

2 CORINTHIANS Chapter 3 Christ's Epistle; The Spirit Not the Letter; Glory of the New Covenant

OBSERVATION

Monday 7:00pm, H 105 (1st floor, High School--foot of stairs, behind the gym, by the vending machine area), Tuesday 7:00am, Family, Room, CCCM – Phil Twente, cell #714 425 9221; email – ptwente@gmail.com For past studies, audio plus notes, go to: www.ptwente.com Click on "Latest Studies" on the right side. References include commentaries by numerous pastor/teachers.

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

2 COR. Chapter 3 - Christ's Epistle;

2Co 3:1 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?

2Co 3:2 You are our epistle (letter) written in our hearts, known and read by all men;

2Co 3:3 clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

The Spirit Not the Letter;

2Co 3:4 And we have such trust (confidence) through Christ toward God.

2Co 3:5 Not that we are sufficient (competent, qualified) of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.

2Co 3:6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

***"Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" Michael W. Smith
feat. Audrey Assad***

***Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His Glory and Grace.***

1— Do I have to bring along a letter from the apostles in Jerusalem, you know, or from the other churches? Do I need letters of commendation when I come to you? Or do I need letters of commendation from you? Do I need for you to write and confirm my ministry there in Corinth?

2— Actually your lives in Christ, your walk in the Spirit is the letter of recommendation or commendation of my ministry. It is verifying my ministry.

3— You are the evidence, the proof. Your faith in Christ, your walk with the Lord is the proof, is the epistle of Christ! Your lives in Christ, your walk in the Spirit, you are all that is necessary as proof of the ministry.

4— What Paul has just written might sound proud in the ears of the Corinthians." These are big ideas, but his place for thinking them is in Jesus, not in himself.

5— Paul doesn't consider himself sufficient for the great task of changing lives for Jesus. Only Jesus is sufficient for such a big job. People often refuse to be used by God because they think of themselves as "not ready." But in a sense, we are never ready or worthy. If we were, the sufficiency would be in ourselves, not from God.

6— Prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31, the **new covenant** was put into practice by Jesus - [Luke 22:19-20](#). In contrasting **the letter** and **the Spirit**, Paul is showing the superiority of the **new covenant** over the old covenant. The **letter** is the law (Old Covenant) in its outward sense, written on tablets of stone. It was good in itself, telling us what to do, but it gave us no power to serve God or to change our hearts. Paul can say **the letter kills** because the law, exposing our guilt, "**kills**" us before God. It thoroughly and completely establishes our guilt. Cf. [Romans 7:5-6](#): The **Spirit** is given to us as the law written on our hearts. He is in us to guide us and be our "law." The Holy Spirit doesn't *replace* the written law, but *completes* and *fulfills* the work of the written law in our hearts. **The Spirit gives life**, and with this spiritual life we can live the law of God. We are ministers of the new covenant; of this new dispensation of truth, light, and life, by Christ Jesus; a system which not only proves itself to have come from God, but necessarily implies that God himself by his own Spirit is a continual agent in it, ever bringing its mighty purposes to pass.

v. 1 The Judaizers boasted that they carried "letters of recommendation" from the "important people" in the Jerusalem church, and they pointed out that Paul had no such credentials. It is a sad thing when a person measures his worth by what people say about him instead of by what God knows about him. How would a true letter of recommendation for you and your ministry, look like?.

vs. 2-3 Do we realize that many who see us and watch us are seeing the only Bible they likely will ever see? We are told that as believers we are living epistles of Christ. How does my epistle measure up? When God gave the Law, He wrote it on tablets of stone. Even reading the two tablets would not change their lives. The Law is an external thing, and people **need an internal power if their lives are to be transformed**. The ministry of grace changes the heart. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God and writes it on the heart. The Corinthians experience of God's grace certainly meant more to them than the letters of commendation carried by the false teachers. **The test of ministry is changed lives, not press releases or statistics.**

v. 4 Paul is saying that his confidence in his ministry is completely based on his trust through Christ toward God. Do you share that confidence?

v. 5 **Paul was quick to give the glory to God and not to himself. His confidence ("trust") was in God, and his sufficiency came from God.** Paul was a brilliant and well-educated man; yet he did not depend on his own adequacy. He depended on the Lord. We should not have a shred of self sufficiency as anything of our ministry or spreading the gospel to be of ourselves, but all our sufficiency of from God.

v. 6 God alone has made us able ministers as well as making us sufficient for these things! We as His apostles execute under His Divine influence what He Himself has devised. We are ministers of the New Covenant!

