



(For access to all available commentaries and sermons of Charlie's click [HERE](#))

2 Corinthians

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

Paul builds upon the previous verse where he noted the glory of the countenance of Moses, even though his ministry was one of death and which was merely written on stones. In contrast to this is the ministry of Christ which leads to life and which is written on our hearts. But having noted glory associated with the ministry of death, that of the shining countenance of Moses' face, then logically how much more glorious will be that which supersedes it!

In this verse, Paul changes the terms from "the ministry of death" to "the ministry of condemnation," and from "the ministry of the Spirit" to "the ministry of righteousness." In other words, the law brought death and associated with that death is condemnation; it is ineffectual to save anyone. However, the Spirit brings life and with that comes righteousness; it is not only sufficient to quicken the spirit to live, but to also grant Christ's righteousness to the one who is so quickened. Paul speaks of the same things in Romans 5 -

"Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment came* to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." Romans 5:18, 19

The glory of this ministry of righteousness far exceeds the glory of the law. The law faded away, but the work of Christ will endure for all eternity. The glory of Christ will shine upon His redeemed throughout the ages of ages.

Life application: The Law of Moses is one of the most studied and cherished writings in all of human history. However its intent, like all of Scripture, was to lead us to Christ. It is not an end in and of itself. Rather we are to use it to understand our great need for a righteousness which is not our own; a righteousness found only in the work of Christ being imputed to us through faith.

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

This particular verse is based on the reading of the Greek version of Old Testament passages found in Exodus 34 (Exodus 34:29 & Exodus 34:35). Paul, using that idea concerning the glory of the situation at that time, says that it actually cannot be compared to "the glory that excels."

The giving of the law was glorious. It was glorious in the display at its giving. It was glorious in the contents of the law which it revealed. It was glorious in how that law was ministered throughout the time of Israel's life under it as well. And yet, it was a ministry of death. It showed that man cannot fulfill its requirements and thus only brought condemnation. The only thing that spared men from this was a grant of mercy based on the Day of Atonement rituals.

However, the covenant which came through the work of Jesus is a ministry of life. It excels in that where the law brought death, it brings life. Where the law brought condemnation, it brings salvation. Where the law was written on stone, it is written on the hearts. In Jesus, there is full pardon of sin. In Jesus, there is the sure hope of restoration with God. In Jesus, there is the prospect of eternal life. In all ways, the glory of the law is shown to have no glory compared to the work of Jesus on our behalf.

Life application: People often feel the need to "add" to the work of Jesus as if they must do something to please God. But what can be added to what God has done? If His plan of salvation isn't capable of saving, then whatever we do is surely not going to take care of the problem. Rest in Jesus, trust in Jesus, and don't add to the gospel which says that you are saved by grace through faith. Anything else isn't the gospel.

For if what is passing away *was* glorious, what remains *is* much more glorious.

2 Corinthians 3:11

Again Paul shows the contrast between the Law of Moses and the New Covenant in Christ's blood. Here he uses a term "is passing away" which is a present participle. Why, if the New Covenant has replaced the Old, has he termed it this way? One could argue that it was because the temple was still standing in Jerusalem until it was destroyed in AD70. However, Paul is writing doctrine for the church age - all of it. What he wrote then still applies now. So what does this mean?

The answer is that Israel has not yet received Jesus Christ as a collective whole. Daniel 9 shows that they have seven more years in the prophetic timeline to do so. These years are yet future and a temple will be rebuilt, sacrifices will be made, and the Old Covenant will be employed during those seven years. This does not mean it is acceptable for a relationship with God, but that it is a time which is preparing them for an acceptable relationship with Him through Jesus, exactly as Daniel prophesied. This is the same type of terminology which is found in Hebrews -

"In that He says, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." Hebrews 8:13

Based on the structure of the Bible, the letters after Paul's epistles which begin with Hebrews are specifically directed to the Jews of the end times. This is why the terminology is used. God reaches out, one last time, to the Jews of the end times for reconciliation to Him. It is coming and may it be soon that they receive their Messiah!

Understanding this, Paul says that this which is "passing away" was glorious. It was received in glory and it bears the holy character of God. Jesus alone fulfilled it, demonstrating His glory. And He remains through it, having shed His blood in fulfillment of the passing glory and being resurrected to lead us to that which is "much more glorious." We have an eternal glory before us in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This glory is now bestowed upon all who receive Him.

Life application: Reinserting the law, which Christ has fulfilled, is to reject the work He accomplished for us. Let us stand firm on the truth that He is the fulfillment of the law and He is where our hope and trust must lie. Not in works, but in faith.

Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—

2 Corinthians 3:12

The word "therefore" is given as a general summary of what has been thus far stated. He has been speaking of the supremacy of the New Covenant which is written on our hearts and which exceeds even the glory of the Old which came at Sinai in such a wondrous display. It was written on tablets of stone by the very finger of God, and yet it cannot compare to what we now have in Christ. In verse 4, Paul spoke of "trust through Christ toward God." Now he builds on that by saying, "...since we have such hope."

