

2 Corinthians 3:1-6  
Godward Ministers of the New Covenant

**Introduction:** David Garland reminds us: When others criticize your ministry, one needs a clear measuring rod by which to appraise oneself before God. The critics will try to impose their own measuring rods to gauge the minister (this other pastor, this school, this website). If the minister is to remain faithful to God's calling, then only God's standards matter.

**1) Godward APPROVAL—3:1-3**

- The root issue is legitimate authenticity and genuine authority
- a) **Two rhetorical questions regarding credentials that assume a negative answer:**
  - i) <sup>1</sup> *Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?*  
(1) cf. 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:18
  - ii) *Or do we need, as some, letters [epistole] of commendation to you or from you?*
- b) **Three-fold literary process regarding credentials: <sup>2</sup> You**  
[emphatic] *are our letter [epistole],*
  - i) **Initial writing:** *having been written* [pf. pass. ptc. *engrapho*] *in our hearts,*
  - ii) **Ongoing reading:** *known* [pres. pass ptc. *ginosko*] *and read* [pres. pass ptc. *anaginosko*] *by all men,*  
(1) Everyone was aware of Paul's love for the Corinthian church.
  - iii) **Clear understanding of what was written: <sup>3</sup> being manifested**  
[pres. pass ptc. *phaneroo*] *that you are a letter [epistole] of Christ,*  
(1) *ministered to* [aor. pass. ptc. *diakoneo*] *by us,*  
(2) *having been written* [pf. pass. ptc. *engrapho*]  
(a) Neg./Pos.: *not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God,*  
(b) Neg./Pos.: *not on tablets of stone but on tablets of hearts of flesh.*
- c) **\*\*Man-centered credentials are normally external; God-centered credentials are primarily internal.** (1 Tim. 3 & Titus 1)

**2) Godward QUALIFICATIONS—3:4-6**

- This takes us back to 2:16
- a) **Godward reliance: <sup>4</sup> And such** (kind of) *confidence [pepochesis] we have through Christ toward God* (the Father).
  - i) **NEGATIVELY: <sup>5</sup> Not that we are sufficient [hikanos] in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves,**

- (1) His denial of self-sufficiency does not reflect an exaggerated humility, but rather a sober recognition of the facts of the matter. (Colin Kruse)
- ii) **POSITIVELY:** *but our sufficiency [hikanotes] is from God,*  
(1) <sup>6</sup> *who also made us sufficient [aor. act. ind. hikanoo] as ministers of a new covenant,*  
(a) Neg./Pos.: *not of the letter [gramma] (the external Law) but of the Spirit;*  
(i) This does not say that literal interpretation of the Bible is harmful.  
(b) Neg./Pos.: *for the letter [gramma] (the external Law) kills, but the Spirit gives life.*  
(i) Cf. Rom. 8:3  
(ii) Death now (living death) and death later (eternal death)
- b) This New Covenant is referred to in Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40 and Ezek. 36:26-27.  
i) It was inaugurated on the cross. Cf. Luke 22:20  
ii) Certain aspects are partially fulfilled today.  
iii) It will be completely fulfilled during the Millennium.

### 3) Things to remember:

- a) Sometimes external credentials are necessary **on behalf of others**. (cf. Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:22-24)
- b) Sometimes external credentials are necessary **on our own behalf**. (cf. 2 Cor. 4:2; 6:4)

2 Corinthians 3:7-11  
Two Ministries, One Glory

**Introduction:** One criticism that I have experienced over the years is that I have taught that the NT church is not under OT Law. This paragraph establishes my position. Paul's teaching here is based on Exod. 34:29-35.

This paragraph reveals three "if ... then ..." conditional sentences. In grammar these are three protasis (propositions, conditions) and apodosis (give backs, consequences) combinations. This is an illustration of the logical argument from the lesser good to the greater good. The Jews called this *qal wachomer*. In the Latin from the 1560's it was called *a fortiori*.

What the Spirit teaches through Paul in this paragraph contradicts Paul's contemporary Jewish teachers.

