

2 Corinthians 3.1-6

“Our Sufficiency is from God”

As Step Into 3<sup>rd</sup> Ch of LETTER > TENSION is Mounting

PAUL deeply HURT by Christians in CORINTH and Responds w LAMENT  
Responding to their Accusations – PROMISED you’d COME and NEVER DID!

And by the Way > We’ve NEVER Even Seen your RESUME!

Back then TRAVELING Preachers would show up with Letter of Reference  
TODAY anyone who wants ACCEPTANCE gets an INITIAL VIEW interview  
Paul had NO Personal WEB Address – Not any KIND of Written Reference

v. 1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?

PAUL was NOT Completely AGAINST Letters of Recommendation

In his Letters he Commends – Timothy, Titus, Apollos, Phoebe, Epaphroditus

Little Book of PHILEMON is Letter of Recommendation, so is 3 JOHN

World w/out FACEBOOK & Instagram > How would they know who is COOL?

And who is COUNTERFEIT?

Need RELIABLE Reference before LETTING Someone in your HOME, Church

Paul STARTED this Church! All Members are there because of his LABORS!

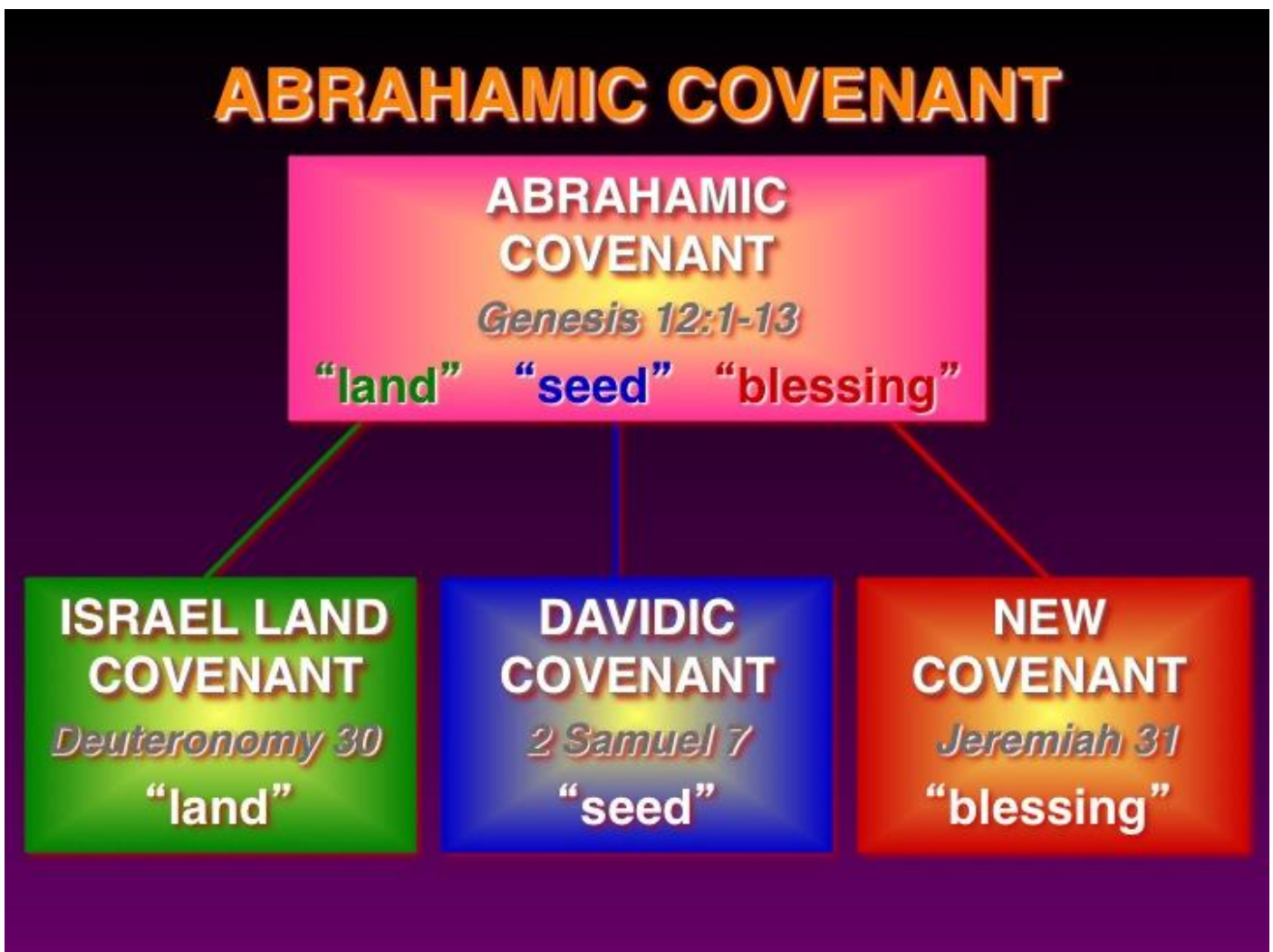
Entered CITY he was NOT Welcome, to tell Message they did Not Want HEAR

