

A New Covenant of Better Things

2 Corinthians Chapter 3

2Cr 3:1 **1) The Better Letter** vs 1-6

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?

2Cr 3:2 You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men;

2Cr 3:3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for 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 is still giving a defense for his ministry to the Corinthians.
- Commend (Greek - *synistemi*) to set with, to unite, to put together
- Letters of Commendation were introductory letters that put people together. These were often used in the ancient church to distinguish approved ministers from possible false prophets.
- Paul used this system:
 - Romans 16:1-2 Phoebe a sister sent to Rome possible with the Letter to the Romans
 - 1 Corinthians 16:3,10-11 Timothy sent to Corinth
 - 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 Titus sent to the Corinthian church
- Paul understands that these are commonly used. But there is a better way to tell. It is the people. The fruit, the heart of people know the truth of a man's ordination.
 - Numbers 17 the people felt they could do the Aarons job. Moses took the rods (staves) from one leader of each of the twelve tribes. He laid them before the Lord. The next day only one of the rods budded. It bore fruit.
 - It is the fruit that bears witness to God's ordination not a document from man's council. It isn't bad or wrong to have man's document but the real proof is in the fruit.
- "You are a letter of Christ" - It can be read by all. You cannot hide it. Not a letter of Paul. The fruit of your life becoming passionate believers and followers of Christ is the letter. Not that they like a particular preacher like Paul.
- "Written...with the Spirit...on...human hearts" this letter cannot get lost, be misunderstood, and cannot fade.

2Cr 3:4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.

2Cr 3:5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,

2Cr 3:6 who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

- Paul's confidence to minister is in just that. That God bears fruit in his ministry. Paul realizes that it is not his own "adequacy" or ability. It is God who equips and enables.
- "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" - REMEMBER THE CONTEXT! This verse is quoted as easily as John 3:16 mostly by hyper charismatics who want a "bible verse blank check" for activities that are not biblical.
 - The preceding context is a letter of commendation. Paul didn't oppose a letter written on paper. He wrote some. He was making the point of HOW MUCH BETTER is the Letter that had an internal witness of the Spirit not just an external witness of man.
 - The following context Paul is making a transition to comparing the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. The Old Covenant had a job to do. To show us that we were dead in our trespass and sins. (Eph 2:1) Yet in Christ we shall be made alive. (1 Cor 15:22)
 - The context is nothing about the ecstatic behaviors of some believers when the Holy Spirit comes upon them.
- The Point is that it is so much better to have the letter written on the heart rather than on a stone.
- Jeremiah 31:31-33 "Behold, **days are coming,**" declares the LORD, "**when I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, **not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,**" declares the LORD. "**But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,**" declares the LORD, "**I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it;** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."
- It's the LAW written in the heart not something new written.

2Cr 3:7 **2) A Greater Glory** vs 7-11

But if the **ministry of death**, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was,

2Cr 3:8 how will the **ministry of the Spirit** fail to be even more with glory?

2Cr 3:9 For if the **ministry of condemnation** has glory, much more does the **ministry of righteousness** abound in glory.

2Cr 3:10 For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it.

2Cr 3:11 For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory.

- The emphasis of this passage is that the New Covenant has a GREATER GLORY than the Old Covenant.
- Before we look at that, Paul uses the term "**ministry of death**" for the Law/Old Covenant.
 - Romans 7:5 + 8-11 "For while we were in the flesh, **the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law**, were at work in the members of our body to **bear fruit for death**. ...**But sin**, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. I was once alive apart from the Law; but **when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died**; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; **for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment**, deceived me and through it killed me."
 - It is very important to see that the Law did not produce the sin or the death. The commandment only revealed the condition of sin that was in the heart. This is the "**ministry of death**".
- This Law, when it was given was with 2 displays of glory.
 - **FIRST**
Exodus 19:9 "The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever."
Exodus 19:23 "So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who {were} in the camp trembled"
It was brought forth with a glory so Israel would believe.
 - **SECOND**
Exodus 34:29-35 "It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), **that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him**. So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. **When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.**"
Israel would have physical evidence that they could see with their own two eyes that Moses had spoken to the Lord God.

