

Letter and Spirit

Joe Slater

The New Testament sometimes poses “letter” and “spirit” in contrast to each other. Christians “*serve in the newness of the spirit and not in the oldness of the letter*” (Romans 7:6). How should we understand this distinction? Newness and oldness should clue us in! This very verse begins, “*But now we have been delivered from the law.*” Oldness, then, would refer to the Law of Moses in contrast to the newness of the Gospel (New Covenant).

The same distinction occurs in 2 Corinthians 3:6 with an even more obvious application to the Old and New Covenants: “*The letter kills, but the spirit gives life.*”

Sad to say, many carelessly refer to “letter” as strict compliance with the text of Scripture, as opposed to a more generalized and loose interpretation (spirit). We hear such things as, “We must go by the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law.” No doubt some have gone to unwarranted extremes and missed God’s intent, just as Jesus said the Pharisees did by straining out gnats and swallowing camels (Matthew 23:24). But was this Paul’s subject in the passage quoted above? No, indeed!

The apostle himself makes it crystal clear he is contrasting Old and New Covenants, not strict and loose interpretation! Immediately before saying “*the letter kills but the spirit gives life,*” Paul stated that God “*made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit.*” He went on to refer to the Old Covenant as “*the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones*” (3:7) and a “*ministry of condemnation*” (3:9).

In these contexts, then, letter and spirit are metaphors for the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament lacked any provision to make sinners right with God. By contrast, the New Testament has the blood of Jesus which paid the atonement price in full. Glory be to God!

Light and Darkness

In many biblical passages, the contrast between light and darkness is a powerful metaphor for the struggle of good vs evil. Light often symbolizes knowledge, goodness, and righteousness, while darkness represents ignorance, evil, and the unknown. This spiritual struggle is best seen in the writings of the Apostle John.

Light is often associated with positive qualities such as wisdom, truth, and purity. In Christianity, Jesus is referred to as the “*Light of the World,*” showing us the path to salvation and righteousness (John 1:9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9; 12:46). John often contrasts the concept of light, which is beneficial, with darkness. Darkness is frequently linked to negative attributes such as fear, ignorance, and evil. In the Bible, darkness is often associated with sin and the absence of God's presence.

The journey from darkness to light is what we should all be working towards in our own spiritual growth. We should want to move from ignorance and sin to knowledge and spiritual maturity. This journey is often depicted as a struggle, requiring courage, faith, and perseverance. Our goal should always be to continue our spiritual growth and to become closer to Christ.

--Dale J. Babinsky (via *Bulletin Gold*)

If your life seems like an uphill battle

Maybe God is calling you to higher ground.

--Jon Rowe (via Facebook)

MOM IN ME

"Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1, ASV).

My mother passed away on my birthday. She was only sixty. Because of circumstances, I didn't attend her funeral. However, she embedded parts of her personality in me.

Our family contained eight children. I remember how hard she worked feeding us and keeping us clothed. She sang hymns as she worked hoeing the garden, canning fruits and vegetables, washing loads of laundry and hanging them out in the winter, and mopping linoleum floors in our farmhouse. Those hymns instilled the first principles of God's love in me.

When my sisters and I wished for new, pretty dresses, she would say, "Pretty is, as pretty does." Or when our hair didn't turn out the way we wanted, she said, "It'll never be noticed on a galloping horse." She taught us what was important in life.

I loved my mother dearly. Being the oldest of the children, I and my sister learned to work early in our lives. We didn't go to school football games and we didn't have friends to run around with in the evenings. There was work to do – cows to milk, pigs to slop, chickens to feed, meals to cook, bread to bake, ironing, and helping with our younger siblings. Our mom was our guide and teacher.

I've dreamed of how it would have been to have my mother longer, but that can't be. I can look back and be glad that she gave her all for us children and I helped her succeed. She didn't talk a lot about living for Jesus, but her example showed how every day. I have tried my best to be a godly woman as she was, and I pray that my children can see Christ in me.

--Donna Wittlif (Ft. Worth, TX)