When Paul faces PROBLEMS / PERSECUTIONS > Stands PROMISES of God

DOUBTS and DESPAIR lifted as REMEMBERS DOCTRINES of the Gospel

Mind turns from their OLD COMPLAINTS to God’s NEW COVENANT

## 1. Covenant that makes us New



Covenant = Solemn agreement between 2 parties, ratified in blood  
 Common Form of TREATY made often in the Ancient Near East  
 God ADOPTED this Form – Suzerainty – UNILATERAL Covenant  
 Covenants with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob...maybe even ADAM?

a. Hazardous Materials: *Deadly Letters*

Very IMPORTANT to Remember the HISTORY of God’s COVENANT  
 God CALLED Abe – Abe BELIEVED God in Faith > then God made Covenant  
 He believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15.6  
 IMPORTANT Verse – Saved by Grace thru FAITH – Repeated 3 X’s in NT  
 Same PATTERN in the making of the Covenant with MOSES/ISRAEL

## 1) God Remembers His Covenant

...the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew. Exodus 2.23-25

## 2) God Redeems the Captives

“You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters. “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them. “You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed” Exodus 15.10-13

## 3) God Regulates their Conduct

““You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” Exodus 19.4-6

Several MILLION Hebrew Slaves forged into NATION

DISORDERLY People needed Clear DIRECTION > over 500 Laws

To Guide their FAITH – Protect their Property, Health, Safety – Forgive SINS

Needed godly LEADERS and GOOD LAWS to Know / Follow Gracious LORD

Exodus 2	Exodus 15	Exodus 19-40
Remembered	Redeemed	Regulations
Chosen	Cleansed	Commanded
Love	Liberty	Law
Old Testament	Gospels	Letters

After Israel REDEEMED thru Red Sea they MARRIED their God at SINAI

Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do”...Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” Exodus 24.3,7

But they COULD NOT KEEP their PROMISE for even 40 Days

MOSES went back UP Mt. Sinai to RECEIVE the LAW

But the PEOPLE WERE at the FOOT of SINAI Rebellng Against the LAW BEFORE Moses’ 40 days on the Mt. SINAI were OVER...

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.” And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. Exodus 32.1-6

SO in just a few hours of REBELLION they Broke 1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10 Commands Doesn't say anything about 7th -- MURDER...YET!!

No WONDER 1st thing MOSES does when comes Down from Sinai >

SMASH Tablets of LAW --- PEOPLE had ALREADY SHATTERED Them!

NO Problem with GOD or His LAW

The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Romans 7.12

BIG Problem with the PEOPLE --- NO POWER to Keep this Righteous LAW  
 2<sup>nd</sup> X GOD Speaks Law – Before Gen X Hebrews will enter PROMISED Land  
 “Oh, that they would always have hearts like this, that they might fear me and  
 obey all my commands!” Deuteronomy 5.29 NLT

South African Dr. Christiaan Barnard > 1<sup>st</sup> to Successful HEART Transplant  
 1968 - Dr. Barnard’s performed Heart Transplant > Dentist – Dr. Philip Blaiberg  
 Became 1<sup>st</sup> man in History to hold OWN HEART in his HANDS  
 Dr. Barnard handed it to Dr. Blaiberg in a GLASS Container  
 “So this is my old heart that caused me so much trouble” Dr. Philip Blaiberg

Just like you can NOW be Member of a Church without KNOWING Jesus  
 Could be ISRAELITE without KNOWING the LORD GOD of ISRAEL  
 Those who had FAITH in Old Covenant were TRUE SONS/Daughters of ABE  
 OPPORTUNITY was given to “HEAR O Israel” – and REPENT and BELIEVE

The believer cannot do without Word and Spirit. Word without Spirit leads not  
 merely to legalism but to a deadening effect on hearer and reader.

