THE QUESTION

# What does Paul mean by “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6)?

*Asked by a THF member on May 18, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 7 numbered quotations · the 24 early Christian passages and 299 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.*

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-does-paul-mean-by-the-letter-kills-but-the-spirit-gives-life

## The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

Origen says the letter is the bare surface meaning of Scripture, and the Spirit is its deeper, spiritual sense. Other early writers tie the contrast to the new covenant, where God writes His law on the heart. Origen also warns that much of Scripture is still true and binding just as written.

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POINT 1 OF 7

## Origen: the letter is the surface sense

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Origen explains Paul's words directly. He takes the letter to mean the plain, literal sense of Scripture, and the Spirit to mean its spiritual sense. He says others before him also read the law this way.

**1**

"We hold, then, that the law has a twofold meaning: one literal and the other spiritual, as some before us have shown."

*later in the same passage*

"In the same way, Paul says that the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. By the letter he means the literal sense, and by the Spirit the spiritual sense of Scripture."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 20 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 14, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 2 OF 7

## The letter is not simply thrown away

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Origen warns against taking this too far. Most of the Bible's history is true as written, and many commands, in the law and in the Gospel, must still be kept just as they read.

**2**

"In fact, the passages that are true in their historical meaning are far more numerous than those that are mixed in with a purely spiritual meaning."

*later in the same passage*

"Again, there are commandments in the Gospel about which there is no doubt whether they should be kept according to the letter."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 4.1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 17, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

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POINT 3 OF 7

## Christ lifted the veil over the law

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Origen says the law and prophets held mysteries no one could fully see until Christ came. By removing the veil, Christ let His followers see what the old types and shadows pointed to.

**3**

"For when He had taken away the veil that was present in the Law and the Prophets, and by His divinity had proved to the sons of men that the Godhead was at work, He opened the way for all those who desired it to be disciples of His wisdom"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on John* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 15, page 6** Read it in the library ›
*THF's updated English*

POINT 4 OF 7

## The time for the bare letter has passed

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Dionysius sees a turning point at Christ's coming. Before it, the letter of the law was kept; once the truth came in full, that way of keeping the law was set aside.

**4**

"Or again: before the incarnation, it was a time to keep the letter of the law; but when the truth came to its full flowering, it was a time to cast that away."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Dionysius of Alexandria,** *Exegetical Fragments* 3 (c. 232–265 AD) **Source 18, page 6** Read it in the library ›
*THF's updated English*

POINT 5 OF 7

## The new covenant brings a new heart

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words***

Irenaeus points to the prophets' promise of a new covenant, unlike the one at Horeb, that gives a new heart and spirit. He links this to the freedom of faith in Christ.

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**5** "And those among them who declare that God would establish a new covenant with people, not like the one He made with the ancestors at Mount Horeb, and would give people a new heart and a new spirit"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 5, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 6 OF 7

## God's commands are written on the heart

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words***

Clement of Rome praises believers whose obedience came from within. He uses the picture of God's commands written on their hearts, not just kept outwardly.

**6** "Adorned by a thoroughly virtuous and religious life, you did all things in the fear of God. The commandments and ordinances of the Lord were written upon the tablets of your hearts."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 24, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 7 OF 7

## True circumcision is of the heart

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Lactantius reads the prophets as promising a second circumcision. It would not be cut in the flesh but done in the heart and spirit, and he says Christ gave it.

**7** "He said that this second circumcision would not be of the flesh, as the first one was, which the Jews still practice even now, but of the heart and spirit. This was given by Christ, who was the true Jesus."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Divine Institutes* 17 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 23, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
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THE LIMITS

## What these passages don’t tell us

- Only Origen in these passages explains Paul's exact words; the other writers speak of the same theme more generally.
- These passages do not list which Old Testament commands are to be read only spiritually.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

## The Sources

The 24 early Christian passages and 299 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–24, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 25–150, in Bible order), then 173 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

### EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *24 passages from 13 writers*

**Barnabas**, *c. 70–132 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Epistle of Barnabas* (on point 7) He also speaks about our ears, how He has circumcised both them and our hearts. The Lord says in the prophet, "In the hearing of the ear they obeyed me."… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Epistle of Barnabas* (1885 English; on point 6) “their covenant was broken, in order that the covenant of the beloved Jesus might be sealed upon our heart, in the hope which flows from believing in Him… [continues online] **read ›**

