

TITLE: THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 3

INTRO: In ch. 3, Paul introduces us to “the ministry,” a topic he’ll continue through ch. 7. Continuing from what he said in **2:17**, his discussion about the true Christian ministry is seen in contradistinction to what the false teachers at Corinth were doing.

I. THE PROOF OF THE MINISTRY (v. 1-4):

- A. (v. 1-3)** *Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you, or...from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known & read of all men:...manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit...not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.*
1. *Do we begin again to commend ourselves to you...do we need letters to you?* No! Paul asks these questions because it may have appeared in the previous verses (**2:14-17**) that he was commending himself. But Paul didn’t need to commend/prove himself to them again (he did this originally through his teaching & miraculous abilities). Also, these questions are intended to contrast him with the false teachers at Corinth (who *needed* to commend themselves to the Corinthians). The Corinthian church existed because of Paul’s work! Why would he now need another congregation to commend him to the Corinthians?
 2. *Do we need letters of commendation from you?* He also didn’t need letters *from* Corinth to prove himself to others (as did the false teachers). *Ye ARE our epistle!* You are the evidence of our truthfulness & sincerity – “manifestly declared” (made known openly) to be the epistle of Christ (i.e., **genuine!**), ministered by us (*we* ‘delivered’ this letter), written with the Spirit.
- B. (v. 4)** *And such trust have we through Christ toward God.* We are confident of this...of you! You are the only evidence we need (at least *part* of you)! Their very existence as a congregation of Christ’s church proved the truthful, accurate teaching of Paul. It also proved Christ & Christianity! The logical question then is, “What kind of epistle are we?”

II. THE GLORY OF THE MINISTRY (v. 5-11):

In describing the glory of his ministry (& theirs – **ch. 5**), Paul makes several comparisons/contrasts between the old & new covenants:

- A. (v. 5-6)** *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*
1. (v. 5) First, Paul gives God the glory. None of us are sufficient of ourselves, regardless of our spiritual level (**Lk 17:10**).
 2. (v. 6) We’re ministers of the new testament (covenant) of the spirit that gives life, not the letter (writing) that kills. The “letter” is clearly a reference to the law of Moses. It does **not** mean, as many say, that we aren’t to be concerned with the “letter” of Christ’s law, but with the “spirit” (meaning)! Rather, the idea is that the old was designed to be temporary, leading us to Christ (**Gal 3:24-25**). The letter (i.e., the old law) had no ultimate power to save, because it didn’t have Christ (it *pointed* to Him). Christ’s blood was (& is) required to have true forgiveness of sins (even the *new* law without this would be useless)! This is the key to understanding everything else Paul says in **v. 6-11** in contrasting these two ministrations.
- B. (v. 7-8)** *But if the ministration of death, written & engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?*
1. A ministration of death vs. a ministration of the Spirit (cf. **Rom 8:2**): “death” (already mentioned above); it is the Spirit that gives life (**Jn 6:63**–“*it is the Spirit that quickeneth...the words I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life*”).
 2. Written in stones vs. written in hearts (**v. 3**). The old law (in stone) was given to Moses (**Ex 34**). The new is still literally written, but it’s in our hearts as well (much more personal). The old covenant made this promise (**Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10**).
 3. Done away vs. remains (**v. 11**): The old was so glorious that the people couldn’t look at Moses’ face! And it was temporary!
- C. (v. 9)** *For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.*
Condemnation vs. righteousness: Sin condemns (**Rom 6:23**), and righteousness & forgiveness come only by faith (**Gal 2:16,21**).
- D. (v. 10)** *For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.* The old law, made glorious by God because it was from God, was *not* glorious **in comparison** with the glory of Christ’s law that excels!
- E. (v. 11)** *For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious*
A ministration to be done away vs. a ministration that remains: This was already mentioned (**v. 8**), but really needs no comment!

III. THE EFFECT OF THE MINISTRY (v. 12-18): How it affects the recipients (this is still a comparison of old to new).

A. Effect under the old (v. 12-15):

Here Paul builds on the point he began in **v. 7**: (**v. 13**) Moses’ face had to be veiled after having been in God’s presence receiving the old law. (**v. 14**) This is symbolic of the Israelites’ receiving the law (with veiled hearts; never openly & completely). (**v. 15**) He says that they *still* have veiled faces (hearts), because they won’t see & accept the prophecies of Christ as being fulfilled by Jesus. The contrast is in **v. 12** – because we have this eternal hope in the new ministration, we speak boldly/bluntly (no veil)!

B. Effect under the new (v. 16-18)

(**v. 16**) *Nevertheless* (“but” – another contrast between old & new), *when it (the heart) shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.* The change must occur in the heart of the hearer (**Jn 7:17**–“*If any man will do his (God’s) will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself*”). (**v. 17**) This person sees Jesus as the source of freedom (not from law, as many say, but from the *old* law that condemns & kills). (**v. 18**) Christ’s liberty should bring about a change. We as Christians, having unveiled faces (open to Christ & the truth), and beholding (or reflecting) as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image (of Christ – **Rom 8:29**), from glory to glory (gradually, as we grow in the Spirit...i.e., in His Word). This is the desired effect of the gospel (the new law of Christ), that we reflect Christ’s image to the world!

CONCLUSION: Two main points of application: **1)** the “veil” is a great study to help us understand the law of Christ: not just Moses’ veil as we’ve studied in **v. 12-18**, but the *temple* veil, symbolic of the old law & the separation of God & man (torn in two at Christ’s death–**Mt 27:51**). And **2)** as the deliverer of the old “message,” Moses’ face shone so that the people couldn’t look at him. Do we shine w/the new message? Christians are “epistles” (evidence of the teaching of the gospel, and therefore of Christ). What do your actions & words say about Jesus?