Ben Witherington III

OLD Covenant has NO INTERNAL POWER > but you COULD Ask / Receive  
 This REMNANT of TRUE FAITH > Rejoiced in the LORD and HIS LAW!

v. 6 For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

By the letter he means an external preaching which does not reach the heart, and  
 by the Spirit life-giving teaching which is, through the grace of the Spirit, given  
 effective operation in men’s souls.

John Calvin

It is NOT the LAW that KILLS but LEGALISM – Trying to Save Self by Law  
 LEGALISM is as POPULAR Today as it was during the TIME of MOSES

Nothing FUELS our PRIDE More than being GOOD ENOUGH for GOD  
 Or at Least THINKING that We Are – thinking we’re getting REWARDED  
 For our RIGHTEOUSNESS, RELIGION, RITUALS, REGULAR Attendance

We might Think our Legalism is getting us CLOSER > Driving us AWAY!

God RESISTS the PROUD but gives GRACE to the HUMBLE

Prayer God heard NOT the Proud Pharisee but PENITENT PUBLICAN

A legalistic ministry brings death. 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...they are depending on the flesh and not the power of the Spirit....Only the grace of God, ministered by the Spirit of God, can transform lost sinners into living epistles that glorify Jesus Christ.

Warren Wiersbe

#### b. Missing Component: *Life-giving Spirit*

vs. 5,6 God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.

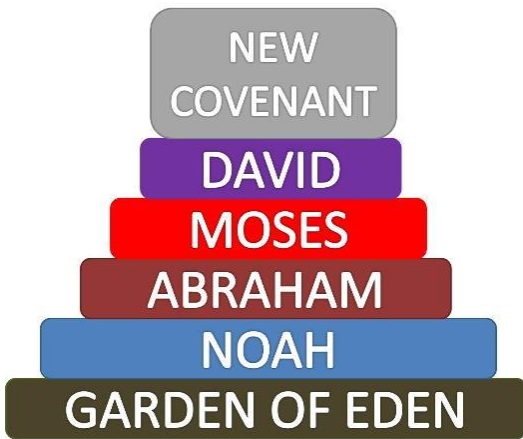
Jeremiah 31 > 600 BC when Young King JOSIAH found LAW of God

Israel REPENTED Again! God RESTORED them Again!

Promised NEW Covenant – UNCONDITIONAL – Totally based on PROMISE

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Jeremiah 31.31-34



Jeremiah PROMISES a DAY when Terrible Problem of Faithlessness END  
 J's HOMEBOY EZEKIEL has a SIMILAR Wonderful Promise of New Grace  
 God will REMEDY Man's BIGGEST Problem > Remove Sinful, Stony Heart

RECEIVE New Heart – HOLY SPIRIT – BORN AGAIN – Knowledge of God  
 SAME Law written on Tablet of STONE is now on TABLET of our HEARTS

Jesus is TRUE SON of Abraham and by FAITH receive BLESSING of Abraham  
 COVENANT Continues as Wild Olive Tree of GENTILES are GRAFTED IN  
 ALL the PROMISES of our COVENANT God are YES and AMEN in JESUS  
 I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from  
 doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may  
 not turn from me. Jeremiah 32.40

Some were in OLD Covenant without KNOWING the Covenant GOD  
 ALL in the NEW COVENANT have SAVING Knowledge of their GOD

Moses is the “lawgiver,” who mediates the Sinai covenant as a result of the  
 Exodus, Paul is the “Spirit-giver,” who mediates the new covenant as a result of  
 the “second Exodus” that has come through Christ. Scott J. Hafemann

“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ  
 whom you have sent.” John 17.3

## 2. Confidence we can have Now

NEW Covenant gloriously New – Unconditional, Universal, Unending

### a. Grace Unconditional

COMPETENCY in our Day is someone who can GET THE JOB DONE

When it comes to Being SAVED by GOD > Stay out of the Kitchen!

