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2 CORINTHIANS 3:4-18

2 Corinthians Series

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we need your power and this study in 2 Corinthians does give us so many ideas about how your power permeates our lives. Today we need that personally to manage life, to deal with the challenges that we face. Lord, I thank you for the message that you've given me this week. I just thank you for working it out in my life as I talk to people and as I've interacted even with myself this week and with you. I pray that you would use the words that I'm about to share in a way that would impact people's hearts. So Lord, as we open your word now, we do it solemnly, we do it with humility, and ask that you would touch us deeply. In Jesus' name, amen.

This week God gave me a clear message that I want to share with you. The message that I want to share with you today is one that God gave to me, and it just was so impressed on my heart. I'll summarize it in these words. When we have self-confidence, we get stuck. When we have God-confidence, we can move forward. I found that to be such a powerful thing to meditate on in my own devotion this week and then just preparing what I want to share with you.

I was drawn to a verse that we're going to end our time with today. I want to read this verse to you first. So would you stand with me in honor of God's word as I read this verse of scripture from Galatians 2:20. And then we'll look at our passage in 2 Corinthians.

The verse says in Galatians 2:20 is a testimony verse of Paul. He says – *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

That is quite a testimony. Go ahead and sit back down. Go ahead and open your Bibles with me to 2 Corinthians 3 starting in verse 4.

In 2 Corinthians 3:4-18, I want to share with you a very important concept and the words are taken right out of the Bible. So let me read the first verse of our passage today. It says – *Such confidence we have through Christ before God.*

I want to talk to you today about confidence – something that we all need, something that we want, something that's developed in our lives. Especially as children it's developed and young people in our early age when we're out getting a job, that confidence is developed. I want to talk

about what it is today and how to develop it in your own heart and life. I think it's something we all need.

Young people, I'm glad you're in the service with us today because this is something you need in your life. Confidence. The word says *such confidence*, which refers back to the previous verses. Remember last week we talked about the fact that God has given us a special identity. He's made us a letter. We're a letter that proclaims God to the world. Because of that, we can feel valuable. That value that we experience is just powerful.

So now he just jumps right onto this idea. *Such confidence* (that confidence that comes from the identity that we have in Christ) *we have through Christ before God*. So the confidence that we have is something we place in Christ or that God has placed in us. It comes through us and in us and does something very valuable inside of us. So that's the confidence we're talking about.

Now confidence has three different beliefs. If we're trying to help someone develop confidence, we're going to help them develop these three core beliefs in our lives. One has to do with power. That I have something that I can control, that I can move forward with that. I have power. The second one has to do with value, that I have something to offer because of what is going on in me. I have something that's worthy or valuable. And thirdly, competence. The idea that I have certain skills that allow me to move forward. We're going to see how this is developed in the passage. But first I want you to understand each one of these from a God-centered confidence perspective.

Let's look at the first one and talk about power. If a person lacks confidence, and this is the area where they're weak, then they're going to feel like a victim. I don't have power. There's a lot of people today who feel like they're victims of life circumstances or other people's decisions. When you feel like you're a victim, then you want to take it right back to this part of the confidence formula because this is the part of the confidence that needs to be developed and God has a plan for that in helping us understand that. We are not weak. We are strong, not because of ourselves, but because of what God has done in us.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 it says – *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions.* That gets really personal, it seems to me, when you start experiencing these things that are the weaknesses. This is what they look like. They are *insults, hardships, persecutions, in difficulties*.

Can you imagine the victim coming here? Oh this is so bad. Because when a person feels like a victim in life, they lack the Christ-confidence that they need, then the largest thing that we see is anger. They're angry at life. They're angry because people have done these things to me. They're angry because of the insults, the hardship, the persecutions, the difficulties. They're angry about them.

So often these people become blamers. If you see someone who is a blamer, it's because they lack the confidence that they need in this part of the area. This formula is lacking in ingredient if they're blaming all the time.

There's an interesting way that people manifest a weakness in this area of confidence is that they become controlling. They've got to control everything and they imagine that that's confidence. I'm confident because I can control everything. They may be bold, but that's not a sign of confidence because confidence has this element of being able to trust. Which has the ability to live with a certain amount of chaos and be okay with that. That's what confidence is. That's why the last part of the verse says – *For when I am weak, then I am strong*. Because it's not about self-confidence here, it's about God-confidence.