**Tatian**, *c. 150–180 AD · source 3*

3 *Diatessaron* 20 (1885 English) “6:63 It is the spirit that quickens, and the body profits nothing: the words that I speak unto you are spirit 4 and life… [continues online] **read ›**

**Irenaeus**, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 4–5*

4 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (on point 5) If anyone, however, advocating for the Jews, claims that this new covenant was about the building of the temple under Zerubbabel after returning from Babylon, and the people's return… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Against Heresies: Book IV* **Quote 5, page 4** “those among them who declare that God would establish a new covenant with people, not like the one He made with the ancestors at Mount Horeb, and would give people… [continues online] **read ›**

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**Clement of Alexandria**, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 6–7*

**6** *Stromata* 3 (on point 1) at once lawgiver and evangelist, He never fights against Himself. For the law lives, since it is spiritual and understood in a spiritual way. But we have died to the… [continues online] **read ›**

**7** *Instructor* 1.7 (on point 5) "have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity." This is my new covenant written in the old letter… [continues online] **read ›**

**Tertullian**, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 8–12*

**8** *Against Marcion* 8 "2:28 Even if the letter kills, yet the Spirit gives life… [continues online] **read ›**

**9** *Against Marcion* 8 (on point 7) "the spirit, and not in the letter… [continues online] **read ›**

**10** *Against Marcion* 20 (1885 English; on point 7) "like manner by Jeremiah: Make to yourselves a new covenant, circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart… [continues online] **read ›**

**11** *Against Marcion* 9 (on point 1) with the sinner. Therefore the Lord, wishing the law to be understood more deeply as signifying spiritual truths by bodily facts, touched the leper. In this way He did not… [continues online] **read ›**

**12** *Against Marcion* 1 (on point 5) heart." And in another passage: "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Jacob, and with the house of Judah… [continues online] **read ›**

**Origen**, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 13–17*

**13** *Against Celsus* 70 (on point 1) "the letter kills, but the spirit gives life," where by "the letter" he means that exposition of Scripture which is apparent to the senses… [continues online] **read ›**

**14** *Against Celsus* 20 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** "in like manner says, that the letter kills, and the spirit gives life, meaning by the letter the literal sense, and by the spirit the spiritual sense of Scripture… [continues online] **read ›**

**15** *Commentary on John* 1 **Quote 3, page 3** "the Gospel, which is the new covenant, having delivered us from the oldness of the letter, lights up for us, by the light of knowledge, the newness of the spirit… [continues online] **read ›**

**16** *Commentary on Matthew* 10 (on point 3) on stones, 2 Corinthians 3:7, and in the stony hearts of the old man. So, by comparing the letter and by showing the Spirit, He may enrich the scribe… [continues online] **read ›**

**17** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 4.1 **Quote 2, page 2** whole of Scripture that no history is real because one part is not, or that no law is to be kept literally because one law, understood by the letter, is… [continues online] **read ›**

**Dionysius of Alexandria**, *c. 232–265 AD · source 18*

**18** *Exegetical Fragments* 3 **Quote 4, page 3** "again: before the incarnation, it was a time to keep the letter of the law… [continues online] **read ›**

**Novatian**, *c. 240–258 AD · source 19*

**19** *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (1885 English; on point 1) first of all, we must avail ourselves of that passage, that the law is spiritual… [continues online] **read ›**

**Apostolic Constitutions**, *c. 250–380 AD · source 20*

**20** *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 7) "be circumcised in your flesh, but let the circumcision which is of the heart by the Spirit suffice for the faithful… [continues online] **read ›**

**Archelaus**, *c. 270–300 AD · source 21*

**21** *Disputation with Manes* 1 "of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life… [continues online] **read ›**

**Methodius**, *c. 270–311 AD · source 22*

**22** *Oration on the Psalms* 1 (on point 1) "in prophecy hid the Spirit under the letter… [continues online] **read ›**

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**Lactantius**, *c. 290–320 AD · source 23*

**23** *Divine Institutes* 17 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** "said that this second circumcision would be not of the flesh, as the first was, which the Jews practice even now, but of the heart and spirit, which was delivered… [continues online] **read ›**