Don't BRING BEST Efforts – Deeply-felt RELIGION – Beloved Traditions

The only thing we contribute to God's plan of salvation is the sin to make it necessary.  
Eric Alexander

when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior Titus 3.4-6

We do not consider that any part of our sufficiency arises within ourselves.

v. 3 And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Paul's CRITICS looked for IMPRESSIVE Human REFERENCES

Paul's COMMENDATION came from MAKER of All MEN – God the LORD

Paul's CREDENTIALS were NOT on PAPER but in PEOPLE

If Paul has NO CREDENTIALS then Corinth has NO CHRISTIANITY

The confirmation of one's ministry lies in the effects of that in ministry in human lives...The proper balance lies in faithfulness to the gospel and pastoral love of the people.  
Paul Barnett

NOT Only do we have Letter ABOUT Christ > We have one FROM Christ

He is THE Message AND the MESSENGER > Paul is APOSTLE

AUTHORIZED AMBASSADOR – Carries all the POWER & Prestige of King



Like an Old Testament prophet called to be a messenger of the covenant lawsuit of God, Paul was called to proclaim the divine complaint against the rebellious Corinthians and to call them back to the stipulations of the covenant.

William Lane

Letter written not with CHISEL on Stone, or even with INK but Holy Spirit

Mt. SINAI – FINGER of God inscribed LAWS on TABLETS of Stone

From RIGHT Hand of God – FINGER of Son of God points Spirit to CHURCH

Paul likens himself to the ink and pen...Christ is the Author...in order that his detractors may understand that they have Christ Himself to deal with if they go on speaking maliciously against his apostle.

John Calvin

## b. Gospel Universal

v. 2 You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all.

HEART > Scripture sees as CENTER of Inner Life and all Functions of SOUL

The SPIRIT'S presence in the WORLD is NOT PRIVATE but POWERFUL

We preach the CHRIST of SCRIPTURE in the Power of the HOLY SPIRIT

People who REALLY HEAR are RISEN with CHRIST to LIVE IN HIM

...the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing

Colossians 1.5,6

There it was on the tables of stone that the finger of God operated; here it was on hearts of men. There it was outwardly that the law was registered, so that the unrighteous were terrified by it; here it was inwardly given, so that we might be justified by it.

Augustine

### c. God Unending

v. 4-6 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.

The church is like a personal letter that our Lord Jesus Christ sends to the world proclaiming what he can do in human lives. Derek Prime

1955 Billy Graham invited to preach at CAMBRIDGE University

“Graham’s approach would be unthinkable before a university audience...it would be laughed out of court” Canon H.K. Luce to ‘The Times’

“I have been deeply concerned and in much thought about our Cambridge mission this autumn...I do not know that I have ever felt more inadequate and totally unprepared for a mission...I realize how shallow and weak my presentations are...I almost decided to cancel...but plans have gone too far...my prayer is that I shall come in the demonstration and power of the Holy Spirit”  
Billy Graham to mission colleague John Stott

November 1955 – Great St. Mary’s – Univ church in center Cambridge filled

37 year old Billy Graham wore Geneva Gown and Doctoral Hood

Preached most ACADEMIC message for 1<sup>st</sup> 3 nights

MANY Came but the RESPONSES were FEW

Sought Lord > felt he was trying to PLEASE his Audience not his GOD

Decided put away his ACADEMIC Messages > Preach to Ordinary Human Souls

“Graham’s weakness plus the all-sufficient, transforming gospel of the new covenant and his dependence on the Holy Spirit wrought a mighty ministry in Cambridge...History will begin to show, but only eternity will finally reveal, how much was accomplished during that week” John Stott

IF God really is CALLING – you SHOULD feel your INSUFFICIENCY  
 Because with the TRUE Call of God will come HIS SUFFICIENCY

VANCE HAVNER was TRAVELING Evangelist for Many Years, Looks back,  
 “a different bed every week, changing food and climate, always getting adjusted  
 and never getting adjusted – and utterly exhausted before I started!...The Lord  
 had the strength and I had the weakness so we teamed up! It is an unbeatable  
 combination”  
 Vance Havner

As God’s Spirit-filled Children do we NOW LOVE His LAW?

Do we place our SUFFICIENCY in anything OTHER than Christ & His Cross?

Do we REJOICE to Stand in Long GODLY HERITAGE of COVENANT Faith?

Do we PRAY for the SPIRIT of God to FILL US More and MORE?

ARE we LIVING Letters – WRITTEN by JESUS?

When the WORLD READS US do they SEE HIM?

2 Corinthians 3.<sup>1</sup>Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? <sup>2</sup>You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. <sup>3</sup>And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. <sup>4</sup>Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, <sup>6</sup>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.