- Comparison of the Two Covenants

<u>The Law</u>
Ministry of Death
Ministry of Commendation
Written on Stones (external)
Came with Glory
The Glory Fades
This Glory, in comparison is no glory

<u>The Gospel</u>
Ministry of the Spirit
Ministry of Righteousness
Written on Hearts (internal)
Has Glory
The Glory Remains
This Glory is Superior

- Hebrews 8:13 "When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear."

2Cr 3:12

3) A Prime Perception vs 12-18

Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech,

- Boldness = Greek "*parresia*" plain, open, free, without ambiguity
- This hope of a New Covenant written on the heart and has a greater glory that remains allows the believer to speak clearly, plainly, and boldly.

2Cr 3:13

and *are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away.

- Our message is not like Moses'. His was fading. Our message remains.
- Here in this passage we find an explanation that is not in Exodus 34. The reason Moses put the veil over his face. In reading Exodus 34 we do not see the reason.
 - Moses spent 80 days with the Lord on the mountain being sustained by the Lord for he did need to eat or drink. (40 days 1st time to receive the 10 commandments; then another 40 to get them a 2nd time after he broke them at Israel's unfaithfulness)
 - The people feared to come near Moses when his face shone and thus the veil according to Exodus 34. But Paul reveals another reason more divinely applicable.
 - Moses knew the Glory was not his. It was the Lord's the glory was fading. He did not want Israel to see the glory fading. **This is very much like living to keep the Law. For a time we keep it. But it will not be long before that glory of us keeping the law will fade due to our inability to keep it.**

2Cr 3:14

But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ.

2Cr 3:15

But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart;

2Cr 3:16

but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

- For the sons of Israel in Moses day there was a veil over Moses' face. It was there so Israel would not see the fading glory.
- Today, for Israel a veil remains, but over the heart. It is there and the Jews have a hard time seeing the fading glory of the Law and the Surpassing Glory of the New Covenant.
- How can the Jew not believe unless there is a veil that blinds the heart to see these truths
 - Isaiah 53 "*He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.*"
 - Zechariah 12:10 "*I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced;*"
 - Isaiah 9:6 "*For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*"
 - Isaiah 7:4 "*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*"
 - Michah 5:2-5 "*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village in Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past. The people of Israel will be abandoned to their enemies until the time when the woman in labor gives birth to her son. Then at last his fellow countrymen will return from exile to their own land. And he will stand to lead his flock with the LORD's strength, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. Then his people will live there undisturbed, for he will be highly honored all around the world. And he will be the source of our peace.*"
 - Psalm 22:1 + 16-18 "*My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? ...They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.*"
- But when a person turns to the Lord (Jew of Gentile) the veil is taken away.

2Cr 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty.

2Cr 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, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

- *"The Lord is the Spirit"* Paul spoke earlier that he has the freedom to speak boldly or plainly without ambiguity. He is not speaking to confuse. The Lord is the Spirit. God is the Spirit.
- Paul continues and summarizes the entire chapter in one glorious statement.
 - *"Where the Spirit of the Lord is There is Liberty"*
 - The Spirit writes on our heart the Law. You and I are the **Better Letter** of Christ made adequate by the freedom from the Law (external) to more naturally fulfill the Law written internally
 - *"With an Unveiled Face (heart) Beholding ...the Glory of the Lord"*
 - *"We all"* believers share a **Prime Perception** of an unveiled face. There isn't anything that is between our realizing the Glory of the Lord. His glory being the salvation of mankind.
 - *"As in a mirror"* may refer to either 1) we can see this glory evident in our own lives or 2) that a mirror reflects something else, a glory yet coming.
 - *"Being Transformed into the Same Image From Glory to Glory"*
 - From the glory of the one the Law exposing our sin and causing death to come to us; to the glory of a New Covenant that is a **Greater Glory** that truly brings righteousness by the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God.
 - *"Being Transformed"* is the sense of an ongoing change. The NIV reads *"from glory to glory in an ever increasing glory"*. It just gets better and better.

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