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Glory of the New Covenant

2Co 3:7 *But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away,*

2Co 3:8 *how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?*

2Co 3:9 *For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.*

2Co 3:10 *For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels.*

2Co 3:11 *For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains (endures, is permanent, lasts) is much more glorious.*

2Co 3:12 *Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—*

7— The surpassing glory of the new covenant. The old covenant, called **the ministry of death**, because that is what the law does to us: it slays us as guilty sinners before God, so we can be resurrected by the new covenant. The problem wasn't with the law, but with us. Cf. [Romans 7:5](#) There was a glory associated with the giving of the law and the old covenant. Mount Sinai was surrounded with smoke, there were earthquakes, thunder, lightning, a trumpet blast from heaven, and the voice of God Himself ([Exodus 19:16-20:1](#)). The glory of the old covenant was shown in **the face of Moses** and the **glory of his countenance**. Ex. 34:29-35 describes **the face of Moses** and how he would veil it after speaking to the people. As glorious as the radiant face of Moses was, it was a fading glory: **which glory was passing away**. The glory of the old covenant shining through the face of Moses was a fading glory, but the glory of the new covenant endures without fading.

8— If the *old* covenant, which brought *death* had this kind of glory, we should expect greater glory in the new covenant, which brings **the ministry of the Spirit** and life. This is one of those “how much more” this new covenant is glorious, this covenant of God's grace through Jesus Christ!

9-10 — When you compare the two there is no comparison! The glory of fellowship with God that we have! The glory of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit! The glory of the power of God that has been vested in His children! It's so far excels the glory of the old covenant that it's hard to even make a comparison.. The old covenant was glorious, but nothing to be compared with the glory of this covenant that God has now established with us through Jesus Christ our Lord! Oh, what awesome glory we have in Christ!

11- This argument from the lesser to the greater is something that is quite common with Paul. Here he uses it in regard to the two covenants. The old covenant was glorious, but oh, the covenant that was of death, it was glorious, but wow, how about the covenant that gives life? How much more glorious is this covenant that we have in and through Jesus Christ?

12- such hope: Since our hope is in a more glorious covenant, we can have a more glorious hope. Because of this hope, Paul can **use great boldness of speech**. The old covenant was restrictive and separated a man from God; the new covenant brings us to God, and enables us to come boldly to Him.

vs. 7-8 — This **paragraph is the heart of the chapter**, and it should be studied in connection with **Exo 34:29-35**. Paul did not deny the glory of the Old Covenant Law, because in the giving of the Law and the maintaining of the tabernacle and temple services, there certainly was glory. What he affirmed, however, was that the glory of the New Covenant of grace was far superior, and he gave several reasons to support his affirmation. How thrilling for us is to be a part of the New Covenant! The Old Covenant was a ministry of death or condemnation, but the New is the ministry of righteousness. The Old Covenant is passing away but the New Covenant remains.

v. 9 -- The Old Covenant had glory, but it is far outshone by the glory of the New Covenant. How much more glorious will be the ministry of the New Covenant, the grace of God?

10— We can see that there is such an excelling glory in the Gospel, that the other is swallowed up and lost in it. It excels it in those things in which it was so glorious.

11— The law had a fading glory. It was not the final solution or the last word on the plight of sinners. **The New Covenant remains forever because it is the consummation of God's plan of salvation.**

12— Do we rejoin in the New Covenant, a more glorious covenant. Because of it, we have a more glorious hope. Because of this hope we, as Paul did, use great boldness of speech. The New Covenant, not restrictive as the old, bring us to God and enables us to come boldly to Him!