**Clement of Rome** · *source 24*

**24** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 6, page 4** "commandments and ordinances of the Lord were written upon the tablets of your hearts… [continues online] **read ›**

**THE BIBLE** *126 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

**25** **Exodus 12:24** You shall keep this word as an ordinance for yourself and for your sons forever. **read ›**

**26** **Exodus 13:10** You shall keep this law at its appointed seasons, from year to year. **read ›**

**27** **Exodus 21:1** And these are the ordinances that you shall set before them. **read ›**

**28** **Leviticus 16:31** It shall be to you a Sabbath of Sabbaths, a rest, and you shall humble your souls; it is a perpetual ordinance. **read ›**

**29** **Leviticus 18:4** You shall do my judgments and keep my statutes, and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. **read ›**

**30** **Leviticus 26:15** but disobey them, and if your soul loathes my judgments, so that you do not do all my commandments, so as to break my covenant, **read ›**

**31** **Numbers 15:15** There shall be one law for you and for the resident foreigners who are joined to you, a perpetual law throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the resident foreigner be before the Lord. **read ›**

**32** **Numbers 15:16** There shall be one law and one ordinance for you and for the resident foreigner who is joined to you.'" **read ›**

**33** **Numbers 35:29** These things shall be an ordinance of judgment for you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. **read ›**

**34** **Deuteronomy 4:5** See, I have shown you ordinances and judgments, as the Lord commanded me, that you should do so in the land that you are entering to inherit. **read ›**

**35** **Deuteronomy 5:2** The Lord your God made a covenant with you in Horeb. **read ›**

**36** **Deuteronomy 5:3** The Lord did not make this covenant with your fathers, but with you—you who are all here alive today. **read ›**

**37** **Deuteronomy 6:24** And the Lord commanded us to do all these ordinances, to fear the Lord our God, that it may be well with us all our days, that we may live, as we do today. **read ›**

**38** **Deuteronomy 10:13** to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his ordinances that I command you today, that it may be well with you? **read ›**

**39** **Deuteronomy 10:16** So you shall circumcise your hardness of heart, and you shall not harden your neck. **read ›**

**40** **Deuteronomy 11:27** the blessing, if you hear the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today; **read ›**

**41** **Deuteronomy 12:1** These are the statutes and the judgments that you shall take care to do in the land that the Lord God of your fathers is giving you as an inheritance, all the days that you live on the land. **read ›**

**42** **Deuteronomy 26:16** On this day the Lord your God has commanded you to do all the ordinances and the judgments; and you shall keep them and do them with all your heart and with all your soul. **read ›**

**43** **Deuteronomy 29:1** These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to establish with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he made with them in Horeb. **read ›**

**44** **Deuteronomy 30:6** And the Lord shall purge your heart and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. **read ›**

**45** **Deuteronomy 30:10** if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his ordinances and his judgments that are written in the book of this law, if you return to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. **read ›**

**46** **Deuteronomy 32:47** For this is not an empty word for you; for it is your life, and by this word you shall live long on the land into which you are crossing the Jordan, to inherit it there. **read ›**

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47 **1 Samuel 2:6** The Lord puts to death and makes alive; he brings down to Hades and brings up. **read ›**

48 **2 Kings 23:3** The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments, his testimonies, and his ordinances with all the heart and with all the soul, to establish the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood in the covenant. **read ›**

49 **2 Chronicles 15:12** And he entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul, **read ›**

50 **2 Chronicles 29:10** Because of these things it is now in my heart to make my covenant, a covenant of the Lord God of Israel, and he will turn away the anger of his wrath from us. **read ›**

51 **Job 33:4** The divine Spirit is what made me, and the breath of the Almighty is what teaches me. **read ›**

52 **Proverbs 2:21** For the upright will dwell in the earth, and the holy ones will be left in it. **read ›**

53 **Proverbs 14:18** Fools will divide wickedness among them, but the shrewd will hold fast to discernment. **read ›**

54 **Proverbs 15:4** The healing of the tongue is a tree of life, and he who keeps it shall be filled with spirit. **read ›**

55 **Proverbs 18:14** A servant of sound judgment calms a man's wrath, but who can bear a faint-hearted man? **read ›**

56 **Proverbs 18:21** Death and life are in the hand of the tongue, and those who hold it fast will eat its fruits. **read ›**