It is the future of what the "trust" implied. We have trust now and that leads us to hope in what the future holds. And because of this hope he says "we use great boldness of speech." This again builds on a previous verse. Towards the end of the previous chapter, he said -

"For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ." 2 Corinthians 2:17

His words are in sincerity "as from God." Therefore, because they are and because they carry a weight and a glory which even surpasses that of the Old Covenant, he

is able to use this boldness, knowing that it has God's sure stamp of approval. Paul's confidence in the message he spoke was grounded in the very workings of God in redemptive history!

Today Christians have Paul's words, written and recorded in his epistles. They carry all of the same weight, glory, and power as what Paul spoke to the masses he met along his journeys. How can we not feel the same confidence as he? How can we not speak with the same boldness? If God be for us (and He is if we rightly proclaim His word), than who can be against us?

Life application: Who cares if your life is threatened for speaking out the truth of the gospel? If it be the gospel you speak, it is the very message that saved you and will continue to save you. Speak it!

...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. 2 Corinthians 3:13

When Moses came down from the mountain, his face shone. Because of this, he veiled his face other than when he spoke to the Israelites the words of the Lord. However, when he went before the Lord, he would again take it off. The reason for the veiling then was to hide the brightness of the reflected glory of God because it was so difficult to look upon him.

That reason seems to correspond with what Paul said earlier in verse 3:7, but in this verse Paul seems to indicate another reason altogether. It was "so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away." In Romans 10, Paul shows that the law had an end which is found in the work of Christ. This is why the law "was passing away" -

"For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."
Romans 10:4

Therefore, Paul is using the account of the Israelites before Moses as a parable of the time in which we live. The law is ended in Christ, but the Israelites could not see the end of it. They looked at the law as permanent and as a means to an end. But the law was intended to lead us to Christ. Because they missed this, they "could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away." And this is exactly what has happened in the dispensational model of history.

However, Olshausen asks, "How could St Paul say that Moses covered his countenance in order that the Israelites should not behold Christ?" His question seems to imply that it would be wrong for Israel, who was looking for their Messiah, to be denied seeing Christ. However, this is an incorrect analysis. They were not denied this actively. Instead, they chose to deny Him. They were offered Christ in Acts 2. From there, and throughout Acts, it shows the truth that Jesus was rejected by them. Paul explains this in Romans 11 -

"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." Romans 11:25

God knew in advance that Israel would reject their Messiah, but it served a greater purpose in that the nations received Him and became the called-out Gentile church. Israel was set-aside during this dispensation "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." And yet, even during this dispensation, there has always been a remnant of Israel who is saved by grace (see Romans 11:5).

There is a time coming when the Gentiles will have reached their fullness and they will be raptured home to be with the Lord. At that time, the focus will be on the nation of Israel once again. On that day, the veil will be taken away and they will see that Christ is, in fact, the end of the law for all who believe.

Life application: Let us pray for Israel as a nation to have their collective eyes opened to the saving grace of Jesus Christ. God is working on them now and that wondrous day is coming. May it be soon!

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.

2 Corinthians 3:14

Referring to the Jews, and any others who would follow in the misguided notion about the purpose and continuance of the Old Testament, Paul states that "their minds were blinded." The word for "blinded" is *poroo*. It properly means, "made of stone; (figuratively) *insensible*; dull, *unperceptive as a rock*; calloused (hardened); i.e. unresponsive (dense), completely lacking sensitivity or spiritual perception." For this reason, many translations prefer the word "hardened" instead of "blinded."

The hardening of one's eyes indicates a spiritual blindness, so the same concept is understood. However, this action is often as much self-willed and purposeful in some as it is lacking in others. In other words, there are those who have been told that Jesus permeates the Old Testament and is revealed in the New, but they willingly harden their minds to this fact.

The New Testament on numerous occasions shows that the law is fulfilled in Christ and thus it is nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14); annulled (Hebrews 7:18); obsolete (Hebrews 8:13); and taken away (Hebrews 10:9). These and multiple other references show that those who cling to the Old Testament for the application of their spiritual doctrine have "until this day the same veil" covering their spiritual senses that kept them from seeing Christ (or the fullness of His work) in the very law which is now abolished.

Paul couldn't be clearer on this, and yet it is not only the Jewish people, but countless heretical sects which reintroduce the law and thus bring condemnation on themselves. In Christ is found the embodiment of the law. Therefore, in Christ is where we are to place our hopes. This veil which remains in place is "unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament." Anytime the law is read to a person who is trying to be justified by the law, the veil remains. They have missed Christ and are attempting to seek a right-standing before God based on personal merit. It is a self-condemning act.