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2Co 3:13 *unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel*

could not look steadily at the end (two meanings: “purpose” and “finish.”) *of what was passing away* (abolished, brought to an end, fading away).

2Co 3:14 *But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away (removed) in Christ.*

2Co 3:15 *But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on (covers) their heart.*

2Co 3:16 *Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*

13 – Moses himself did not have real boldness under the old covenant. A **veil** is not a “bold” thing to wear; it is a barrier and a place of hiding. Moses lacked boldness (compared to Paul) because the covenant that he ministered under was fading away, and fading in glory. ...**look steadily at the end of what was passing away**: From reading the account in Exodus 34:29-35, it might appear that Moses wore a veil after his meetings with God so the people wouldn't be afraid to come near him; that it was to protect them from seeing the shining face of Moses. But here Paul explains the real purpose of the veil: not so the shining face of Moses would be hidden, but so that the diminishing glory of his face would not be observed, because the glory was fading. The **passing** glory of the old covenant contrasts with the enduring glory of the new covenant.

Could not look: Since the veil hid the face of Moses, the children of Israel couldn't see *any* of the glory from his face. Therefore, the contrast isn't only between **passing** glory and enduring glory, but also between *concealed* glory and *revealed* glory.

14 - 15 ...**the same veil remains unlifted**: Paul says that the Jews of his day were unable to see that the glory of Moses' ministry had faded in comparison to the ministry of Jesus. If the **veil** were **unlifted**, they would see that the glory of Moses' ministry had faded and they should now look to Jesus. But since the “same” veil that hid Moses' face now **lies on their heart**, they still think there is something superior or more glorious in the ministry of Moses.

16. It can be said of the Jews that **a veil lies on their heart**. But the veil can be taken away in Jesus. Many Christians in preaching to their Jewish friends have wondered why it is rarely so simple as just showing them that Jesus is the Messiah. This is because **a veil lies on their heart**. Unless God does a work in them, so they turn to the Lord and have the veil taken away, they will never see the fading glory of Moses' covenant and the surpassing glory of Jesus and the new covenant. The Jews are not the only ones for whom **a veil lies on their heart**. Gentiles also have “veils” that separate them from seeing Jesus and His work for us clearly. But Jesus is more than able to take those veils away! This points to the essential need of *prayer* in evangelism. It has been rightly said that it is more important to

13 – *end* - After Moses came down from Mt. Sinai, having been in the presence of the Lord, his face was shining, scaring the children of Israel. He put a veil over his face and here we are told that he did this *so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away*. **The glory on the face of Moses must give way to the glory in Another Face!**

14 – Can you see how the veil was emblematic of darkness and ignorance that is on the hearts of those under the law, hinders the glory of the Gospel from shining in?

15 – Those who read the law today remain “blinded” in their ignorance of Christ and the Gospel, actually preferring the traditions of their fathers. We need to be aware of the dangers of following traditions rather than the Word of God.

16 – Because of the veil that remains on the heart of many Jews, more prayer is generally needed in witnessing to them. Establishing a genuine loving relationship with them, individually, has proven to be so helpful in opening their hearts to at least listen and consider the good news of the Gospel! However, **doesn't that apply to all unbelievers? Truth and love, always!**

Is there any hope for the lost Children of Israel? Yes, there is! “Nevertheless, when one (the heart) turns to the Lord (by trusting Jesus Christ), the veil shall be taken away”

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2Co 3:17 *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (freedom from the law).*

2Co 3:18 *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 (ever increasing glory), just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

17 – The Lord is the Spirit: From the context of Exodus 34:34, we see that when Paul says that **the Lord is the Spirit**, he is saying that the Holy Spirit is God, just as Jesus and the Father are. **liberty**. Paul's thinking follows like this: When Moses went into God's presence, he had the liberty to take off the veil. The presence of the Lord gave him this liberty. We have the Holy Spirit, who is the Lord. We live in the Spirit's presence because He is given to us under the new covenant. So, just as Moses had the liberty to relate to God without the veil in the presence of the Lord, so we have liberty because of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