57 **Ecclesiastes 1:3** What advantage does a man have in all his labor at which he labors under the sun? **read ›**

58 **Ecclesiastes 1:4** A generation goes, and a generation comes, and the earth stands forever. **read ›**

59 **Ecclesiastes 2:3** And I searched whether my heart would draw my flesh along as wine does (while my heart was guiding me in wisdom), and whether I should lay hold of gladness, until I should see what is good for the sons of men, which they should do under the sun for the number of the days of their life. **read ›**

60 **Isaiah 1:31** And their strength shall be like a stalk of flax fiber, and their works like sparks, and the lawless and the sinners shall be burned up together, and there shall be no one to quench them. **read ›**

61 **Isaiah 2:8** And the land was filled with abominations, the works of their hands, and they worshiped what their fingers had made. **read ›**

62 **Isaiah 5:17** And those who were plundered shall be fed like bulls, and lambs shall eat the desolate places of those who were taken away. **read ›**

63 **Isaiah 13:14** And those who are left will be like a fleeing fawn and like a straying sheep, and there will be no one to gather them; so that a man will turn back to his own people, and a man will flee to his own land. **read ›**

64 **Isaiah 13:15** For whoever is caught will be overcome, and those who are gathered together will fall by the sword. **read ›**

65 **Isaiah 18:2** which sends hostages by sea, and paper letters on the water; for swift messengers will go to a nation high in the air, and to a foreign and harsh people. Who is beyond it? A nation without hope and trodden down. Now the rivers of the land, **read ›**

66 **Isaiah 38:16** O Lord, for word was brought to you concerning it; and you raised up my breath, and being comforted I lived. **read ›**

67 **Jeremiah 18:8** and if that nation turns from all its evils, I will relent concerning the evils that I planned to do to them. **read ›**

68 **Jeremiah 18:9** And at another time I may speak concerning a nation and a kingdom, to rebuild it and to plant it; **read ›**

69 **Jeremiah 31:31** Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, (Septuagint Jeremiah 38:31 (Jeremiah 31:31 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

70 **Jeremiah 31:33** For this is my covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will surely put my laws into their mind, and I will write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Septuagint Jeremiah 38:33 (Jeremiah 31:33 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

71 **Jeremiah 39:9** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

72 **Jeremiah 50:12** your mother has been greatly ashamed; she who bore you for good things has been put to shame; she is the last of the nations, a desolate place, (Septuagint Jeremiah 27:12 (Jeremiah 50:12 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

73 **Ezekiel 3:20** And when a righteous man turns from his righteous deeds and commits a trespass, and I set torment before him, he shall die, because you did not warn him; and he shall die in his sins, because his righteous deeds will never be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. **read ›**

74 **Ezekiel 7:15** War with the sword is outside, and famine and death inside; he who is in the field shall die by the sword, and famine and death shall bring to an end those in the city. **read ›**

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75 **Ezekiel 10:12** And their backs and their hands and their wings and the wheels were full of eyes all around, for the four wheels. **read ›**

76 **Ezekiel 11:19** And I will give them another heart, and I will put a new spirit within them; and I will draw out the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, **read ›**

77 **Ezekiel 32:8** All the things that shine with light in the heaven shall be darkened over you, and I will bring darkness upon the land, says the Lord God. **read ›**

78 **Ezekiel 36:26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take away the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **read ›**

79 **Hosea 8:8** Israel is swallowed up; now he has become like a useless vessel among the nations, **read ›**

80 **Amos 9:15** And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up from the land which I have given them, says the Lord God Almighty. **read ›**

81 **Micah 4:5** For all the peoples will walk each in his own way, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and beyond. **read ›**

82 **1 Esdras 8:94** as has been decided by you and by all who obey the law of the Lord. **read ›**

83 **Tobit 12:9** For alms delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin. Those who do acts of alms and righteous deeds will be filled with life; **read ›**

84 **Wisdom of Solomon 9:15** For a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthly tent burdens the mind that ponders many things. **read ›**

85 **Wisdom of Solomon 16:13** For you have authority over life and death; you lead down to the gates of Hades and bring up again. **read ›**

86 **Wisdom of Solomon 16:14** A man in his wickedness kills, but he cannot bring back the spirit that has gone forth, nor set free the soul that has been taken. **read ›**