**1) The ministry of DEATH compared with the ministry of the SPIRIT—  
3:7-8**

a) **IF the Old Covenant ministry began in glory—3:7** <sup>7</sup> *But if* [1<sup>st</sup> class condition] *the ministry [diakonia] of death* (named for its effect), *in letters having been engraved* [pf. pass. ptc.] *on stones, came* (into being) [aor. pass. ind. *ginomai*] *with [en] glory,*

- i) How does the Old Covenant bring death? (several authors)
  - (1) It prescribes death as the penalty for sin. (Rom. 5:12-21; 7:10)
  - (2) In defining transgression it increases sin (Gal. 3:21-31), which leads to death.
  - (3) It provides an opportunity for sinful people to pervert God's holy Torah into legalism, that is, a dead system of rules intended to earn God's favor even when followed without trusting God. (Rom. 3:19-31)
  - (4) It does not have in itself the life-giving power of the Spirit which alone can make people righteous. (Rom. 8:1-11)
- ii) *so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, which was being brought to an end* (theological passive, by God),
  - (1) It is of interest that in Exodus 34 the MT says that the skin of Moses' face "emitted horn-like rays" (*qāran*, vv. 29–30, 35). Given the relation of *qāran* to *qeren* ("horn"), the Vulgate rendered these three uses of the verb by the adjective *cornuta* [*facies sua*], "his face was horned." This explains the artistic representations of Moses with horns on his head such as Michelangelo's famous statue. (Murray Harris)

- b) **THEN** the New Covenant ministry will have more glory—3:8 <sup>8</sup>  
(then) how will the ministry [diakonia] of the Spirit not be even more in [en] glory?

**2) The ministry of RIGHTEOUSNESS (the New Covenant) has more glory—3:9-11**

a) **Degrees of glory—3:9-10**

- i) **IF** the Old Covenant ministry had glory ... <sup>9</sup> For [gar] if [assumed 1<sup>st</sup> class condition] the ministry [diakonia] of condemnation [katakrisis] (named for its effect) has glory (and it does),

(1) Not just the Law, but the tabernacle/temple, priesthood, etc.

- ii) **THEN** the New Covenant ministry has more glory ... (then) much more [polus mallon] does the ministry [diakonia] of righteousness [dikaioisune] (named for its effect) abound [pres. act. ind. perisseuo] in glory.

iii) **Comparison/explanation—3:10**

(1) **The old was glorified but not glorified:** <sup>10</sup> For [gar] indeed what had been glorious [pf. pass. ptc. doxazo], in this case has no glory [pf. pass. ind. doxazo]

(2) **The new has surpassing glory:** because of the glory that surpasses [pres. act. ptc. hyperballo] it.

(3) Someone said: it has been de-glorified by being out-glorified.

b) **Permanence of glory—3:11**

- i) **IF** the temporary Old Covenant ministry was with glory ... <sup>11</sup> For [gar] if [assumed 1<sup>st</sup> class condition] that which was being brought to an end [pres. pass. ptc. katargeo] (theological passive, by God) was with [dia] glory,

(1) Though the temple was still functioning when this was written, it would not last much longer (@ 14 years).

- ii) **THEN** the permanent New Covenant ministry is in glory ... (then) much more [polus mallon] that which remains [pres. act. ptc. meno] is in [en] glory.

**3) Things to remember:**

a) This is perhaps best illustrated by the glory of the full moon that loses its glory as the blazing sun appears.

- i) Even a dim lightbulb in a dark room appears bright until you open the shades to let the sunlight in.

ii)

b) Review the following chart: (based on Murray Harris)

<b><u>Old Covenant</u></b>	<b><u>New Covenant</u></b>
Engrave on stone tablets (3:3, 7)	Written on hearts-of-flesh tablets (3:3)
A death-dealing written code (3:6)	A life-giving Spirit (3:6)
Ministry of death (3:7)	Ministry of the Spirit (3:8)
Ministry of condemnation (3:9)	Ministry of righteousness (3:9)
Glorious (3:7, 9-11)	More glorious (3:9-11)
Fading (3:7, 11)	Permanent (3:11)