18 – Paul gives an invitation to every Christian. He will speak of an intimacy of relationship and a transforming power that everyone who has an **unveiled face**. If we will turn to the Lord, He will take away the veil and we can be one of the **we all**. We can see **the glory of the Lord**, not yet perfectly, but as a **mirror**. We can see **the glory of the Lord**, but we can't see it perfectly yet.

being transformed: As we behold the glory of God, we will be **transformed**. God will change our lives, and change us from the inside-out. Though the old covenant had its glory, it could never transform lives through the law. God uses the new covenant to transform us. "How can I change?" Or, everyone wants to know, "How can *they* change?" The best and most enduring change comes into our lives when we are **transformed** by time spent with the Lord. There are other ways to change (guilt, willpower, coercion), but none of them are as deep and long lasting as the transformation that comes by the Spirit of God as we spend time in the presence of the Lord. Yet, it requires something. It requires **beholding, meaning** a careful study. We all have something to behold, something to study. We can be transformed by the glory of the Lord, but only if we will carefully study it.

Into the same image: As we look into "God's mirror," we will be changed **into the same image** of the Lord. When we spend time **beholding** the glory of the God of love, grace, peace, and righteousness, we will see a transforming growth in love, grace, peace, and righteousness.

17 – Because of our Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the law, following His resurrection, sent the Holy Spirit to all believers. That gives us liberty from the law! **How thankful are we for this liberty in Christ?**

18 – *But we, all of us, with unveiled faces beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* There should be **changes taking place daily in our lives that indicate growth from glory to glory as the Spirit of God is conforming us into the image of Jesus Christ**. It's like God is an artist and we are the chunk of marble on which He is chipping away on. And if you want to know what you are going to look like when God is through, you look at the model, our Jesus Christ! God works in us, chipping away as He is conforming us into the image of Jesus, according to the power of God's Spirit, working in me. Working the changes in me, which is a part of the purpose of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. **That purpose is to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ!**

The personal application (2Co_3:18).

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." This verse is the climax of the chapter, and it presents a truth so exciting that I marvel so many believers have missed it — or ignored it. **You and I can share the image of Jesus Christ and go "from glory to glory" through the ministry of the Spirit of God!**

Under the Old Covenant, only Moses ascended the mountain and had fellowship with God; but under the New Covenant, all believers have the privilege of communion with Him. Through Jesus Christ, we may enter into the very holy of holies (Heb_10:19-20) — and we don't have to climb a mountain!

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2 Cor 3:18 (cont'd) *But we all, with unveiled face, holding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord,*

from glory to glory,

just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

By the Spirit of the Lord: With these last words, Paul is emphasizing two things. First, this access to God and His transforming presence is ours by the new covenant, because it is through the new covenant we are given **the Spirit of the Lord**. Secondly, this work of transformation really is God's work in us. It happens **by the Spirit of the Lord**, not by the will or effort of man. We don't *achieve* or *earn* spiritual transformation by **beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord**. We simply put ourselves in a place where we can be transformed **by the Spirit of the Lord**.

Moses reflected the glory of God, but you and I may radiate the glory of God. When we meditate on God's Word and in it see God's Son, then the Spirit transforms us! We become more like the Lord Jesus Christ as we grow "from glory to glory." This wonderful process cannot be achieved by keeping the Law. The glory of the Law faded away, but the glory of God's grace continues to increase in our lives.

Keep in mind that Paul was contrasting, not only the Old Covenant with the New, but also the Old Covenant ministry with the ministry of grace. The goal of Old Covenant ministry is obedience to an external standard, but this obedience cannot change human character. **The goal of New Covenant ministry is likeness to Jesus Christ.** Law can bring us to Christ (Gal_3:24), but **only grace can make us like Christ.** Legalistic preachers and teachers may get their listeners to conform to some standard, but they can never transform them to be like the Son of God.

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