This idea of power is a very important one. Understanding that God has empowered us gives us a greater sense of movement and confidence in our lives. If you're all about self-confidence then you're going to have a challenge in life situations. It becomes difficult.

This week I went to Amazon to find out how many books there are on this subject of confidence. It seems to be something that lots of people want. It seems to be something that people are eager to obtain in various ways. Confidence on the job, confidence in their ability to do this, or that, or the other thing. Do you know how many books you can find just typing in "confidence" in the Amazon book field? There are 24,859 books on confidence. But today I'm going to share with you from one book, the Bible. And you're going to have more information about confidence than you'll need by reading the 24,859 other books. God has some very important things to say about this. Power is one segment, belief. I have power that provides a person with confidence that they need.

A second part of what it means to experience confidence has to do with this idea of value. That I am valuable. I have something to offer and what I have to offer is important or worthy or valuable.

In Ephesians 1 we see how God has made us valuable. So listen to these words about how God views us in Ephesians 1:3-6. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. We could stop right here. He's given us all these blessings. We're valuable because of that. For he chose us (because we're valuable) in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love (He loves us because we're valuable to Him) he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

There's something about value that's very important. It's one of the ingredients that is very important when building confidence that we have this sense that I am valuable.

See, the person who lacks value in their lives in this part of the formula for confidence has these symptoms. You'll see these symptoms. They become people-pleasers. They're always looking to please someone else because they don't find the intrinsic value within them, so they're looking for ways to impress other people or look good. These are the people who are often looking for

status symbols. So they might drive a fancy car or they might have these various things that make them look good. I'm not suggesting that people who drive fancy cars have a lack of self-confidence. I'm just saying that one of the things that happens when a person lacks this part of their confidence is that they try to look for status so they can start to feel important because they don't have it inside. These are the people that are easily offended in life. They are easily offended because somebody doesn't like what they've done or they take it personally. They lack the confidence necessary to face life challenges. Very important part of the confidence formula.

A third part of the confidence formula has to do with competence. Competence has to do with the ability to do something. Now let's say you're going to take up a new sport or a new activity. Confidence doesn't mean that you know how to do it and you do it well, but it means that you have the internal ingredients that you know will allow you to try even if you fail. To try even if you fail. You have what it takes to be able to experience failure without feeling defeated.

See, the person who lacks this part of the formula of confidence has a real hard time making mistakes. These people are often perfectionists. They hate to make mistakes. They don't even want to take risks because when you take risks you're liable to fail. Then when you fail then that makes a statement about who you are? No, I don't think so. A person who is willing to take risks is a person who has confidence. So you take these three things (power, value, and competence) and you put them together and they form the basis for confidence in a person's life.

We all need confidence in our life. But we have this voice inside that says, "You don't fit here. You don't have what it takes." Now maybe that voice is the voice of our own conscience that's revealing the brokenness that we have inside. It's actually a true statement. We don't have what it takes. We don't fit here. That's why the scriptures are saying this is not our home. We're foreigners in this land, and we're citizens of another country, heaven.

That's why the scriptures are talking about how God is doing something inside of us because it's not about us. The person who has self-confidence is relying on self. The person who has God-confidence is relying on something inside that empowers them forward in some great ways. That's why I say I think self-confidence leads to getting stuck and God-confidence allows us to move forward in a rather powerful way.

The word competence is used in the next verse, so let's go on and read here. In verse 4 it says – *Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.*

There's a key to success here. Whether you're working with confidence in the workplace, which those of you who are in work you often have those seminars or things that help you develop confidence in the workplace, confidence in your schoolwork, confidence in your own personal life, self-improvement. Confidence is so important.

Notice it says *your competence comes from God*. That is a different way of thinking for many people. Especially in a world that's pumping you up – "Oh you're good. Come on, you can do it."

Now he ties this into this theological idea as we get into verse 6, so I want to explain the idea to you and then I want to bring it down to our life so we understand it. He says in verse 6 – *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.*

He's referring to the covenant of Moses. That's the old covenant. So Moses received the Ten Commandments, which was the letter of the law. That letter of the law was the old covenant, and then in Jeremiah 31 we're taught about a new covenant that's coming. Instead of having the law written on tablets of stone, we have the law written on our hearts by the Spirit of God. That's Jeremiah 31. So Paul is comparing the two covenants and he's helping us understand there's a difference between the two. He uses some very powerful language to describe them.