- c) The glory of New Covenant ministry is not seen with the eyes but is perceived with the hearts of attentive listeners. (paraphrase of Mark Seifrid)
- d) Thus no one could deny that the Spirit of God in one's heart was better than a law scroll before one's eyes, (Craig Keener)

2 Corinthians 3:12-18  
Three Results of New Covenant Ministry

**Introduction:**

- 1) **The eternal New Covenant ministry results in HOPE—3:12-16** <sup>12</sup>  
*Therefore* (cf. 3:7-11) *having such a hope* [*elpis*] (cf. 3:11),
  - a) **Positive:** *we use great boldness* [*parresia*],
    - i) Forthright openness, honesty and straightforwardness, nothing to hide, non-evasive; this is not arrogant audacity.
    - b) **Negative:** <sup>13</sup> *and are not like Moses* (who concealed),
      - i) **Moses' veil covered a fading glory:** *who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the consequence of what* (the fading glory) *was being brought to an end* [pres. pass. ptc. *katargeo*]. (theological passive, by God) (cf. Exod. 34:33b, 35)
      - ii) **Contemporary veils—3:14-16**
        - (1) **GRIEF because of the hindering veil of old covenant ministry—3:14-15**
          - These two things explain some of the difficulties in witnessing to Jews.
          - This is not criticism of Jews ethnically, racially, biologically, culturally, nationally, or religiously. (David Stern, JNTC)
        - (a) **Old generation, unresponsiveness due to the unlifted veil:** <sup>14</sup> *But their minds* [*noema*] *were hardened* [aor. pass. ind. *poroo*]; (by God? by themselves?)
          - (i) **Unlifted:** *for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant* (the Law) *the same veil remains unlifted*,
            1. The only reference to the Law as the Old Covenant.
          - (ii) **Possibility of removal:** *because it* (the veil) *is brought to an end* [pres. pass. ind. *katargeo*] (theological passive, by God) *in Christ*.
        - (b) **Current generation restatement, inability due to the heart-covering veil:** <sup>15</sup> *But* (despite what God has done in Christ) *to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart*,
      - (2) **HOPE because of the God-removed veil—3:16**
        - (a) <sup>16</sup> *but WHENEVER a person TURNS TO THE LORD, THE VEIL* (over their heart) *IS TAKEN AWAY* [pres. pass. ind. *periaireo*]. (theological passive, by God the Spirit) (cf. Exod. 34:34a)

- 2) **The eternal New Covenant ministry of the Spirit results in FREEDOM—3:17** <sup>17</sup> *Now ...*
  - a) **His personhood:** *the Lord* (of 3:16, Yahweh) *is the Spirit*,
    - i)
  - b) **His presence:** *and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom* [*eleutheria*].
    - i) **Freedom from:** bondage to the Law and its penalties, misunderstanding when reading the Bible, the consequences of the veil
    - ii) **Freedom to:** obey Christ, understand the Bible, etc.
  
- 3) **The eternal New Covenant ministry results in ongoing TRANSFORMATION—3:18** <sup>18</sup> *But we all, ...* (unlike Moses' unique privilege)
  - a) **Inside-out process:** *are being transformed* [pres. pass. ind. *metamorphoo*] ...
  - b) **Indirectly through the gospel as revealed in the Word of God:** *with unveiled* [pf. pass. ptc.] *face, beholding* [pres. mid. ptc.] *as in a mirror the glory of the Lord*,
  - c) **According to the standard of Christ:** *into the same image* (that we see mirrored)
  - d) **To what end?** *from* [*apo*] *glory to* [*eis*] *glory*,
    - i) Normally: not instantly but progressively
    - ii) Possibly: from the old glory to the new glory
  - e) **With what enablement?** *just as from* [*apo*] *the Lord, the Spirit*.
  
- 4) **Things to remember:**
  - a) Any so-called gospel that does not result in hope, freedom, and transformation must be avoided and condemned.
  - b) The New Covenant Gospel produces hope for the spiritually hopeless, freedom for the spiritually enslaved, and transformation for the spiritually deformed.
  - c) This hope, freedom, and transformation is available to all who, by God's grace, have repented and trusted in Jesus Christ alone.