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2 Corinthians 3
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By Dan Maines

2 Corinthians 3

2 Corinthians 3:1-2

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some, letters of commendation to you or from you? You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all people.

† Paul rejects the need for human letters of recommendation. The Corinthians themselves are his living letter.

† The transformation of the church is the greatest testimony of

his ministry.

† Clement of Rome (1 Clement 47) acknowledged Paul's fruitful labor among the Corinthians, serving as proof of his apostleship.

2 Corinthians 3:3

Revealing yourselves that you are a letter of Christ, delivered 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.

† Believers are living letters of Christ, written by the Spirit.

† This contrasts with the Law written on stone, which brought death.

† Jeremiah 31:33 promised the new covenant would be written on hearts, fulfilled here in Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:4-5

Such is the confidence we have toward God through Christ. Not that we are adequate in ourselves so as to consider anything as having come from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.

† Paul confesses that his sufficiency is entirely from God, not self.

† Ministry in the Spirit is God's work, not human ability.

† Origen (On Prayer 33) emphasized the necessity of God's sufficiency in true ministry.

2 Corinthians 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.

† The old covenant of the letter brought death.

† The new covenant of the Spirit brings life.

† Philo (On the Decalogue 20) recognized the Law's severity, which Paul contrasts with the Spirit's life.

2 Corinthians 3:7-8

But if the ministry of death, engraved in letters 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, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?

† The Law had glory, but it was fading.

† The ministry of the Spirit surpasses it in glory.

† Exodus 34:29-35 records the fading glory of Moses' face, a picture Paul uses here.

2 Corinthians 3:9-10

For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness excel in glory. For indeed what had glory in this case has no glory, because of the glory that surpasses it.

† The old covenant condemned, yet with glory.

† The new covenant gives righteousness, with surpassing glory.

2 Corinthians 3:11

For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.

† The glory of the new covenant is permanent, unlike the fading old.

† The destruction of the temple in AD 70 confirmed the fading away of the old system.

† Josephus (Wars 6.4.5) described the temple's destruction, showing the fading of old covenant glory.

2 Corinthians 3:12-13

Therefore, having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and we are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not stare at the end of what was fading away.

† Unlike Moses, Paul speaks boldly, because the glory he proclaims does not fade.

† The veil symbolized Israel's inability to see the covenant's end.

2 Corinthians 3:14-15

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. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts.

† Israel's hardness kept the veil in place.

† Only Christ removes the veil, revealing the covenant's true fulfillment.

† Justin Martyr (Dialogue with Trypho 38) pointed to Israel's blindness when reading Moses apart from Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:16

But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

† Turning to Christ removes the veil of blindness.

† The new covenant reveals God's glory clearly.

2 Corinthians 3:17

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

† The Spirit brings freedom from Law, sin, and death.

† True liberty is in the Spirit of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18

But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

† Believers, unveiled, behold the Lord's glory and are transformed into His image.

† Transformation is ongoing, Spirit-driven, from one degree of glory to another.

† Irenaeus (Against Heresies 5.8.1) spoke of believers being shaped into Christ's image, echoing Paul's teaching.

How it applies to us today

† 2 Corinthians 3 teaches that the old covenant was temporary, fading, and brought condemnation, while the new covenant in Christ is permanent, glorious, and life-giving.

† The veil of blindness still covers those who seek the Law for righteousness, but in Christ, the veil is removed.

† In the fulfilled kingdom, we live with unveiled faces, transformed by the Spirit into Christ's image.

† Freedom is not in the Law but in the Spirit of the Lord.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

Source Index

† Clement of Rome, 1 Clement 47 - Paul's fruitful labor at Corinth

† Jeremiah 31:33 - covenant written on hearts

† Origen, On Prayer 33 - God's sufficiency in ministry

† Philo, On the Decalogue 20 - severity of the Law

† Exodus 34:29-35 - fading glory of Moses' face

† Josephus, Wars 6.4.5 - destruction of the temple

† Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 38 - blindness of Israel

† Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5.8.1 - transformation into Christ's image

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