

# The Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians

## Chapter 3:7-18

*December 20, 1998*

- **Outline of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians:**
  - Chapter 1 God equips His people through trial, comfort and perseverance.
  - Chapter 2 Restore fellowship to the repentant; One aroma, two response.
  - Chapter 3 The glorious covenants
- **Review & Introduction**

It is important that we keep ourselves focused on the context of the verses we discuss with expounding upon them in an expository manner. Paul is writing to a church for which he has great fondness and history. As in most other cities there were those who attempted to undermine his character, doctrine and ministry by teaching heretical doctrines. In Corinth however, the tactic used by his adversaries was to discredit Paul's word because he had earlier promised to re-visit the church twice but later found it prudent to only visit once. His detractors seized upon this as evidence that his word was unreliable and therefore the entire corpus of doctrinal instruction was also suspect. Paul has given an explanation for his change in plans which was to ultimately demonstrate his tender love and care for their well-being.

In verse 2:14 Paul begins tangential discussion that will bring him back to his former topic of his attempts to locate and receive word from Titus in Macedonia. He continues this rich instructional talent here and through to chapter 7.

- **Exposition of 2nd Corinthians 3:7 - 18**

*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,<sup>8</sup> how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?*

- Paul continues with the thought that he introduced in verse six where he began to contrast the old and new covenants by referring to one as the letter that kills and the other the Spirit that gives life. Here he refers to the letter as the ministry of death. This is a point that escapes the modern church because of our refusal to acknowledge God's ultimate and exhaustive sovereignty. The covenant established through Moses was intended to increase sin and condemnation. This was a primary function of the law as imposed by God upon sinful man.
- Secondly, he describes the letter or law as "written and engraved on stones" as contrasted with the new which is spiritual. He draws this point out to differentiate it with the splendor of the new covenant which was promised to be written by the Spirit on our hearts. The move from external or physical to spiritual or internal is seen in the scriptures as a paradigm for increased glory.
- Thirdly he arrives at his first point that even though the old covenant was a ministry of death written on stone, it was also a glorious ministry. The coming of the law was accompanied by glory and the glory continued as manifested later by the grand offices, the temple, the ceremony and the sacrifices. He also adds that this glory was such that the people could not look at Moses' face (Exodus 34:29-35).
- But what is glory? Taking the whole of God's counsel, it most commonly should be defined as the manifestation of the attributes of God. Therefore, something is glorious because it manifests or displays some or many attributes of God. How then was the ministry of death glorious? We see Moses' face reflecting that God is light and shines brightly. We see in the law God's perfection, wrath, judgement, faithfulness to promises and as Paul teaches us that this glory was passing away, we have the revelation of omniscience in things to come.
- The culmination of Paul's prior points is found in an a fortiori argument which teaches us that as surely as the law had glory so too we surely know that the law of the Spirit will excel in glory—even more of God's attributes will be made known as His covenant of redemption is further unrolled like a fine tapestry.

*9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.<sup>10</sup> For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels.<sup>11</sup> For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.*

- The primary point of this section is to say that the ministry of righteousness exceeds the ministry of death or condemnation by such a degree that it would be as if the latter had no glory at all even though we know that it did. An earthly example of this concept can be seen when considering the brightness of the moon and stars is far exceeded by the brightness of the sun to such an extent that the former brightness disappears.
- How is it that the new covenant displays much more glory? The entire book of Hebrews boils down to this answer. First, we have a better mediator in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:1-6). He is a better High Priest than Aaron or Levi (Hebrews 7) in

that His ministry is an eternal one like Melchizedek. Jesus is ministering at a better tabernacle (Hebrews 9:1-15) offering a better sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-18) under a better covenant with better promises (Hebrews 8:1-6).

- o Paul calls the new covenant the ministry of righteousness. This prompts us to ask the question, "Didn't God require much more righteousness under the law than he does under the new covenant?" Paul is not teaching that the definition of that which God calls sin has changed but that this new ministry actually had the power to make men righteous. (Romans 8:1-4)

*12 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—<sup>13</sup> unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.*

- o Here is where we see a root cause of our lack of boldness. Because the modern church does not know these things or at least does not believe them we see that lack of belief manifest in an impotent speech not a speech of boldness. Notice the confidence that Paul drew from the fact that God had made him a minister called to declare that which was much more glorious. If we refuse to disciple the world when we have this kind of a covenant upon which we stand, then there is no way we can be surprised to see the world swimming in evil. As it did Paul, this should embolden us to proclaim without timidity and serve without hesitancy.
- o Paul contrasts his ministry with Moses who had to veil his face to hide the fact that glory of the covenant was passing away. This by itself is very remarkable—in the simple action of Moses veiling his face we see great prophetic meaning and implication. Moses' face was veiled for a number of reasons which include the fact that he did not want the people to know or understand the fading nature of the covenant. Had they known, they might not have feared or turned to the Lord for mercy rather they may have disparaged the covenant by thinking it to be weak. Secondly, his face was veiled as a picture of the blindness of the people in not seeing that God was fulfilling His promises to Abraham and their blindness regarding their own need for mercy. Thirdly, the veil pictured the obscurity of the shadowy old covenant riddled with types and shadows that would eventually be made clear as God was pleased to reveal His mind and grant understanding. This is not to say that Christianity is an exclusive club based on a special mystery knowledge or secret handshake. Rather it is a aggregation of those for whom God has granted regeneration and repentance by His good mercy for His good pleasure.

*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 in Christ.<sup>15</sup> But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*

- o Paul teaches that from the time of Moses even up to his own day, the same virtual veil that Moses' veil pictured remained on the minds and hearts of the Israelites/Jews when the OT was read. God had not granted them a full understanding because of their sin. What was meant to be a great source of frustration for the Jews was the fact that now there would be Gentiles declaring the praises of God and speaking mysteries. As Paul says in his teaching on tongues, this was a sign of judgement upon the nation.
- o Again we see that the act of Moses leaving the people with a veiled face to address the Lord where he removed the veil was a picture of those who by faith turn to the Lord for mercy. Those who do are received and given wisdom and understanding because the veil is removed.

*17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.<sup>18</sup> 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 by the Spirit of the Lord. NKJV*

- o The Lord is Lord of this new spiritual covenant and He has taken away all condemnation for those who are *in Him*. When His Spirit is given as a seal, so too we are sealed with godly liberty—not *free to sin* but rather *freed from sin*.
- o We should again keep in mind the context of this instruction. The fact that Paul at length contrasts the glory of one covenant over the new covenant (of which he was made a minister) gives the indication that his detractors may have been like the Judaizers attempting to promote those things which were passing away.
- o We whom God has seen fit to regenerate and give His Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our future redemption, are a reflection of God's glory. That is, we live our lives in such a way that God's mercy, love, severity, righteousness, wisdom and his other attributes are made manifest for the universe to see. Through a process called sanctification, we are being brought from a position of glory at conversion to greater and greater levels of glory as God conforms us more and more into the image and glory of His Son.