormity of things can make you feel like you're in over your head.

Comparison will do it too. Why do I have this when he's got that? Why is his church so much _____ than mine? Paul said that he tried to avoid that quagmire of mental defeat:

2 Corinthians 10:12 For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.

Paul seemed to be bothered by inferiority feelings at times, especially when it came to the Corinthians. He felt that the people showed greater respect for false teachers than for him and he expressed a defensiveness that exposed an effort to set himself apart. I think a little of that is woven into this text, but in the end a beautiful and powerful picture of the faithful minister emerges.

"I'm not bragging, nor do I need some sort of portfolio or endorsement," he said. "All the credibility I need is the very evident work of the Holy Spirit in your lives. You are written in my heart and God's truth is written in your hearts — it's right there for anyone to read, and this makes me confident."

Various things can be the source of confidence in life, but the true and triumphing kind comes from ministry carried out by the Holy Spirit working in and through you. God's Word eschews confidence in the flesh, even in the soul because power is of God but natural, human wisdom and effort simply obscure the cross and empty its power on the ground.

When a man knows that his message, delivery, life, and ministry are all of and through and by the Spirit of God, great confidence replaces timidity and second guessing. Look at verses 4-6 — the confidence is through Christ toward God who makes a man adequate. Nothing is coming from the man, but from God who is linking adequacy with the new covenant of the Spirit and as the man is surrendered to God, He makes him adequate to bring life instead of death to his people. The great reward in this is to encounter people years after your time of ministry with them and find they are faithful and strong in Jesus, still living the Christ life as you taught them back when.

3 John 1:3 For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

God has done everything to make you adequate for where you are. You may be facing great trials and a time of questioning — there often seems to be a deacon willing to make some of that happen. But don't worry, as you minister the Word of God in the Spirit of God it imparts life all the while affirming your adequacy. You don't need to defend yourself or worry about any who oppose or about the eventual fruit of your effort. Just stay filled with the Spirit and let Him speak the Word through you and truth will prevail.

The thing to guard is handling the Word by the Spirit and not by your natural capabilities.

John 6:63 "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."

Jesus said that the Word of God is itself spirit and life. Yet it can be handled by natural means and be reduced to death. Paul went on to explain how the Law without the Spirit involved brought death to the people. It still had power. Moses carried power on him to where he had to cover his face so as not to blind the people, but without the Spirit to bring life, the Law could only administer death because they couldn't obey it.

Do you preach a "you must", "you better", "here's five steps", "try harder" message? Or do you put the Word up with its requirements and then help people to find the place of surrender so the Spirit of God fills them, forms Jesus into them, and they experience the Christ life flowing through them in obedience to it?

Paul then described the glory connected with the Law, but touted the much greater glory of the ministry of the Spirit. This superiority of the Spirit gave him great hope and boldness in proclaiming the truth of freedom in Christ and His Spirit. He knew that the residual blindness caused by the Law was always lifted when a person turns to Jesus. *But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.* The conclusion of this chapter is amazing:

2 Corinthians 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed

*into the same image from glory to glory,
just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

Liberty speaks of being made independent from religious regulations and legal restrictions. Freedom is the hallmark of grace and the ministry of the Spirit. Jesus is the Spirit (remember He is also called "Eternal Father" in isaiah 9:6) and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Your adequacy and confidence are inextricably linked to Jesus and the way you minister Him to your people. If you work in the power of the Spirit, Jesus and His word will bring glory and life to them. The incredible thing is that the glory will take root in their lives and then steadily increase from one stage to the next as they are transformed into His image. Someone pictured this as sitting in a chair next to Jesus, but with a wall between you. At the end of the wall there are two mirrors positioned in such a way as to see His image in one of them, and your image in the other. As time passes you notice your image beginning to look more and more like His image.

I can't think of a more exciting prospect than to be involved with God in this life-altering process. You lead someone to faith in Christ and then minister His life to them and see more of Jesus all the time. You will truly join with Paul in his joy over the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 2:19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

I hope you can find a way to believe and receive these truths in your life today. God wants to fill you with confidence that flows out of a sense of adequacy that comes from ministering the life of Jesus in the power of the Spirit. Be encouraged, my friend, God is working to accomplish all He has planned for you, and He will finish it to the last detail!

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