Finally, the NKJV ends this verse with, "because the *veil* is taken away in Christ." This is a possible translation, but it is not the intent of Paul's words. Notice that the word "veil" is inserted (italicized words are inserted); it is not in the Greek. In their translation they have incorrectly assumed that it is the veil which is taken away in Christ. But this is properly explained in verse 16. Rather, Paul's words here are speaking of the law itself. In Christ, the law is taken away. Only when one realizes this is the veil then removed. Here is John Darby's translation of this verse, rightly showing Paul's intent -

"But their thoughts have been darkened, for unto this day the same veil remains in reading the old covenant, unremoved, which in Christ is annulled." Darby

Once it is understood that the old covenant is annulled and a turning to the Lord has taken place, then verse 16 can occur - "Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."

Life application: If you are in a church which mandates precepts from the Old Testament - circumcision, Sabbath worship (meaning Saturday), tithing, etc. then get out of there. We do not reinsert into the New what has been annulled in the Old!

But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.

2 Corinthians 3:15

In the previous verse, Paul notes this concerning the Jews - "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." As explained in that verse evaluation, the "veil" should be rendered "the old covenant." In support of that, Paul continues with, "But even to this day..."

It has to be remembered that Paul wrote this epistle about 30 years after the time of Christ. The temple was still standing, the Jews attended their synagogues and read weekly from the Torah, and the veil remained over their hearts concerning

the work of the Lord. He was just as hidden to them then as He was before He came. Now, it is about 2000 years later and the same truth applies. When Jews meet to discuss the Torah, the details of Christ are hidden from them.

The time for this is ending though. Jews are converting to Christ at an ever-increasing rate. Israel has been returned to the land of Israel as prophesied. The nations of the world are coming against them just as the Bible showed would happen. All of this is preparing them for one final seven-year period where a temple will stand and they will finally understand what Daniel was talking about in verses 9:24-27 of his book.

In the end, the Jewish nation will finally call out to Jesus and He will return to rescue them. But until that happens, the veil lies on their heart. We are witnessing the coming end of the church age and the time of Daniel's 70th week which will end with the veil finally being removed.

Life application: It is a messy world and it is getting messier, but God has a plan which He is working on through it all. Stand back and watch the Lord work! Israel is being prepared for a meeting with their true Messiah.

Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

2 Corinthians 3:16

Different translators look at what is being said here in a couple of ways. In the NKJV, it says "when one turns to the Lord." It implies that each time a Jew turns to Jesus, the veil is taken away. However, other translations say, "...when it shall turn to the Lord." This then would be speaking of the heart of Israel collectively. The Weymouth version says this more specifically with the words, "But whenever the heart of the nation shall have returned to the Lord, the veil will be withdrawn."

It is true that individually as Jews come to the Lord, the veil is taken away. However, the context of the passage is implying the nation as a whole. This was actually pictured in Exodus 34. In verse 31 it says -

"Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them." Exodus 34:31

The prophetic picture of that passage is that the rulers (who represent the nation) "returned" to Moses. The word drives the analogy which Paul clearly saw and is using for us to see. This is also pictured in the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 and of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers in Genesis 41. Further, it is explicitly stated by Jesus in Matthew 23 -

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! ³⁸ See! Your house is left to you desolate; ³⁹ for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!' " Matthew 23:37-39

Jesus, speaking to Jerusalem which is the seat of power in Israel, said that when they call on Him, He will come to them. This implies that the veil has been taken away. Zechariah speaks of the effect of this moment on the people -

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn." Zechariah 12:10

Life application: It should be as apparent at the nose on one's face that Jesus is not through with the nation of Israel. If you are a "replacement theologian" you may be missing your nose.

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

This phrase seems perplexing, but it is only perplexing if we fail to look for the context of Paul's thoughts. In verse 3:6, he said, "...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." He is now returning to that thought, as if the intervening verses were parenthetical.

He has been contrasting the supremacy of the new covenant over the old. In doing so, he gave the example of Moses' veil as a picture of how the truth of Christ is veiled to those who read the law without the connection of who Jesus is in relation to the words it contains. Once a person (specifically a Jew, and more specifically the nation of Israel collectively) turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

In this is found the answer to what Paul is saying. The Lord is the Spirit of biblical interpretation. This is not speaking then of the Holy Spirit but the knowledgeable relationship between what is written in the law and what it is pointing out, which is Christ Jesus. As He said Himself in John 5 -

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." John 5:39

The sentiment that Paul is giving here is very similar to the words of the angel who spoke to John in Revelation 19 -

"Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Revelation 19:10

Albert Barnes explains the intent of this verse quite well -

"The sense is, that Christ was the Spirit; that is, the sum, the substance of the Old Testament. The figures, types, prophecies, etc. all centered in him, and he was the end of all those institutions. If contemplated as having reference to him, it was easy to understand them."

Understanding who Jesus is, and understanding what Scripture is saying about Him, leads to the liberty that Paul addresses. The Jews only find true liberty from the veil which covers their eyes when they turn to the Lord.

Life application: One can read Scripture all day long and not properly understand it unless they recognize that it is revealing Jesus. Therefore, arguing Scripture with those who do not accept who He is makes no sense. They must first be correctly trained in the Subject of Scripture before they can understand the meaning behind the words.