I want you to understand how this applies to this whole idea of confidence in your life. He says these words – *for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.* The letter kills. That's really strong language.

See what he's saying is when Moses came down with the law there were a lot of dos and don'ts (a lot of primarily don'ts) and they helped people to know what they shouldn't do. But if you keep emphasizing what you shouldn't do, it just creates something inside of you that drags you down. It just kills something inside of you. The Spirit gives us something to look forward to and moves us in this direction called grace. It gives us something very powerful that we can enjoy instead.

There's a Point A and Point B in the change process. We're all on the change process. We're moving from Point A, where we are now, whatever those problems might be, to Point B, where Christ wants us to be and where we're going to live with Him forever. So we're moving from Point A to Point B. The law or the letter focuses in on Point B.

Now I would suggest most of us don't look into the Old Testament and try to follow all of the laws that are written in Leviticus and so on. But for the most part many people have created their own laws that they now carry with them that are the dos and don'ts for their lives. They're not all bad. We need those kinds of things. But if they define our reality of who we are, then they focus on the letter. The letter has this ability to kill, to damage, to drag us down, to harm us. It certainly would make us feel worthless. It certainly doesn't give us a lot of confidence.

So Paul is saying we've got something even better. We've got the Spirit here which points us to Point B so we're moving in a direction. God is giving us things over here that we can develop in our lives that help the Point A diminish. When we give ourselves to the Spirit of God, when we allow God to work in our lives, then things over here start to diminish. The anger decreases, the disorganization decreases, the lying decreases. Why? Because God is doing something over here in Point B that's much more positive, much more encouraging. We need that line (*for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*) in our daily lives.

If you're a parent and you're working with children, you make a choice as you're working with them. You can overly focus on Point A – “cut it out,” “stop doing that,” “I can't believe you're doing that again,” “if you don't cut it out, I'm going to do this to you.” So an over-emphasis on

Point A really drags down the parent-child relationship. But there's something different we can do. We can be moving to Point B and saying here's where we want to go and we're going to help you become more responsible, more self-control. We're going to help you have more peace instead of your anger. We're going to help you move towards something. So a parent has a lot of power over the early formation of confidence in a person.

Now maybe you grew up in a home where there was not just firmness. I do believe that firmness is very important for children because firmness builds character. But maybe you grew up in a home that didn't just have firmness, but had harshness. That harshness communicates a message when you hear it over and over again. When parents yell at their kids. When they're telling them that they're not good enough or they've always got problems. "You're always going to be that way." When parents do that, it communicates a message that you're unworthy, unlovable, unacceptable, and it starts to do damage to you on the inside. Maybe you grew up in a home like that.

I want you to know that God wants to do something amazing in you because it isn't even about your past now. It's about what the Spirit wants to do inside your heart. God wants to transform you from the inside out, move you from *the letter* to *the Spirit gives life*. God wants to do something amazing.

This is why it's so important in a marriage relationship that we look at these words – the *letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*. I know there's a right way to hang the toilet paper on the roller. I know there's a right way to spend the money, or the right way to get gas in your car. There's a right way to do all kinds of things, but if you're emphasizing the negative things about your spouse continually, you're doing something that the Bible says here about the letter. Even though you might be right, it kills, it drains, it damages. But grace in a marriage relationship draws it to such a beautiful place.

We could talk about parenting, we could talk about marriage, but let's just talk about our individual lives because in your own heart you've got the tape running. If the tape is running about "oh I should have done this" or "people should do this" or "this is the right way," if the tape running in your head is about the law, then there's killing going inside of you. There's grace. He wants to propel you forward into some really positive things.

Really what happens is God wants you to shine. He wants this idea of confidence to be so strong inside of you, not because of something you've done, accomplished, or because you look cute; He wants this confidence to be something really powerful that comes from Him. When that happens, then there's this shining that takes place that other people see. It comes from the Greek word *doxa*. *Doxa* is this word that means to put the spotlight on. We see it in the next verses.

Verse 7 – *Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory. There's our word doxa. Even the Old Testament when Moses received the law, there was the glory of the Lord shone around that big mountain. There was glory there. If there was glory there, he's saying, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?*

You want to shine? You want to have that confidence that allows you to stand in the midst of the pressure? That allows you to make decisions, take risks, step out there? You want to have that confidence that isn't easily offended, that allows you to take charge of areas of your life that you hadn't been able to do before? That's the shining that can take place when you understand this passage that God has for us, and it has to do with the Spirit of God at work in your life. It's a God-confidence.