87 **Wisdom of Sirach 3:22** Think about the things that have been commanded you, for you have no need of the things that are hidden. **read ›**

88 **Wisdom of Sirach 14:16** Give and take, and indulge your soul, for in Hades there is no seeking of luxury. **read ›**

89 **Wisdom of Sirach 15:15** If you are willing, you will keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is of your own good will. **read ›**

90 **Wisdom of Sirach 17:14** And he said to them, 'Beware of all unrighteousness'; and he gave each of them commandment concerning his neighbor. **read ›**

91 **Wisdom of Sirach 17:28** From the dead, as from one who does not exist, thanksgiving perishes; the one who is alive and well will praise the Lord. **read ›**

92 **Wisdom of Sirach 31:13** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

93 **Wisdom of Sirach 31:17** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

94 **Wisdom of Sirach 32:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

95 **Wisdom of Sirach 35:15** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

96 **Wisdom of Sirach 35:23** In every work trust your own soul, for this too is the keeping of the commandments. **read ›**

97 **Wisdom of Sirach 36:3** A man of understanding will trust in the law, and the law is faithful to him like the inquiry of the righteous. **read ›**

98 **Wisdom of Sirach 37:17** The trace of a change of heart: **read ›**

99 **Wisdom of Sirach 38:18** for from sorrow death comes forth, and sorrow of heart will bend strength. **read ›**

100 **Baruch 3:9** Hear, O Israel, the commandments of life; give ear to know sound judgment. **read ›**

101 **1 Maccabees 2:21** Far be it from us to forsake the law and the ordinances. **read ›**

102 **1 Maccabees 14:18** they wrote to him on bronze tablets to renew with him the friendship and the alliance that they had established with Judas and Jonathan his brothers. **read ›**

103 **2 Maccabees 1:3** May he give you all a heart to worship him and to do his will with a great heart and a willing soul. **read ›**

104 **2 Maccabees 1:4** May he open your heart to his law and to his statutes, and may he make peace. **read ›**

105 **2 Maccabees 2:3** And with other such words he urged them that the Law should not depart from their hearts. **read ›**

106 **4 Maccabees 1:31** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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107 **4 Maccabees 2:8** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
108 **4 Maccabees 5:17** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
109 **4 Maccabees 13:14** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
110 **4 Maccabees 13:15** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
111 **4 Maccabees 18:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
112 **1 Enoch 59:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
113 **1 Enoch 81:6** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
114 **1 Enoch 103:4** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
115 **Matthew 23:26** Blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and the platter, so that their outside may also become clean. **read ›**
116 **Matthew 23:28** So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. **read ›**
117 **Mark 2:5** Jesus, seeing their faithfulness, said to the paralyzed man, "Child, your sins are forgiven you." **read ›**
118 **Luke 11:39** The Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but your inward part is full of extortion and wickedness. **read ›**
119 **John 2:4** Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My hour has not yet come." **read ›**
120 **John 6:63** It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing. The words I speak to you are spirit and life. **read ›**
121 **Acts 26:9** I myself therefore thought that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. **read ›**
122 **Romans 2:28** For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; **read ›**
123 **Romans 2:29** but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God. **read ›**
124 **Romans 7:5** For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions that worked through the law were active in our members, bearing fruit for death. **read ›**
125 **Romans 7:6** But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter. **read ›**
126 **Romans 7:8** But sin, finding occasion through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of coveting. For apart from the law, sin is dead. **read ›**
127 **Romans 7:10** The commandment which was for life, this I found to be for death; **read ›**
128 **Romans 7:11** for sin, finding occasion through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. **read ›**
129 **Romans 7:14** For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am fleshly, sold under sin. **read ›**
130 **Romans 7:22** For I delight in the law of God in my inward man, **read ›**
131 **Romans 8:4** so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. **read ›**
132 **Romans 8:6** For the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace; **read ›**
133 **Romans 8:7** because the mind of the flesh is hostile toward God, for it is not subject to God's law, neither indeed can it be. **read ›**
134 **Romans 8:8** Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. **read ›**
135 **Romans 8:13** For if you live according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. **read ›**
136 **Romans 11:2** God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel: **read ›**
137 **Romans 11:6** And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. **read ›**
138 **1 Corinthians 3:9** For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. **read ›**
139 **2 Corinthians 3:3** You are manifestly a letter of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not on tablets of stone but on tablets that are hearts of flesh. **read ›**