Verse 9 – *If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.* In other words, there's no comparison to focusing on Point A and the letter that kills and the things you're doing wrong. There's nothing that compares with the glory that God wants to provide inside of you. He wants to give you such a confidence in your life that you can shine forward. *And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!*

Verse 12. Notice two words that tie in, obviously, with confidence. *Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.* I think there are a lot of bold people who aren't very confident. Just because you're bold and you attack someone or you yell at them or you put somebody down, that's bold, but that doesn't come from a strong sense of confidence sometimes. Sometimes the boldness covers up some weakness that exists inside of us. Because we don't have the power, we don't have the value, we don't have the competence lined up correctly. So it comes out in ways that aren't appropriate.

Oh there's a lot of people that look confident in life because they're bold, but they're missing something very important. This is a hope. This isn't a hope like "I hope I get a new bike for Christmas" kind of hope. This is the hope that is an assurance that I have a hope that I can stand on. God has given me something that's transforming me from the inside out. When we have that, then the boldness that comes out is just an amazing, humble kind of boldness that other people can see.

Now we're taken into this story about Moses, which is kind of interesting. It says in verse 13 – *We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away.*

Here's the story that's being shared with us in this passage. Moses, when he received the law, saw God in all of His glory, and it transferred over to him, so his face shone so bright that the people said, "Cover your face up so we don't have to look at you. We're afraid of what you've seen." So Moses put a veil over his face. But the idea in the passage is that the glory was fading, but he kept the veil on, the mask on, to make it appear that the glory was still there.

I think we do that sometimes. We put masks on. We can put great masks on when we come to church sometimes. Everything looks good, everything is fine, no problems. But inside we know that there's a problem, the glory is not there. We don't want to be like Moses with the veil on where the glory is depleting. We want that glory to shine because God has given us this confidence inside that we can enjoy.

Verse 14 – *But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.* Notice those words, *in Christ*. It's only in Christ that you can have this confidence that God wants you to have. What does that look like? Man, I need that. It's in Christ. It's a growing experience that we have.

Verse 15 – *Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* Freedom from a critical nature. Freedom from perfectionism. Freedom from being a people-pleaser. Freedom from being easily offended by other people. Freedom from taking personally the other problems that other people have when they attack us. There's freedom that we have inside of us that shines in great glory.

We have this confidence inside because we know that God has given us the power. I don't have to live as a victim anymore because I have Jesus Christ living inside of me and He's given me that power. I'm valuable because of what God has done. I don't have to put status symbols out there because God has given me a value on the inside. I don't have to try to prove myself with competence because my competence comes from God. Oh this is big. This is transforming. This is amazing. And it doesn't happen instantly in any of our lives. It takes time.

Young people, I want you to know that you're in process. You want to be developing this in your life. Let's look at verse 18, which describes the process that we all need to be aware of. *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory.*

Let's just contemplate the *doxa* of God, the glory of God, glory to God in the highest. Let's contemplate that as it relates to our own personal lives. *We are being transformed.* It's not a one-time experience. It's continually happening. We know we're growing in this, right? I'm growing in it; you're growing in it. We need more of this. Where does it come from? *It comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* God-confidence drives us forward. Self-confidence gets us suck. The world is all about self-confidence. You just got to understand that. God wants us to be able to move forward in some powerful ways.

I think of some biblical examples of confidence. You think of Moses. He really lacked confidence, didn't he? God comes to him in a burning bush. He goes to the burning bush, takes off his sandals, and God talks to him and says, "You're going to go to Pharaoh and you're going to tell him, 'Let my people go.'" And Moses says, "Not me! Who am I going to say is telling me to do this?" He gives five excuses in that passage because he's unwilling, he doesn't have the confidence to go forward.

God says, "Hey, let me show you something. You're going to love this. Take that rod in your hand. Throw it down." Moses took the rod, he threw it down, and the rod turned into a snake. Oh what a trick. God's power at his disposal. "Okay! I think I can do this!" God is building in him this confidence. Yes, yes, I can do this in you. He says, "I'm going to go!" So he gets his brother, Aaron, and they decide they're going to go off and they go to Pharaoh.

You've got to understand, if you have God-confidence, you're going to fail. Did you know that? And it's okay if you fail. Failure is not necessarily bad.

Moses fails. Here's what he does. He goes up to Pharaoh – “Pharaoh, you need to let the people go.”

Pharaoh says, “You've got to be kidding me.”

Moses said, “Well my God told me to do this.”

Pharaoh says, “Who is your God?”

He says, “Well let me show you this trick.” He takes the rod. He says, “Aaron, go ahead and throw down the rod.” He throws down the rod.

Pharaoh says, “Well that's pretty good. Let me call my magicians. Magicians, come on over here. Can you do this trick?” The magicians throw down their rods and they turn into snakes also.

What do you think Moses felt in that moment? “I'm not so good as I thought I was.” Oh wow. In that moment the rod of Aaron, the snake of Aaron ate up the other snakes, demonstrating the power of God. But Pharaoh says, “Forget you. I'm not going to do this.” How do you think Moses felt? He failed in his mission. He did not get the people to go away. Pharaoh did not say yes. That was his mission to go tell Pharaoh, “Let my people go,” and he failed.

I just want to tell you, if you have the confidence of God in your life and you're moving forward with the glory and the confidence and the freedom and the hope and the boldness, all of those things, you're going to fail. You just have to know that. But that's okay, because you're obeying the Lord.

God had much more to this story than Moses saw in the plagues as they were going to develop and come about. Until finally Moses comes to the end and they're running away and amazing things happen.

God is powerful. But you've got to realize, you're likely to fail, even with God-confidence, and it's okay. Confident people can accept failure and move forward. It's part of what God is doing. It's okay.

Let's look at another Bible character. I suppose one of my favorite guys is Peter. He is a guy who had a lot of self-confidence. That was part of the problem. He's the kind of guy that could see something that was wrong and he would do something about it. But just because you see something that's wrong doesn't mean you can do something about it.

In his self-confidence, he saw something that was wrong and he took his sword and he cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest as they were coming to arrest Jesus. Something wrong, I'm going to do something about it, self-confidence. It was the wrong thing to do. He failed desperately in that situation.

What does Jesus do? Jesus picks up the ear and puts it back on and it miraculously heals. Wow. That is such an amazing picture.

Peter is the kind of guy that says, “If you can walk on the water, I can too.” Jesus says, “Fine. Come on out. I want you to learn a little bit more about self-confidence here.” So Peter steps out of the boat and he starts walking toward Jesus, but he didn’t have the God-confidence to keep his eyes focused on Jesus. He starts looking at the waves and he’s saying, “I am not up to this.” Of course he falls into the water and God brings him back to the shore.

There’s a wrestling, I believe, that goes on in our hearts in this area of confidence that is very real. There are going to be times in your day, times in your week, times in your life when you’re going to say, “I am not fit for this task,” “I am failing,” or “I have failed miserably,” or “the pressures of my life, I just can’t handle those,” and you’re right. You have failed. The pressures you can’t handle. But the beauty of this passage is it says we have something inside of us that we can enjoy. We can start to grow in this self-confidence and we are being transformed. We are being transformed.

It doesn’t happen immediately. You’re not going to walk out of here today and say, “Okay, now I got the confidence and now I can go out and do everything.” I think you want to grow in that a little bit and start being bold, but I would encourage you just to pray and ask God, “God, what is an area in my life where I can take some initiative on your behalf, knowing that I’ll likely fail, knowing that I might get abused or criticized or people will misunderstand me. I just want to step out and I want to trust you. I don’t want to be bothered by the opinions of other people or the other things that can happen here. I want to trust in you and I want to move forward.” When you start doing that, you grow in this amazing God-confidence inside that God is at work in something much bigger than what you could ever do on your own.

Wow, I needed this message this week. I trust that God will use it powerfully in your life as He has in mine. Let’s stand and pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, I just ask that you would give us wisdom to know how to live our lives in such a way that increases our God-confidence. We need you, Lord. We’re very aware of that. It cuts the very core when we fail, make mistakes, when we’re being mistreated, when life isn’t going the way we thought. We have the problems, all those things that are there, Lord. I just pray that you would help us to remember those words – *I am crucified with Christ*. Lord, use that deeply in our lives to grow us in our relationship with you, relying on you, being strengthened by you. Take us to new heights. Develop in us the confidence that you want in our hearts and lives, and do it today. We ask in Jesus’ name, amen.