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**140** **2 Corinthians 3:6** who also made us sufficient as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. **read ›**

**141** **2 Corinthians 4:12** So then death works in us, but life in you. **read ›**

**142** **Galatians 3:2** I want to learn only this from you: did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? **read ›**

**143** **Galatians 5:17** For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, that you may not do the things that you desire. **read ›**

**144** **Galatians 5:18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. **read ›**

**145** **Colossians 2:20** If you died with Christ to the elements of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you submit to ordinances, **read ›**

**146** **Colossians 3:5** Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth: sexual immorality, uncleanness, depraved passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. **read ›**

**147** **Hebrews 8:10** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and I will write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **read ›**

**148** **Hebrews 9:1** Now indeed even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and an earthly sanctuary. **read ›**

**149** **Hebrews 9:10** These gifts and sacrifices concern only foods and drinks, various washings, and ordinances of the flesh, imposed until a time of reformation. **read ›**

**150** **Hebrews 10:16** “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and I will write them on their minds; **read ›**

## ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *173 verses, by reference*

*Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.*

**Genesis** 1:26 · 1:29 · 2:21 · 4:25 · 14:14 · 17:27

**Exodus** 20:12

**Leviticus** 15:18 · 16:9 · 26:10

**Deuteronomy** 8:18 · 20:5 · 20:19

**Psalms** 3:6 · 4:5 · 16:9 · 28:1 · 116:15

**Proverbs** 9:17

**Isaiah** 2:4 · 5:21 · 33:13 · 50:9

**Jeremiah** 4:4 · 17:10 · 23:24

**Ezekiel** 20:25

**Daniel** 3:18 · 7:7 · 7:24 · 8:17 · 9:25

**Matthew** 3:15 · 4:16 · 5:3 · 5:4 · 5:17 · 6:19 · 6:24 · 7:21 · 10:2 · 10:19 · 13:52 · 18:16 · 18:20 · 19:4 · 19:6 · 20:16 · 21:15 · 22:32 · 22:37 · 23:9

**Mark** 2:11 · 6:15

**Luke** 2:29 · 2:32 · 4:27 · 5:1 · 5:12 · 5:14 · 6:1 · 6:5 · 6:26 · 6:29 · 6:36 · 6:46 · 14:33 · 16:16 · 19:40 · 20:25 · 20:27 · 20:34

**John** 1:14 · 3:6 · 4:21 · 5:14 · 5:31 · 6:27

**Acts** 7:51 · 10:15 · 10:47 · 13:47 · 20:35 · 28:17

**Romans** 1:16 · 1:18 · 2:2 · 2:11 · 2:12 · 2:16 · 2:21 · 2:24 · 3:19 · 3:21 · 4:1 · 4:2 · 5:1 · 5:20 · 5:21 · 7:4 · 7:7 · 7:12 · 7:13 · 8:14 · 14:19 · 14:21

**1 Corinthians** 3:12 · 5:11 · 6:12 · 6:18 · 7:5 · 7:8 · 7:9 · 7:14 · 7:25 · 7:32 · 7:39 · 8:5 · 10:11 · 10:25 · 11:1 · 11:27 · 15:11 · 15:46 · 15:51

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**2 Corinthians** 1:3 · 3:5 · 3:7 · 3:14 · 3:15 · 3:16 · 3:17 · 3:18 · 4:4 · 4:6 · 4:7 · 4:8 · 4:10 · 4:11 · 4:14 · 4:16 · 5:17 · 6:16 · 11:3

**Galatians** 1:6 · 1:8 · 2:18 · 2:19 · 3:17 · 3:22 · 5:13

**Ephesians** 2:12 · 5:21

**Philippians** 2:9 · 3:3 · 4:3

**Colossians** 2:17

**2 Thessalonians** 2:11

**1 Timothy** 2:1 · 3:2 · 4:1 · 4:3 · 4:13 · 5:14

**Titus** 3:1

**Hebrews** 10:1 · 10:25 · 12:29 · 13:5 · 13:8

**1 Peter** 2:17 · 5:5

**Revelation** 2:10

*Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.*

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What does Paul mean by “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6)?” on May 18, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY