

2 CORINTHIANS

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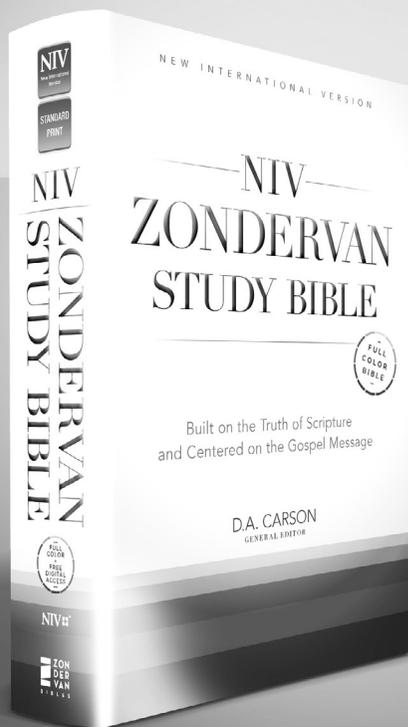
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# Editorial: Learning from Paul's Second Letter to Corinth

**STEPHEN J. WELLUM**

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Every year we devote one issue of *SBJT* to a study Lifeway's January Bible study book. For 2016, our focus is on Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church. In focusing our attention on this specific book of Scripture, I am reminded about the story told by Kent Hughes regarding one of the world's most renowned classics scholars, E.V. Rieu. Hughes recounts the story that Rieu, at the age of sixty, had just completed a new translation of Homer into modern English. Soon after his work was done, Rieu, who at this time was not a Christian, was approached by Penguin Books to translate the four Gospels. Interestingly, when Rieu's son heard that his father had accepted the publisher's request, it is reported that his son was overheard as saying: "It will be interesting to see what father will make of the four Gospels. It will be even more interesting to see what the four Gospels will make of father."

As the story goes, Rieu's son did not have to wait long to discover what the Gospels would do to his father. Soon after E. V. Rieu finished his translation, he committed his life to Christ. Rieu's story is not an anomaly. It reflects countless similar stories of how our triune God takes his Word and drives it home in people's life. This story is a wonderful testimony to the transforming

power of God's Word. When people devote time to reading and studying Scripture, often they personally experience what the Bible claims for itself, namely, that it is God's Word written, the product of his own divine agency through human authors, which Paul describes as God's own breathed-out Word (2 Tim 3:16; cf. 2 Pet 1:20-21). They also discover that Scripture powerfully changes our lives because it is through his Word and by the Spirit that God makes people alive, unites them to Christ, and transforms us. In the words of the author of Hebrews, in reading and studying Scripture, we discover anew that "the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12, NIV).

In focusing our attention this year on Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, it is important to keep these truths in mind. Our study of Scripture is never merely to learn more information about ancient times, or what the church was like in the first century, or use the Bible as a mere source book for our theological reflections. Rather, our goal in reading and studying Scripture is to know our great and glorious triune God more, to be transformed by his Word, and conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we approach 2 Corinthians, we ought to do so with a sense of expectation that God will take his word and apply the truth of the gospel to our daily lives. Sadly, we often become so familiar with Scripture that we take it for granted, but we need to be reminded that it is not enough to confess doctrinally and theologically what Scripture is; we must also submit our lives to it, and pray that the Spirit of God will do his transforming work through our study of Scripture. Scripture repeatedly teaches that God never gave us his Word to have no effect on us. On the contrary, God intends for his Word to inform, change, and conform us to Christ Jesus our Lord, since the one who the Lord esteems is "he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isa 66:2b, NIV).

A wonderful place to turn to see the power of God's Word at work is 2 Corinthians. Second Corinthians is the last of the extant letters Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. Anyone familiar with the Corinthian church knows of its serious problems and aberrations and how Paul patiently, yet forthrightly addressed these problems with pastoral care and the theological application of the gospel to their situation. In 2 Corinthians, we not only discover more about the serious condition of the Corinthian church, but also of Paul's deep

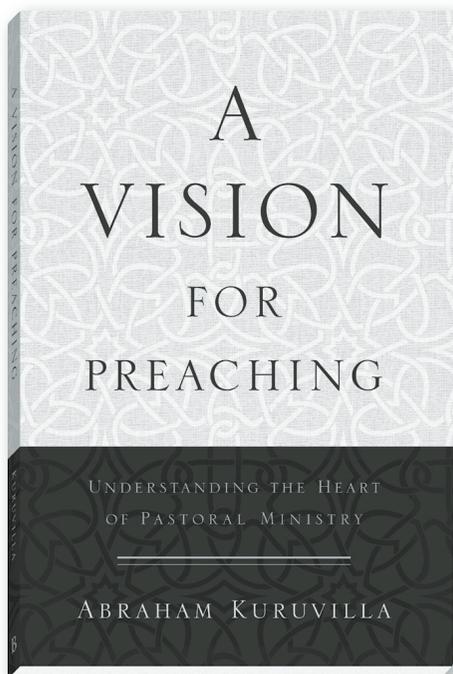
and abiding love for this church which had caused him no small amount of grief and sadness. In this letter we learn that the church was infected by false apostles and their teaching; how these “teachers” stood against Paul and his ministry, and more importantly, how Paul responded to these charges. In Paul’s response, we not only discover the heart of the apostle—a man captivated by Christ and all of his glory—we also learn valuable lessons about what true Christian ministry is and what true leadership entails in the church.

In addition, 2 Corinthians is valuable in its theological instruction. It offers us insights into our future state (2 Cor 5:1-10), it unpacks the incredible ministry of reconciliation that God gave the apostles and by extension to the church (2 Cor 5:11-21), and within that discussion we are reminded again about the glorious doctrine of justification, and that how in Christ, we are reconciled to the Father as we are clothed in Christ’s righteousness (2 Cor 5:21). Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 8-9 also provides the most detailed NT treatment of Christian giving, especially focusing on the motivation for why we give, rooted and grounded in Christ’s example: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9, NIV). In this profound letter, we also learn about the importance of church discipline, how to restore offenders, and how the church ought to function as ambassadors of Christ in the world.

However, probably the most distinctive contribution of the letter is Paul’s discussion of Christian leadership and specifically how pastors ought to execute their ministerial roles. In contrast to the false teachers who infected Corinth with their false teaching and example, Paul presents the Christian leader as one who knows his weaknesses, and it is precisely in those weaknesses, that the sovereign God brings about success in ministry. In our day, it seems as if the times have not changed, and the temptation for pastors to be like leaders in the world is a perennial temptation. For those in pastoral ministry, 2 Corinthians pays valuable dividends as we discover the hows and whys of faithful, godly pastoral ministry and ministerial effectiveness. In many ways, what Paul lays out for us is the glory of Christ, and what leadership in the church ought to be as a result of Christ’s glorious reconciling work.

It is my prayer that this issue of *SBJT* will spur us on to greater faithfulness and service in our Christian ministry and lives for the glory of Christ.

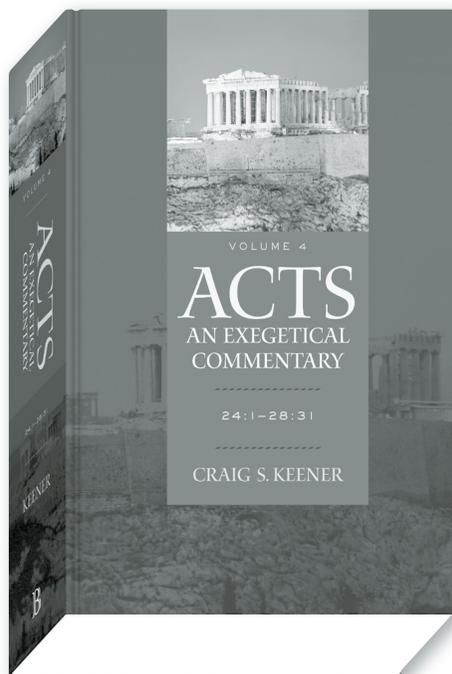
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# The Message of Second Corinthians: 2 Corinthians as the Legitimation of the Apostle

MARK SEIFRID

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Paul does not write abstract theological disquisitions. His word is always a “word on target,” intended to address the needs of his readers at times in which he himself cannot be present with them.<sup>1</sup> All of Paul’s letters are likewise personal. Second Corinthians is intensely so. The question at stake here is the legitimation of an apostle, and not merely any apostle, but the legitimation of Paul as apostle to the Corinthians.<sup>2</sup> Precisely in its particularity, 2 Corinthians speaks to the present, and it does so profoundly. As the Corinthians themselves recognize, the marks of an apostle are the marks of a Christian. Apostolic existence is Christian existence as large-screen video, set before the eyes of the world, the angels, and all human beings (1 Cor 4:9).

Already when Paul wrote our 1 Corinthians, Paul’s legitimacy as apostle was in question within the Corinthian church.<sup>3</sup> The church had divided into factions, each of which promoted the apostolic figure that seemed best to them: “I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I am of Christ” (1 Cor 1:12). The final claim in the list probably should be understood as an

attempt to outdo all of the rest. Every apostle is of Christ, by definition (2 Cor 10:7; cf. 13:3). The claim to be “of Christ” likely signifies a direct, visionary knowledge of the risen Lord, and anticipates the challenges to Paul’s apostolic authority that arose first within the church (2 Cor 1:23-2:11) and then from without (2 Cor 10:1-12:13). It is this situation to which Paul responds in 2 Corinthians. But it was already incipiently present when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, and appears there as the weightiest problem with which Paul had to deal in this troubled church. The first section of the body of 1 Corinthians, with its appeal to “the word of the cross” as the apostolic message (1 Cor 1:18-2:16), is itself a definition of apostolic authority and a defense of the apostolic mission in Corinth. It concludes with a reference to Paul’s dispatching Timothy to Corinth as well as his own subsequent arrival there (1 Cor 4:14-21). This “apostolic parousia” is a usual mark of the ending of the letter-body and the transition to the closing of the letter. While much of 1 Corinthians is yet to follow, the weight that Paul places upon his definition and defense of apostolic ministry shows that it is the fundamental issue at stake already in this letter. Paul likewise interjects a defense of his apostolic calling into his discussion of idol-meats: he cannot appeal to his example in service to the Corinthians, without their understanding the freedom he exercises as apostle in refusing to accept funds from them (1 Cor 9:1-27). More trouble is to follow, but it was already brewing when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.

When Paul writes 2 Corinthians, matters have become much worse. He had made an emergency visit to Corinth, in which an individual within the church had openly resisted his apostolic authority, and had received at least tacit support from the church itself. In the wake of this disaster, Paul wrote a letter to the church “through many tears” that undoubtedly called upon them to confront this offender themselves (2 Cor 1:23-2:11). In the face of the seriousness of this situation, Paul cancelled a promised visit to Corinth, not wanting to bring about another unhappy and unsuccessful confrontation like the one he had just experienced (2 Cor 1:23-2:4). He instead sent Titus as his emissary in an attempt to resolve the situation. In order to communicate his love and concern to them Paul brackets the body of 2 Corinthians with his report of his distress over them as he awaited the report of Titus’s mission and his joy over its success (2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:5-16). Of all the suffering that the apostle has to experience, the burden of the churches is the heaviest of all (2 Cor 11:28-29). The happy end to Titus’s

mission meant that the Corinthian church was reconciled to its apostle, at least temporarily (2 Cor 7:5-16).

In 2 Corinthians, Paul seeks to build upon that success in the face of the fresh challenge that had come from outsiders who had made their way to Corinth and presented apostolic claims. As a prosperous center of travel and trade, Corinth was also a stopping-off point for early Christian missions, as is evident from the factions in Corinth that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 4:15). It is no wonder, then, that travelling preachers found their way there. They seem to have made their way to Corinth after the resolution of the recent crisis, but it is not impossible that they were there already, and were able to establish their claims within the church after the local, Corinthian leader who had offended Paul had been removed. In any case, the relationship between the apostle and the Corinthians remained fragile, despite their recent reconciliation. In the new threat of apostolic claimants, the fundamental issue, the question of the marks of an apostle came to the fore. Who is the true apostle, Paul or one of the intruders? Now Paul himself stands at the center of the conflict. His calling as apostle cannot be separated from his person. The form of Christ's saving presence within the world is being tested in him.

### **THE OPPONENTS OF PAUL IN 2 CORINTHIANS**

We know very little of the theology of these new opponents of Paul at Corinth. As is always the case, we have to read it off of what Paul says about them in the letter. Paul's direct statements about them appear only in 2 Corinthians 10-13. They based their apostolic claims on the performance of wonders, ecstatic visions, and rhetorical powers (2 Cor 10:10; 12:1, 12). They brought to the Corinthians, "another Jesus, another Spirit, another Gospel" (2 Cor 11:4). Yet Paul does not attack any explicit theological assertion on their part. His argument against them is directed against their claim to apostolic authority based on their personal powers and charisma (especially the "fool's speech," 11:22-12:13). It is hardly likely that Paul holds back from challenging a theology that they offered. It is much more likely that they had no developed theology to offer the Corinthians. It is their practical theology, with its implicit assumptions about Christ, the Spirit, and the Gospel that Paul must address. There were parallels to these sorts of figures within the Greco-Roman world of the first century, in both Hellenistic "divine-men" and Jewish exorcists and wonder-workers. As a cultural phenomenon, Paul's

opponents in Corinth were undoubtedly related to them, especially to the latter. But we gain no real knowledge about their message or the problem that Paul addresses in Corinth from this background. In the most important respect, the opponents of Paul in Corinth were unique. They claimed to be apostles of the risen Christ. Their powers were supposed to have been mediated by him. Their words were his words.

Paul's comparison of his ministry with that of Moses in 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 offers no good reason to think that his opponents were Judaizers or that they appealed to Moses and the Law as a basis of their powers. The question of Gentile circumcision arises only once in the Corinthian correspondence, and appears as the counterpart to Paul's urging circumcised Jews not to undergo epispasm (1 Cor 7:18). It is not too surprising that this fractured church displayed tendencies in opposing directions. But where Jews are tempted to abandon their cultural identity, there can hardly be much pressure on Gentiles to become circumcised. At the very beginning of its existence, the church had experienced a violent expulsion from the synagogue (Acts 18:1-17). It is not too likely that it now was ready to return there. Furthermore, the vocabulary of the disputes over circumcision does not appear in 2 Corinthians 3. Paul speaks of "the letter" and "the Spirit" rather than "the Law" and "Christ," and of "the sons of Israel" rather than of "Jews" or "circumcision." He does not appeal to his readers to reject Judaizing nor does he attack his opponents in this chapter. Instead he draws upon Scripture to expose the nature of the apostolic mission and the realities that it entails. By way of contrast, the story of Moses's ministry of the Law becomes a mirror in which the apostolic ministry—the glory of which presently is unseen—becomes visible. Paul likewise connects the Corinthian demand for letters attesting the validity of an apostle to God's written address to Israel (and therewith to all humanity) in the written code of the Law. The purpose and intent of that ministry was to bring death and condemnation, so that Christ might bring life and righteousness. The proof of apostolic ministry does not lie in any letter that Paul might bring. It lies in the Corinthians themselves, and in their faith in Christ (2 Cor 3:3). The whole of 2 Corinthians is thus centered on the legitimation of Paul as apostle to the Corinthians, in the face of the challengers who offer their outward and visible powers (together, most likely, with letters of commendation) as proof of their apostolic authority.

### **THE STRUCTURE AND UNITY OF 2 CORINTHIANS**

We have noted the way in which Paul structures the letter around his grief over the Corinthians and his relief over Titus's fruitful mission there (1:23-2:17; 7:5-16). Chapter 3 begins the body of the letter as a presentation of the nature of the apostolic ministry. Paul then begins to speak about himself directly, first in relationship to God and the message of the Gospel that he bears as an apostle of Christ (4:1-5:10), and then as God's agent with respect to the Corinthians (5:11-21). The body of the letter concludes with a direct appeal to the Corinthians (6:1-7:16). The two final units of the letter serve as the hortatory conclusion to Paul's argument (8:1-9:15; 10:1-13:14).

Paul's call to the Corinthians to complete their promised contribution to the collection for Jerusalem is a practical extension of his appeal to them to recognize him as their apostle (8:1-9:15). He does not seek to bind them to himself, but to Christ and therewith to the other churches, especially Jerusalem (11:2; cf. 1:24). In a tangible way, the collection serves this end, just as their completion of it entails submission to the apostle.

The final unit of the letter, returns to the theme of the legitimation of the apostle, and more precisely, to the legitimation of Paul as the apostle to the Corinthians in the face of the challenge from his opponents (10:1-13:14). Paul has spoken of himself frequently in the body of the letter already. But now his appeal to the Corinthians is much more personal and direct, especially in his "fool's speech," where he ironically commends himself in the terms that the opponents use in their self-commendations (11:22-12:10). The change in tone over against the irenic and conciliatory body of the letter is understandable in more than one respect. It is the minds and hearts of the Corinthians for which Paul battles. It would do very little good to challenge the opponents if the Corinthians are blind to the issues at stake. The body of the letter serves as a preparation for the bold assault on the opponents and equally sharp words he has for the Corinthians in these chapters. Likewise, it makes good sense rhetorically for Paul to capitalize on the recent victory that had been won in Titus's visit to Corinth. At least for the moment, the church had been reconciled to the apostle. The body of the letter concludes with his rejoicing over this happy event, and his expression of confidence in the Corinthians. Nevertheless, there are clear indications that all is not well in the relationship between the apostle and the church, from his explanation for his failure to visit Corinth (1:15-2:4), to his appeal

to them to be reconciled to God—and to him (6:1-7:1; 7:2-4).<sup>4</sup> Paul's tone does not change entirely in 2 Corinthians 10-13, and is in fact correlated to the argument of 2 Corinthians 1-7. Paul opens his argument by appealing to the Corinthians on the basis of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (10:1). His ironic appeal to be bold while he is absent (10:2), together with his following request to speak "as a fool" (11:1, 16), implies the impropriety of his forced "self-commendation" and thus presupposes the argument of the preceding chapters. Even more so, his open appeal to his weakness, which does not appear *expressis verbis* in 2 Corinthians 1-7, serves as an obvious complement to the argument there (11:21, 29-30; 12:5, 9-10; 13:3-4, 9). It may be prompted in part by the charge of his adversaries (10:10), but it also sums up the apostolic existence that Paul describes in the earlier chapters (see esp. 12:9-10). Likewise, and decisively, the argument on the basis of weakness most likely would not be persuasive to a church intent on power. Without the background of the argument of 2 Corinthians 1-7, in which Paul presents the life of an apostle as one of suffering and deliverance, his words in 2 Corinthians 10-13 would likely fall on deaf ears.

### **THE THEOLOGY AND MESSAGE OF 2 CORINTHIANS**

As we have noted, the message of 2 Corinthians cannot be separated from Paul, the messenger. This truth remains to this day. It makes a world of difference that this defense of apostolic ministry comes from the suffering—and delivered—apostle, and not from one of his comfortable opponents. The comfort that the apostle received in his affliction has been passed on through his word to countless others through the centuries, and still comes to us through him even now. In its own way, 2 Corinthians underscores the unique and irreplaceable role of the apostle in interpreting the message of the crucified and risen Jesus to the world. The life of the apostle is the life of the Christian written large. Very few have been called to bear the hardships that Paul bore. But all are called to bear hardship in some measure, and likewise to share in the hardships of others. As the apostle of Christ, in suffering and deliverance, Paul offers true comfort to all of us.

The word that has been placed within the apostle bears profound hermeneutical implications. Paul does not require credentials (2 Cor 3:1-3; 1 Cor 4:1-5). His authentication rests in those to whom he has been sent and in their faith (2 Cor 3:1). The Corinthians are to exercise judgment in a whole

range of matters, and especially with regard to Paul's opponents. In the end, however, they are not in a position to interpret and judge the apostle or the Gospel that he bears. The word and work of God are not subject to human judgments. At the point of the Gospel and God's saving work in Christ, human reasoning must submit. Paul has introduced the Corinthians to this matter already in 1 Corinthians. "The word of the cross" is foolishness to those who are perishing. Only to those who are "being saved"—those who believe—is Christ the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23-25). The Gospel is a "mystery," even in its open proclamation (1 Cor 2:1, 7). The apostle, who bears the Gospel, is therefore likewise inscrutable to human beings who operate with the practical reasoning of human judgment (1 Cor 2:15-16).

Our fundamental problem is that we cannot see or understand ourselves or God rightly. Our salvation entails our coming to the truth about ourselves and about God. It means our coming to confess the painful reality of our blindness and rebellion, and the condemnation and death in which we live. It is this hermeneutical dimension of God's saving work that Paul sets before the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 3. Although he speaks of Christ in this chapter (3:14), he describes salvation primarily in terms of the work of the Spirit, filling in the "christological gap" only in 5:21. This emphasis on the work of the Spirit is bound up with the profoundly *material* hermeneutic that Paul sets forth in the chapter. Our understanding God and ourselves does not take place through our own reason and understanding, or by any bare rules of interpretation. It must be given to us by a word from God, a *material* address to us in our condition of sin and death. God has the first word as well as the last. The ministry of Moses, who delivered the written commands of God ("the letter") was necessary to the ministry of the apostle, through which the Spirit of God is given. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3:6 might well be translated: "The letter kills *and* the Spirit gives life." Life is given to us only through death, righteousness only through condemnation. To our practical reasoning this statement is absurd and foolish, because we can see neither ourselves nor God rightly. That was the case for "the sons of Israel" who were unable to look at Moses' face on account of its glory, and whom Moses prevented from looking upon it by placing a veil over his face (3:7, 13). Only "in Christ" is this divine judgment on the human being done away with, so that we see that "the letter" that brings our death has its end in Christ, in whom the Spirit gives us life. In Christ it is revealed that "the old covenant" has been done away (3:14).

Paul's emphasis throughout this chapter rests on the work of the Spirit within the human heart. We cannot by our own reason and strength come to Christ or know God. Only where the Spirit is present—namely, in Christ, just as once in the tent of meeting—is there freedom (3:16-18). This freedom is a freedom of communication between God and the human being in which we share in the divine glory revealed in the crucified and risen Christ (3:18; 4:6). That glory is God's power revealed in weakness, God's righteousness revealed in sin, life revealed in death itself.

And here again lies the problem between the Corinthians and the apostle. The communication of life within death, power within weakness, wealth within poverty, and so on, is alien to their thinking, as it is to ours as well. As the apostle of Christ, Paul bears the presence of Christ within the world in special measure. That much the Corinthians understand. But they imagine that the presence of the risen Lord brings with it the charisma and power that they find in the other apostolic claimants, and seems to be missing in Paul. The power of Christ should be manifest in the power of his apostle. But they thereby overlook the nature of God's saving work. They strive upwards for power and success, not realizing that God has come down to them to meet them in their misery and distress. It is there, in the midst of death and condemnation, that God has established in Christ communication between himself and the human being: "He made him, who knew no sin to be sin, in order that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21). God made Christ to be our sin in order that we might be a new creation in Christ and find our righteousness in him. It is for this reason that Paul already announces in 1 Corinthians that the Gospel is "the word of the cross" and that he proclaims and will know nothing other than Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:8, 23; 2:2). The risen Lord remains none other than the crucified Jesus. This truth is fundamental to the apostle and his mission: "He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God." Thus Paul is also "weak in him, but lives by the power of God" given to him (2 Cor 3:4). Just as God's power is present in the crucified and risen Jesus, so it is also in the apostle. While Jesus' crucifixion took place at a definite time and location in the past, it also transcends that time and place: the crucified Lord is present in the apostle and also in all believers. Paul's entire message to the Corinthians is bound up with this truth. The sufferings given to him are the sufferings of Christ, just as the comfort given to him comes through Christ (1:5). It is

this very comfort that is communicated through him to others, including the Corinthians, who themselves share in sufferings—if they are indeed Christians (1:6-7). Just as Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross, God leads the apostle to death in a Roman triumph, so that the knowledge of Christ might be manifest everywhere (2:14-17). The treasure of the knowledge of God’s glory in Christ is placed in an earthen vessel in order to manifest the communication that is taking place between God and the apostle (4:7). Paul constantly bears in his body the “deadness of Jesus” in order that the life of Jesus might be manifest in him and effect life in the Corinthians and all others (4:10-12). The apostle lives a life of suffering and deliverance, being thrust into difficulties beyond his powers in order to be delivered by the power of God. In the midst of it all, he believes and therefore speaks (4:13; Ps 116:10). Consequently, although he is poor, he makes many rich (6:10). It is this paradox that is offensive to the Corinthians. God’s saving work in Christ and Christ’s apostle turns their distorted view of the Christian life upside down. That is precisely what is necessary for their salvation.

The false judgment in which the Corinthians remained trapped has at least two dimensions. In the first place, they have lost the horizon of the final judgment and the life to come. For a long time that has been so for them: “Already you have been satisfied, already you have been made rich, without us you have begun to reign as kings!” (1 Cor 4:8). Paul must remind them again in 2 Corinthians that this present body and life are a mere tent and pilgrimage to an eternal house and home, a body and life of a different order, in which the mortal will be “swallowed up by life” (5:4). All earthly deliverance is an anticipation of this final deliverance from death itself (cf. 1:10). What is taking place before their eyes in the life of the apostle is a mere display of what is finally true for all who believe in Jesus — if, in fact, the Corinthians do believe. There will yet be a final judgment before Christ himself (5:10)! If they do not believe, the apostle is merely a portent of their own end, an “aroma from death, unto death” (2:16). The Corinthians have become short-sighted, judging things by the mere appearances and false standards of the present world (5:12, 10:7).

Secondly, in their self-satisfaction and assumed role as judges of the apostle, the Corinthians have turned the gift of salvation into a benefit and possession. They are therefore in danger of cutting themselves off from the salvation that is present in the crucified and risen Jesus, and the communication with

God established there: “Test yourselves, if you are in faith!” (13:5). Just as Paul earlier had to remind the Corinthians that the “manifestations of the Spirit” (πνευματικά) are “spiritual gifts” (χαρίσματα), and not mere personal powers (1 Cor 12:1-11), so in 2 Corinthians he repeatedly reminds them that their salvation is bound up with him and the message that he bears as their apostle. He is their boast, just as they are his in the day of the Lord (1:14). It is as death is at work in Paul that life is at work in the Corinthians (4:12). They are to open their hearts wide to him, just as he has done so to them (6:11-13). Their salvation rests in the communication with God, in petition, lament, thanksgiving, and confession that has been established by the Gospel that the apostle bears. It remains a gift that is present in their reception of the apostle and his message.

As an apostle, Paul has been made a “minister” (διάκονος) of the new covenant (3:6) and given the “ministry” (διακονία) of the Spirit (3:8). While interpreters have tended to emphasize “service” in their interpretation of these terms, it is the basic idea of “agency,” or “acting on behalf of another” that lies behind the language.<sup>5</sup> As Paul earlier informs the Corinthians, he is “an assistant of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1). He is not going to be judged finally by the Corinthians, but by the Lord. Moreover, he is not going to be judged for his gifts, but whether or not he has been faithful in his stewardship (1 Cor 4:2). The Corinthians have misunderstood the nature of an apostle entirely. They are looking for giftedness: powerful rhetoric, charisma, deeds of power. To be sure, the “signs of an apostle” have been performed through Paul among the Corinthians: “both signs and wonders, and deeds of power,” but these have taken place “in all perseverance,” namely, in suffering and deliverance (12:12). In place of the genius and hero that the Corinthians were seeking, Christ sent them Paul, the suffering apostle, in whom he himself is present as the crucified and risen Lord (13:3). Paul speaks to the Corinthians in the presence of God (2:17). They are not the final audience and judge. God himself is both.<sup>6</sup> They themselves will be called to account for their reception or rejection of the apostle. Yet the apostle’s role as an agent of Christ does not mean that he sets himself above those to whom he is sent. Just the opposite. He will not lord over the Corinthians: in their faith, they stand and thus are his equals (1:24). In fact, he is beneath them: his proclamation includes not only Jesus as Lord, but himself as their “servant” on account of Jesus (4:6). It is the apostolic pretenders who operate otherwise, and abuse the Corinthians

(11:20-21). Paul's apostolic ministry defines the nature and form of all Christian ministry. It liberates all those called to ministry from introspection concerning their weaknesses or fear of human judgments. It teaches us the fear of God.

As apostle to the Corinthians, Paul teaches them and through them all of us a basic truth of the Christian life. It is fundamentally passive. Contrary to what the Corinthians suspect in his cancellation of his promised visit, Paul has purposes, makes plans, and actively engages in his mission. Yet his purposes, plans, and actions are not final. In his weaknesses, he is being led by God in God's triumph in Christ, so that apart from and beyond his work, God is performing his work in and through him (2:14-17). As we have noted, his life is one of difficulty and deliverance. Precisely in the midst of the direst difficulties he speaks, because he has been given the Spirit of faith (4:13). This speaking in the midst of affliction is the most important ministry of all, because it is intended to reach the Corinthians and to reach us at the point of our misery, where God has deigned to meet us in Christ. Paul's life is not a purpose-driven life, but a God-driven life. That makes all the difference in the world, to a world that lives under the power of sin and death. It is reported that Karl Barth, when asked to summarize his massive theological writings in a word responded, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so!" If we were to summarize the whole of Paul's message in 2 Corinthians in a word, we might take up the second line of that hymn, "Little ones to him belong, they are weak, but he is strong." In essence, those are the words of the crucified and risen Lord to his suffering apostle: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (12:9). As the Corinthians both suspected and feared, these words apply not only to the apostle, but to all Christians. They run counter to our imagination and desires. But they are the essence of our life as Christians.

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Beker, *The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul's Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Käsemann's interpretation of the final chapters applies to the letter as a whole. See Ernst Käsemann, *Die Legitimität des Apostels: Eine Untersuchung zu II Korinther 10-13* (Reihe Libelli 33; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964).

<sup>3</sup> First Corinthians was not his first letter to Corinth, of course (see 1 Cor 5:9).

<sup>4</sup> The appeal to the Corinthians to separate themselves from unbelievers, which appears here, is most likely directed to their relationship with the apostolic claimants (6:14-18).

<sup>5</sup> See J. N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Resources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion of a devotional address in S. Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing* (trans. and introduced by D. V. Steere; New York: Harper and Row, 1948), 181.



# The Glory of God in 2 Corinthians

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I cannot expect to understand the mysteries of God ... If I understood God, He could not be the true God. A doctrine which I cannot fully grasp is a Truth of God which is intended to grasp me. When I cannot climb, I kneel. Where I cannot build an observatory, I set up an altar. A great stone which I cannot lift serves me for a pillar, upon which I pour the oil of gratitude and adore the Lord my God. How idle it is to dream of our ever running parallel in understanding with the infinite God! His knowledge is too wonderful for us. It is so high—we cannot attain to it.<sup>2</sup>

We can study nothing as monumental or overwhelming as our glorious God. Yet through creation, humanity, his Word, and Jesus himself, God has graciously revealed himself—and his glory—to us. Although God has not spoken

exhaustively, he has spoken truly and sufficiently to us as his image-bearers. So while the depths of God and his glory will remain out of our reach, by God's grace and through his revelation we can and do know in part.

One particularly helpful glimpse into God's glory is 2 Corinthians, which contains twenty-one references to the term (counting both nominal and verbal forms; see 2 Cor 1:20; 3:7 (x2), 8, 9 (x2), 10 (x3), 11 (x2), 18 (x3); 4:4, 6, 15, 17; 6:8; 8:19, 23). Glory is a vital theme in 2 Corinthians,<sup>3</sup> pulling together the letter in particular ways. First, 2 Corinthians 3:1–4:6 stands as a key to the book, and “glory” is central to that passage. Second, glory relates to one of the main threads throughout the book—the contrast between Paul's boasts and commendations on the basis of the gospel, on the one hand, and the super-apostles' claims based on their own personality, on the other. Paul boasts, commends, and is commended—he gives and receives glory—on the basis of the gospel, not on the basis of his own roles, gifts, or accomplishments.<sup>4</sup> Third, the uses of glory in 1:20; 4:15, 17; and 8:19, 23 culminate Paul's statements about the purpose of ministry—to glorify God in Christ. Because much of the book centers on the legitimacy and purpose of Paul's ministry, and since God's glory stands as his ministry's ultimate purpose, glory plays an important role in the letter's argument.

This essay traces Paul's teachings about glory in 2 Corinthians: first, on the basis of explicit uses of the term, and second, on thematic elements related to it. The explicit uses are treated under three broad categories: the glory of God (glory not ascribed, or without any reference to a creature giving it to him), the glory of God's people, and glory to God (glory ascribed, or with reference to creaturely worship). Along the way we will see the meaning(s) of glory in 2 Corinthians and that glory serves as an important thematic and theological thread tying the book together.

## **PAUL'S USE OF THE TERM “GLORY”**

### ***The Glory of God***

Explicit reference to the glory of God, without a reference to a creature giving it to him, is found clustered in the middle of 2 Corinthians—3:7–18—and its corollary arguments in 4:1–18. This portion of the letter is one of the main hinges of Paul's argument, weaving together the two overarching concerns of the epistle, namely, the veracity of the gospel and the validity of his

apostleship.<sup>5</sup> While the issues surrounding this passage are complex,<sup>6</sup> we can say with relative certainty that Paul wants to show the glory of the new covenant superseding that of the old covenant, meaning that his ministry is valid while his opponents' are not.<sup>7</sup> In making that contrast, Paul compares the (lesser) glory of the old covenant and the ministry of Moses with the (greater) glory of the new covenant and the ministry of the Spirit (vv. 7–11). The vast majority of the references to “glory” in this section occur here, and each mentions God’s glory being given to him by a creature.

The references to God’s glory apart from any mention of a creature giving it to him come later, first in the climax of the covenantal contrast in 3:18, and then in the subsequent argument of 4:1–6. In concluding the first part of his argument, Paul says that members of the new covenant are, by the Spirit’s power in Christ, able to behold “the glory of the Lord,” and thereby are changed “into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (v. 18). We will deal with the latter phrase in the section below, but for now it is enough to say that the phrases “glory of the Lord” (*doxan kuriou*) and “the same image” (*tēn autēn eikona*) are synonymous.<sup>8</sup> The glory of God in the ministry of the new covenant, and the glory that believers are being changed into, is the glory of Jesus Christ.

The other two references to God’s glory apart from any mention of him receiving it occur in the next section of this passage, 4:1–6. Here Paul refers to the good news as “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (v. 4). Two verses later he again discusses conversion, describing it as coming to the “knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6). Both of these references connect the gospel and the incarnation of the Son to the glory of God. For Paul, God’s glory is seen in Christ, specifically in his work of salvation in his life, death, and resurrection for both Jew and Gentile—the content of the gospel and apostolic proclamation.<sup>9</sup> Paul here reveals a revelatory dimension to God’s glory: it is ultimately seen through the incarnate Christ and his saving work. Indeed, seeing the Father’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ is the content of the good news. Or, as Richard Gaffin puts it, “2 Corinthians 4:4–6 affirms that divine glory has found its focused manifestation and ... its full and final manifestation in Jesus Christ as Lord. Further, the glory-manifestation that Christ is specifies the content of Paul’s gospel.”<sup>10</sup>

### ***The Glory of God's People***

Explicit reference to creaturely glory without corresponding reference to a giver of that glory is again clustered in 3:7–4:18. There is also a clear mention in 8:23. First, as we have already noted, Paul shows that the glory of the new covenant is such that it exceedingly surpasses the glory of the old covenant (v. 10).<sup>11</sup> In chapter 4, Paul uses the term “glory” in 4:4, 6, 15, 17, and 18. Here we are concerned primarily with the latter two references, but first note Paul’s discussion of “treasure in jars of clay” beginning in 4:7. While there is no mention in these verses of the term “glory,” the treasure is likely “the gospel of the glory of Christ” or the “glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup> Paul is conveying a point he will repeat in 2 Corinthians: God’s power is seen through human weakness.

Paul then lays out this theology of weakness, making it explicit in 4:17, where he says that he, the apostles, and those who preach the gospel experience momentary affliction in preparation for “an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”<sup>13</sup> The renewal of the inner self in v. 16 and the eternal, unseen things in v. 18 refer to the glorification of believers at Christ’s return (e.g., 5:1–11; Rom 8:18–30; 1 John 3:2).<sup>14</sup> Such future glory fosters present hope, especially for those suffering for the gospel. Notice again that glory, in this case the future glorified state of believers, is still connected both to the preaching of the gospel and to Christ.

The other mention of someone’s glory besides God’s occurs in 8:23, where Paul says that “our brothers are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.” Murray Harris argues rightly that the last phrase is a reference to Titus and the other two unnamed messengers<sup>15</sup> commended to the Corinthian church in 8:16–24.<sup>16</sup> This means the phrase’s referent is to the messengers’ work of gospel ministry; it is this ministry of the new covenant that is the glory of Christ.

One other sense in which we see Paul, the apostles, and the churches having glory or being glorified is through the book’s refrain of boasting in (1:14; 5:12; 7:14–16; 10:7–12:21) or being commended by (3:16; 5:12; 6:3–13; 8:18) the Lord and his gospel rather than in or by human hands. While there is little mention of glory in these contexts,<sup>17</sup> it is not hard to see the relationship between the concepts.<sup>18</sup> George Guthrie is among those who tie them explicitly together, using the corresponding contrast of honor/shame, noting that the Corinthian culture and the larger Greco-Roman world were

inordinately occupied with social status, social acknowledgement, and their position.<sup>19</sup> For Paul, defending his apostleship to the Corinthians would have fallen into this realm of concern, but Paul does so with a twist—by boasting in his weaknesses and commending himself on the basis of his afflictions.<sup>20</sup> The contexts of such statements, and in particular those of 4:7–18 and 10:7–12:21, reveal why: Paul’s boasting is in God’s power and not his own. In both of these passages, Paul links his afflictions to God’s power in the midst of his weakness.

Further, if we take Martin’s point that the verb for “rest” in 12:10—*episkēnōsēi*—is likely a reference to the “Hebrew concept concerning the presence of God as it was found in the Jewish Tabernacle and first Temple,” i.e., the *shekinah* glory,<sup>21</sup> then we have a direct link between the boasting of Paul and God’s glory. That link is further strengthened by Jason Hood’s argument that the “third heaven” language in 12:2ff. is reminiscent of the “common triadic sanctuary arrangements on earth (the Garden-Eden-outermost uninhabited land trio ... reflected in Sinai, the tabernacle, and the Jerusalem temple).”<sup>22</sup> In other words, Paul in 12:1–6 recounts an experience of being taken to a place reminiscent of, or perhaps synonymous with, the Garden and the Holy of Holies, and in 12:7–10 he refers to the tabernacle-ing presence of God resting on him in his weakness. All of 12:1–10 is thus seen through a tabernacle lens, so to speak, and therefore is flush with the presence of God’s glory, both literarily and conceptually. In seeing Paul’s weakness, then, we see God’s power, and thus his glory.<sup>23</sup> Because he acknowledges his own weakness, fragility, and frailty, this “makes Paul most translucent so that one can see the source of the real power and light.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, God’s glory shines through Paul when he acknowledges, boasts about, and commends himself because of his own weakness (see likewise the “treasure in jars of clay” of 4:7). Further, Paul’s weakness is patterned after and participates in Christ’s “strength through weakness,” and so is a display of Christ *and* of his glorious power.<sup>25</sup>

The glory of God in 2 Corinthians, then, is “not just referring to a radiance or a shining appearance but to the very manifestation on earth of the presence of God,”<sup>26</sup> especially in Jesus, and therefore is the demonstration of who he is and what he has done, to the praise of his name; likewise Paul, the apostles, and the churches can boast and be commended because of who they are and what they do. The key difference, though, is that God is who he is because

he is I AM; Paul, the apostles, and the church, on the other hand, are who they are because of the grace of God through the gospel of the Lord Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup> And this is exactly Paul's point; he and his brothers and sisters in Christ can boast, but only in Christ and his saving work. Once again we see that same threefold thread—glory, Christ, and the gospel—running through important themes, boasting and commendation.

### ***Glory to God***

Finally, some passages speak of Paul, the apostles, the church, and/or events giving glory to God. These include 1:20; 4:15; 8:19; 9:13–14; and possibly 2:14–17. In each case what brings God glory is the ministry of the gospel. In 1:20 and 4:15, believing and expressing thanks for<sup>28</sup> the gospel message brings God glory. In 8:19 and 9:13–14, the ministry of the gospel in both proclamation and service brings God glory. Second Corinthians 9:13–14 is particularly instructive in this regard, since *epi tē hupotagei* can and should probably be taken as a subjective genitive to *tēs homologias humōn*.<sup>29</sup> The ESV translates it well: “because of your submission which comes from your confession.” In other words, their confession—“Jesus is Lord”—results in their submission, to the ministry of service expressed in their gospel-motivated giving. The gospel that redeems them also motivates them for service, to the glory of God. Finally, in the “fragrance” metaphor of 2:14–17, whatever we conclude about the background issues,<sup>30</sup> those being led by Christ are at the same time proclaiming him and his work. Similar to 4:15, as the gospel is proclaimed, who God is in Christ is made known; in other words, God is glorified.<sup>31</sup>

What we see again, then, is that glory, gospel, and Christ are tied together. The gospel is tied explicitly to the testimony about Jesus Christ so that we can once again say that the threefold cord of God's glory seen in the face of Jesus Christ and particularly in his salvific work—the gospel—is at play in this third set of passages.

### ***Synthesis: The Meaning(s) of Glory in 2 Corinthians***

The previous survey not only shows the centrality of glory to the argument of 2 Corinthians, but also reveals glory used in various ways and with multiple shades of meaning:<sup>32</sup>

- The glory of God as the ultimate purpose or result of God being exalted, worshiped, thanked, or praised (1:20; 4:15; 8:19; 9:12–15).

- The glory of God as the splendid display of God's presence (3:7–18).
- The glory of God as Christ's transformative power to change believers increasingly into conformity to him (3:17–18).
- Glory as the image of God (cf., Christ, the image of God, in 4:4) into which believers are gradually transformed (3:17–18).
- The glory of Christ as the content/focal point of the gospel itself (4:4).
- The glory of God as the covenantal, saving presence of God revealed in the person of Jesus (4:6).
- Glory as the prepared, eternal, and weighty blessings of the age to come, experienced partially now, experienced fully and bodily at the consummation, and whose value is so significant that extreme suffering seems light and momentary by comparison (4:17–5:10).
- Glory as honor, in contrast to shame (6:8).
- The glory of Christ as applied to the messengers of the churches, the meaning of which is ambiguous. The sense may be that those who come bearing the presence of Christ honor Christ, or more likely, faithfully proclaim the gospel of the glory of Christ (8:23).

### **THEMES RELATED TO PAUL'S USE OF "GLORY"**

Having surveyed and defined Paul's use of the term "glory" in 2 Corinthians, what are its thematic and theological implications? Here we argue that in 2 Corinthians Paul relates the glory of God to several key themes, many of which are intricately interrelated: Trinity, revelation, Christ, gospel, new covenant, salvation, Spirit, eschatology, boasting, suffering, and ministry. Each relationship sheds light on Paul's understanding of glory and his overall message to the Corinthians.

#### ***Glory and the Trinity***

First, Paul shows that glory is thoroughly Trinitarian, both ontologically and economically. Ontologically, all three persons of the Trinity share in the same divine essence and in the glory that shines from that essence. Without hesitation, Paul shifts from speaking of the "glory of God" (e.g., 1:20) to the "glory of Christ" (8:23), and from the glory of "the ministry of the Spirit" (3:8) to "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6). All three persons, as the one God, are intrinsically and extrinsically glorious

(how glory particularly relates to Christ and the Spirit will be developed below as separate themes).

Economically, Paul shows how the Son fulfills all the covenant promises of God, who establishes, anoints, and seals believers with the Spirit, the down payment of the future inheritance to come (1:18-22). The Spirit also points to the Son in the ministry of the new covenant (3:7-18) and when God is seen “in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6).

### ***Glory and Revelation***

Second, Paul directly links the revelation of God to glory. The revelation of God’s glory in 2 Corinthians is predominantly Christological. All the promises of God find their “Yes” in Christ (1:18-22). God revealed his presence in splendor and brilliance to Moses, and now God has revealed his presence even more fully and marvelously in Jesus (3:7-18). Further, Paul speaks of “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,” Christ as “the image of God” (4:4), and salvation/new creation as “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6). In each case, Paul crystallizes the content of revelation—God’s glory (3:1-4:18). And in each case, it is the Son who shows us the Father.

Paul also teaches that revelation is progressive; revelation is genuine in the old covenant but even fuller in the new (also note 1:20: “All the promises of God find their ‘Yes’” in Christ). Mikko Sivonen perceptively recognizes both how Paul links revelation to glory and how the progressive revelation ultimately culminates in Christ:

God’s revelation both in letter and stone, in the manifestation of the Law, and in the ministry of Spirit is described as δόξα for Paul. Indeed the common denominator to both is δόξα ... [T]he revelation of God at the face of Moses as δόξα is inferior to the ministry of the Spirit and temporary compared to the permanency of the ministry of Spirit of δόξα. Both glories are revelations, and both revelations are glories. Therefore, they are not as much antithetical as they are progressive and advancing.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout 2 Corinthians Paul thus highlights that divine revelation of glory is decidedly and permanently Christological, as John Owen detects:

All communications from the divine being and infinite fullness in heaven to glorified saints are in and through Christ Jesus. He shall forever be the medium of communication between God and the church, even in glory. All things being gathered into one head in him, even things in heaven, and things in earth—that head being in immediate dependence on God—this order shall never be dissolved (Eph. 1:10,11; 1 Cor. 3:23). And on these communications from God through Christ depends entirely our continuance in a state of blessedness and glory. We shall no more be self-subsistent in glory than we are in nature or grace.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Glory and Christ***

Third, Paul relates the glory of God to Christ. In 2 Corinthians Paul portrays Christ in lofty terms. He is the preexistent and incarnate redeemer who is the basis for and the example of generosity: “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (8:9). Jesus is the sinless substitute who “knew no sin” and yet became sin so that everyone in Christ might become the righteousness of God (5:21). Jesus is meek and gentle, the example for genuine ministry (10:1). Jesus is the unique Son of God (1:3–5; 11:31), and as such is the fulfillment of all God’s promises (1:18–22). Jesus is Lord (3:16–18; 4:5) and thus assumes “the role of ‘the Lord’ in the Old Testament narrative.”<sup>35</sup>

Jesus, the preexistent, sinless, unique Son of God and Lord, is also directly identified with the glory of the Lord. Indeed, believers behold the glory of Christ and are being “transformed into the glory that is Christ’s” (3:18).<sup>36</sup> Paul also identifies glory with Christ when he refers to “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (4:4), Christ as “the image of God” (4:4), and “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6). From these passages, Owen concludes, “In his incarnation he becomes the representative image of God to the church (2 Cor. 4:6); without whom our understanding can make no such approach unto the divine excellencies but that God continues to be to us what he is in himself—the “invisible God.” In the face of Jesus Christ we see his glory.”<sup>37</sup> As Son and Lord, Jesus inherently possesses divine glory and is “the true expression of God the Father’s glory and the true bearer of the divine image.”<sup>38</sup>

### ***Glory and the Gospel***

Fourth, and as we have noted throughout, Paul relates the glory of God to the gospel. With respect to apostleship, those commissioned by Christ through the power of the gospel, not through their own self-effort or praise, are “messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ” (8:23). With respect to the message of the gospel, over and over again Paul proclaims the power of God, not man, in the face of weakness (e.g., 12:9–10).<sup>39</sup> Those who recognize their own weakness and Christ’s sovereignty are actually the strong, the ones on whom God’s power truly rests. With respect to gospel ministry, Paul underlines that ministry grounded on self-praise, presumptuous boasting, or self-glorification is not authentic ministry.

In 2 Corinthians true ministers of the glorious new covenant serve because of the gospel they genuinely believe. True ministers help those who are weak just as they are; find God’s strength through weakness; discover God’s grace is sufficient for life and ministry. And they do it all for the glory of God and the good of the church. In each of these—apostleship, message, ministry—we see a connection between what God gives to us in the gospel, what he does in us through the gospel, what he does through us as ambassadors of the gospel, and how he is glorified by us in that gospel service. In other words, God is glorified through redeeming us, commissioning us, and using us to serve others—all through the gospel.

### ***Glory and the New Covenant***

Fifth, and integrally related to the gospel, the new covenant is also directly linked with the glory of God. Since the exegetical section previously addressed this and since George Guthrie’s solid essay, “*Καταργέω* and the People of the Shining Face (2 Corinthians 3:7-18),” addresses the subject in this *SBJT* volume, suffice it to say here that the new covenant builds upon the old covenant, surpasses the old covenant, testifies to God’s faithfulness, culminates in Christ, is effected by the Spirit, fosters boldness, is permanent, is characterized by life, features God’s glory, removes the veil, brings freedom, and enables believers to behold the glory of the Lord and be transformed into Christ’s glory-image (1:20–23; 3:7–18).

### ***Glory and Salvation***

Sixth, Paul relates glory to salvation. Much of how glory relates to salvation is already clear from the previous treatments of glory and Christ, the gospel,

and the new covenant. It is important to point out, however, how Paul's view of Christ and his glory drives his view of salvation in Christ. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul directly links the two, as Fee clarifies: "This transitory glory has been replaced in the new covenant by a much greater glory, effected by Christ and made effective through the Spirit, so that believers, as they behold Christ by the Spirit, are themselves transformed into the glory that is Christ's."<sup>40</sup> Thus, salvation is grounded on the person and work of Christ (see also 5:14–21). Salvation is applied through the work of the Spirit. And salvation is pictured as a transformation, particularly a transformation into Christ's unfading glory.<sup>41</sup> This transformation is already and not yet, present and future. In Christ and through the Spirit, believers have already partially been changed into Christ's glory. Believers are also presently characterized by faith, and apparently they are ever-increasingly being changed into his glory (3:18; 4:16; Rom 12:2). And one day believers will be completely transformed by his glory and into his glory, be "in his presence," and receive a glorious heavenly body (3:18; 4:14; 5:1–11; cf. Rom 8:18–30; 1 Cor 15:35–49; Phil 3:20–21).<sup>42</sup>

Further, according to 2 Corinthians 4:4–6, the bearer of the divine glory is himself the image of God. Paul here links the glory of God with the image of God in the person of Christ. Astonishingly, Paul likewise links the glory of God with the image of God for everyone in Christ. Upon that basis, Paul likens salvation to restoration, even a new creation, in which the God who creates and summons light to emerge also shines in the hearts of believers "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6; cf. 5:14–21). In Christ believers are therefore "being re-created into the image of God as they by the Spirit behold the One who is himself the perfect bearer of the divine image, whose glory is seen in Christ's face."<sup>43</sup> While Paul does not detail the nature of this glory, it is related to the image of God, as John Calvin notes in his comments on 2 Corinthians 3:18:

Observe, that the design of the gospel is this—that the image of God, which had been effaced by sin, may be stamped anew upon us, and that the advancement of this restoration may be continually going forward in us during our whole life, because God makes his glory shine forth in us by little and little.<sup>44</sup>

Thus salvation is likened to transformation by Christ's glory into glory

from one degree of glory to another. Salvation is also being conformed to Christ, the image of God, and is therefore a restoration, leading believers to increasingly become what they were always created to be (see also Gen 1:26–28; Rom 1:18–21; 3:23; 8:28–30; Col 3:9–10).<sup>45</sup>

### ***Glory and the Spirit***

Seventh, and intricately related to glory and salvation, is Paul's link between glory and the Spirit. After explaining that Christ is the fulfillment of all God's covenant promises and that this redounds to God's glory, Paul stresses that God establishes, anoints,<sup>46</sup> and seals believers in Christ, giving his Spirit to them as a guarantee (1:18–22). Similarly, Paul later shows how God will provide a glorified, heavenly body for all believers, and again highlights the Spirit as a guarantee (5:5). In both cases, the Spirit's work is eschatological and tied to glory. The Spirit is God's eschatological down payment to believers, as the real and first portion of what is to come (full glorification at the consummation) and the guarantee of that certain future (see also 1 Cor 15:42–49 for more on how our bodies are "spiritual," existing in a mode characterized by the eschatological Spirit).<sup>47</sup> In other words, the future, which is characterized by glory, is here and certain by the Spirit's presence. Therefore, believers experience glory already in part now and in fullness later at the consummation—all through the Spirit, as Michael Horton observes:

Through the Spirit, all that is done by Christ for us, outside of us and in the past, is received and made fruitful within us in the present. In this way, the power that is constitutive of the consummation (the age to come) is already at work now in the world. Through the Spirit's agency, not only is Christ's past work applied to us but his present status of glory in glory penetrates our own existence in a semi-realized manner. The Spirit's work is what connects us here and now to Christ's past, present, and future. . . . [T]he Spirit shapes creaturely reality according to the archetypal image of the Son.<sup>48</sup>

Paul also links glory and the Spirit in 3:1–18. As Paul contrasts the ministries of the old and new covenants, he contrasts that "of the letter" with that "of the Spirit": "The letter kills, the Spirit gives life" (3:6). He also ties the new covenant to the Spirit in verse 8: "Will not the ministry of the Spirit have even

more glory?” Paul then points to the Spirit as the source of a new covenant believer’s freedom, from the removal of the veil and for boldness to enter God’s presence, behold his glory face to face, and be transformed into the glory-image of Christ (3:15–18).<sup>49</sup> Sinclair Ferguson explains:

In Scripture, image and glory are interrelated ideas. As the image of God, man was created to reflect, express and participate in the glory of God, in miniature, creaturely form. Restoration to this is effected through the Spirit’s work of sanctification, in which he takes those who have distorted God’s image in the shame of sin, and transforms them into those who bear that image in glory.

The mark we were created to reach, but have missed, was glory. We have sinned and failed to attain that destiny. Against this background, the task of the Spirit may be stated simply: to bring us to glory, to create glory within us, and to glorify us together with Christ. The startling significance of this might be plainer if we expressed it thus: the Spirit is given to glorify us; not just to “add” glory as a crown to what we are, but actually to transform the very constitution of our being so that we become glorious. In the New Testament, this glorification is seen to begin already in the present order, in believers. Through the Spirit they are already being changed from glory to glory, as they gaze on/reflect the face of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:17–18). But the consummation of this glorification awaits the eschaton and the Spirit’s ministry in the resurrection. Here, too, the pattern of his working is: as in Christ, so in believers and, by implication, in the universe.

The image and image-bearers are one in Spirit to the end, so that when Christ appears in glory image-bearers are one with him in that glory (Col. 3:4). We are raised in Christ, with Christ, by Christ, to be like Christ.<sup>50</sup>

The Spirit’s work of sharing God’s glory with us does not elevate us beyond our humanity or our creaturely nature, but actually enables us to live in full humanness as image-bearers of God.

### ***Glory and Eschatology***

Eighth, and as should be evident in the preceding themes, Paul links glory and eschatology. The themes of revelation, Christ, gospel, and the new covenant are each eschatological, as Christ comes as the fulfillment of all the

promises of God, bears the new covenant, and brings the new age with his arrival and saving work (1:18–22; 3:1–4:6). Salvation is eschatological as believers are presently experiencing the glory-transformation of the end of the age and will receive the glorious, heavenly body at the consummation (3:15–5:10). The Spirit is also eschatological, as he is God’s down payment to believers, the firstfruits and the guarantee of their transformation to the glory-image of Christ (1:20–23; 3:15–5:10).

### ***Glory and Boasting***

Ninth, Paul relates the glory of God to boasting as he contrasts appropriate boasting (and commending of himself, the apostles, and the churches) with that of his opponents, the so-called super-apostles. For Paul and godly ministers, boasting and commending are based only on the gospel; for Paul’s opponents, boasting and commending are also based on their own perceived merit. D. A. Carson captures it well:

Paul is prepared to boast what God has done for him (Gal. 6:14) in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and what God has done through him (Rom. 15:18–19; cf. Acts 14:27) by the Spirit in his apostolic ministry; but he is not prepared to boast about talent, wealth, power, wisdom, eloquence, and the like. After all, what do we have but what we have received (1 Cor. 4:7)?<sup>51</sup>

That is why Paul stresses the gospel of the glory of Christ is communicated through weak messengers (as we will see below). The treasure of the gospel is carried by jars of clay “to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (4:7–12). As such, all boasting must be “in the Lord,” the only one worthy of glory (10:17–18).

### ***Glory and Suffering***

Tenth, Paul links glory and suffering as he contrasts the suffering, weakness, and humiliation of this life with the glory that awaits when Christ returns and changes his people through his Spirit (3:18; 4:16–18). What is good, true, beautiful, and eternal is the gospel of the glory of Christ. And what promotes the gospel of the glory of Christ is not human strength, vigor, or talent. To the contrary, death had to be at work in Paul before he could manifest the life of Christ in a way that served others (4:7–12). Suffering

for the sake of Christ and the churches was counted as light and momentary when Paul viewed it in light of the incomparable and eternal weight of glory he would receive (4:16–18). Note the contrasts: suffering is momentary; glory is eternal. Suffering is light; glory is weighty.<sup>52</sup> No wonder the apostle could exclaim: “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (12:9–10).

### ***Glory and Ministry***

Finally, Paul relates his motives of ministry: the glory of God as the ultimate purpose of all things and his ministry for the good of the church. God’s glory as Paul’s ultimate purpose of ministry is clear throughout. The covenant promises are in Christ, and believers “Amen” them for God’s glory (1:20). Paul ministers so that God’s grace extends to more and more people, which increases thanksgiving for God’s glory (4:15). Paul’s central aim is “to please him” (5:9). Paul is committed to the collection of the offering for God’s glory (8:19). And Paul expects those receiving the offering ultimately to offer thanksgiving and glory to God (9:12–15).<sup>53</sup>

Yet in these very passages, and in others, Paul speaks of another central purpose: his ministry is for the sake of the church. Indeed, for Paul the two purposes, God’s glory and the church’s good, are united. After all, the church is the new temple, the very dwelling place of the living and holy God (6:14–7:1). Paul proclaims “Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (4:5). For Paul, serving the church is for the sake of, and thus the glory of, Jesus. Revealing his pastoral burden, Paul declares, “Death is at work in us, but life in you” (4:12). He continues: the suffering “is all for your sake,” so that God’s grace keeps extending to more and more people, all “to the glory of God” (4:15). Paul invests himself in the collection for the poor because it supplies the needs of the saints, overflowing into thanksgiving to God and leading them to glorify God for the church’s generosity (9:12–15). In each case, Paul’s motives for ministry are dual, though uneven: to give of himself for the good of the church, ultimately for the glory of God.

Further, Paul often highlights the God-centered and God-glorifying process of ministry. Paul teaches that the God of all comfort “comforts us” (Paul and the other ministers) in “all our affliction” (Paul and the other

ministers), that “we may be able to comfort” others “with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (1:3–7). So the God of comfort comforts Paul, and the God of comfort comforts others through Paul’s comfort. Paul also clarifies that God gives light and life through the gospel of the glory of Christ, Paul and the others are given over to death for Jesus’s sake, and God is giving life to others through death’s being at work in them (4:1–18). Paul likewise urges that in Christ, God produces the new creation and reconciles believers to himself, entrusts them with the message of reconciliation, sends them as his ambassadors, and through it all makes his appeal through them to others: be reconciled to God (5:16–21). Paul also shows that the God of comfort gives comfort through his people. He recalls how we received comfort through Titus, who likewise received comfort through the Corinthian church (7:6–7). Paul similarly celebrates God’s grace given among the churches of Macedonia, who despite their extreme poverty overflowed with generosity, giving to the Lord, to Paul and his leaders, and through them to others, all to the thanksgiving and glory of God (ch 8–9).<sup>54</sup> Paul then marvels that the God of grace and power chooses to show his grace as sufficient in Paul’s weakness, leading him to boast in his weakness and become strong in God’s power resting upon him (12:9–10).

In each example—comfort, suffering, reconciliation, giving, and weakness—God is the beginning, middle, and end of all authentic ministry. God gives; we receive. God initiates and gives to us; we receive from God and serve others through what we have received. God initiates and gives to others; they receive from God and serve us through what they have received. Throughout it all, we are blessed, others are blessed, and the inherently glorious God displays his glory and is glorified.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt wrote the bulk of the exegetical section, and Chris wrote most of the theological section.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Hairs of Your Head Numbered,” sermon on Matthew 10:30 (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34; London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1888): sermon number 2005.

<sup>3</sup> We will not address the issue of 2 Corinthians’ structure and unity. We see the book as a coherent whole written by the same author, Paul, and that as a coherent whole we may examine a particular theme of the book in a unified manner. For a detailed examination of the book’s structure and unity, see George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 23–51.

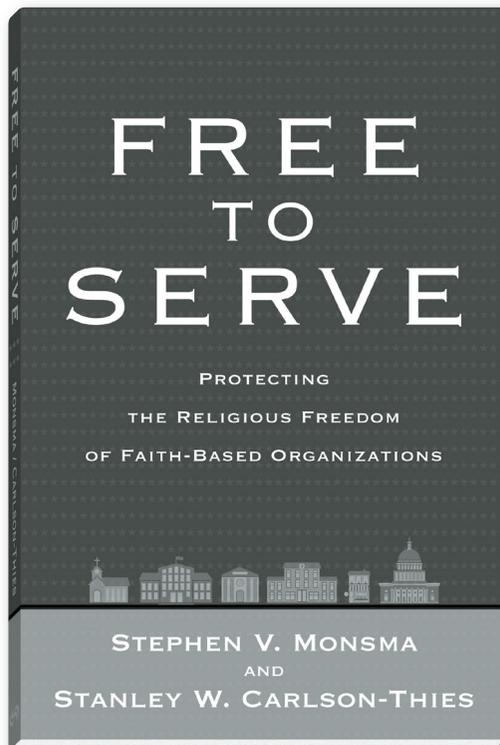
<sup>4</sup> On the rhetorical style of the letter and its use in defending Paul’s apostleship, see Linda L. Belleville, “A Letter of Apologetic Self-Commendation: 2 Cor. 1:8–7:16,” *NovT* 31.2 (1989): 142–63.

- <sup>5</sup> Or as Hafemann puts it, “Within [2:14–7:16] it has long been recognized that 2:14–3:18 is the theological heart of the epistle, providing the framework for understanding the rest of Paul’s discussion in chapters 4–9, and perhaps also chapters 10–13.” Scott Hafemann, “Paul’s Use of the Old Testament in 2 Corinthians,” *Int* 52.3 (1998): 246. See also idem, “The Comfort and Power of the Gospel: The Argument of 2 Corinthians 1–3,” *RevExp* 86 (1989): 325–44.
- <sup>6</sup> See Murray J. Harris, *2 Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 275–320, for a summary of the issues at hand. See also Hafemann, “The Glory and Veil of Moses in 2 Cor 3:7–14: An Example of Paul’s Contextual Exegesis of the OT; A Proposal,” *HBT* 14 (1992): 31–49; and idem, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (WUNT 81; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 1995. See also Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 203–32.
- <sup>7</sup> See Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1986), 59; Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 206; Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 275–76, 278. Guthrie helpfully emphasizes that the primary contrast in this passage is between the apostolic ministry and the ministry of the Mosaic covenant, not simply between the two covenants themselves. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 206. See also David A. Garland, “The Sufficiency of Paul, Minister of the New Covenant,” *CTR* 4.1 (1989): 21–22.
- <sup>8</sup> This is apparent due to Paul’s use of the personal pronoun (translated “the same”) to point back to “the glory of God,” but also because of Paul’s use of the terms *kurios* and *eikona*. The former is used regularly by Paul to refer to Christ, and the context supports that use here, while the latter is used by Paul elsewhere in his letters to refer to Jesus as the “image of God” (e.g., Col 1:15). In other words, both terms are used by Paul to refer to Christ, and here they are linked definitively by the pronoun that comes syntactically between them. See Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 330–31.
- <sup>9</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 72.
- <sup>10</sup> Richard Gaffin Jr., “The Glory of God in Paul’s Epistles,” in *The Glory of God* (ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson; Theology in Community; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 131.
- <sup>11</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 64–65.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.
- <sup>13</sup> “Weight of glory” is likely a paronomasia, since the Hebrew term *chabod* likely stands behind Paul’s use of *doxa*. At its root, *chabod* conveys the idea of heaviness, used in the OT to speak of God’s glory. So Paul is likely bringing out both of those interrelated senses with this phrase. See Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 92. For more on the Jewish background of Paul’s use of “glory,” see Linda L. Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul’s Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3:1–18* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991); and C. C. Newman, *Paul’s Glory-Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992).
- <sup>14</sup> See Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 249–55.
- <sup>15</sup> Walker believes them to be Apollos and Timothy. William O. Walker, “Apollos and Timothy as the Unnamed ‘Brothers’ in 2 Corinthians 8:18–24,” *CBQ* 73 (2011): 318–38.
- <sup>16</sup> Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 610–12. On the Jewish background to this passage, and particularly the Isaianic servant songs (esp. Isa 42:8), as well as its background in the Greco-Roman benefactor tradition, see James R. Harrison, “The Brothers as the ‘Glory of Christ’ (2 Cor 8:23): Paul’s *Doxa* Terminology in Its Ancient Benefaction Context,” *NovT* 52 (2010): 156–88.
- <sup>17</sup> Although see 6:8, which contrasts honor and dishonor in Paul’s combination of a “virtue list” and “affliction list.” Paul contrasts *doxa* (translated here as “honor”) with *atimia* (“dishonor”). While we have not included this use of *doxa* in our analysis because of its obvious association with honor by virtue of being contrasted with dishonor, its use here also shows that glory in 2 Corinthians is closely bound up with boasting and commendation (e.g., honor). Guthrie makes this connection between honor and glory as well, noting that they are closely associated concepts in the Greco-Roman world (e.g., Plutarch, *Rom. Q.* 1.13; *Mulier. virt.* 16; *Cor.* 4:3). See Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 15n14; see also 207–9.
- <sup>18</sup> On the relationship between boasting and God’s glory in Paul, including in Rom 3:27, the Corinthian correspondence, and other Pauline texts, see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “‘Where Then Is Boasting?’: Romans 3:27 and Its Contexts,” *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society* 5 (1985): 57–66.
- <sup>19</sup> Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 15–17.
- <sup>20</sup> This type of argument by Paul is not limited to 2 Corinthians. For its use in Galatians, see James A. Kelhoffer, “Suffering as Defense of Paul’s Authority in Galatians and 2 Corinthians 11,” *SEA* 74 (2009): 127–43. On the background of these “tribulation lists,” see Robert Hodgson, “Paul the Apostle and First Century Tribulation Lists,” *ZNW* 74 (1983): 59–80.
- <sup>21</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 421; following A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915; repr., 1978), 355.

- <sup>22</sup> Jason B. Hood, "The Temple and the Thorn: 2 Corinthians 12 and Paul's Heavenly Ecclesiology," *BBR* 21.3 (2011): 357–70, esp. 361–65.
- <sup>23</sup> Alexandra R. Brown, "The Gospel Takes Place: Paul's Theology of Power-in-Weakness in 2 Corinthians," *Int* 52.3 (1998): 280–82.
- <sup>24</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 463.
- <sup>25</sup> See Dane C. Ortlund, "'Power is Made Perfect in Weakness' (2 Cor. 12:9): A Biblical Theology of Strength through Weakness," *Presbyterian* 36.2 (2010): 86–108, esp. 106. See also Schreiner, *Paul*, 94–99.
- <sup>26</sup> Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 386.
- <sup>27</sup> As Gaffin notes, glory is uniquely attributed to God but only derivatively so to others. "The Glory of God in Paul's Epistles," 130.
- <sup>28</sup> And perhaps doing so in a liturgical context. So Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 27.
- <sup>29</sup> David A. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (NAC 29; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 414.
- <sup>30</sup> For a detailed examination of the linguistic possibilities and historical background of this passage, see Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 241–56. See also George Guthrie, "Paul's Triumphal Procession Imagery (2 Cor. 2:14–16a): Neglected Points of Background," *NTS* 61 (2015): 79–91; as well as the seminal work of Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of II Cor. 2:14–3:3 within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* (WUNT 2/19; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986). Finally, for the connection between the "olfactory tradition" in early Christian writing, Jewish Wisdom tradition, and the gospel of Jesus Christ, see Dominika A. Kurek-Chomyz, "The Sweet Scent of the Gospel in the *Didache* and in Second Corinthians: Some Comments on Two Recent Interpretations of the *Stinoufi* Prayer in the Coptic *Did.* 10.8," *VC* 63 (2009): 323–44. This particular nexus only bolsters the present claim about 2:14–17, namely that the fragrance metaphor is about demonstrating to the world the gospel of Jesus Christ, which, as we have already shown, is tantamount to displaying God's glory.
- <sup>31</sup> On 4:15, if we take Paul's short citation of Psalm 115 LXX in 4:13 as in some way identifying his own sufferings and (eventual) overcoming with the suffering and resurrection of Christ, this only bolsters the connection between giving God glory and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only do those who receive grace give thanks and thus glory to God (4:15), but those who are sent out to proclaim that message are imitating Christ and thus spreading his fame—his glory—throughout the earth. On 4:13 and its use of Ps. 115 LXX, see, e.g., Douglas Campbell, "2 Corinthians 4:13: Evidence in Paul That Christ Believes," *JBL* 128.2 (2009): 340–48.
- <sup>32</sup> For a more thorough treatment of the meaning(s) of glory in Scripture, as well as in biblical and systematic theology, see Christopher W. Morgan, "Toward a Theology of the Glory of God," in *The Glory of God*, 156–60.
- <sup>33</sup> Mikko Sivonen, "Eschatological Vindication of δόξα of God in Creation and Humanity through δόξα of Christ, Who Represents God and Humanity," unpublished paper.
- <sup>34</sup> John Owen, *The Glory of Christ: His Office and Grace* (1684; reprint, Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Heritage/Christian Focus Publications, 2004), 221.
- <sup>35</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 176. Fee masterfully treats each passage's Christological teachings mentioned above.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, 54.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 174–85. Also helpful is Sivonen's unpublished "Eschatological Vindication of δόξα": "The eschatological prophecies previewed in the Old Testament of seeing God's glory seem be pinned and come into fruition in the Christ-event. Paul seems to equate 1) the gospel with the glory of Christ and 2) the knowledge of the glory of God with the face of Christ, and 3) the glory of the Lord with the image of God found in Christ. Thus, Christ becomes a character that shares both the Adamic glory (the image and the glory of Christ) and the glory of God. He is the image that the Corinthians' gaze upon, the Adamic figure, and the revealed God himself. Christ as God's glory is the very gospel that Paul is preaching. Not only so, but the same Christ, who is referred to the glory of the Lord, is the representation that the believers are called to image."
- <sup>39</sup> On the applicability of 12:9–10 and its broader context to all believers and not just to Paul, see Dustin W. Ellington, "Not Applicable to Believers? The Aims and Basis of Paul's 'I' in 2 Corinthians 10–13," *JBL* 131.2 (2012): 325–40.
- <sup>40</sup> Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 176.
- <sup>41</sup> For more on transformation, see Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 178–87.
- <sup>42</sup> See Gaffin, "The Glory of God in Paul's Epistles," 127–52, for an outstanding treatment of this.

- <sup>43</sup> Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 184.
- <sup>44</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 187.
- <sup>45</sup> For more on glory and salvation, see Morgan, “Toward a Theology of the Glory of God,” 179–87, especially 186–87: “In sum, from our vantage point, the story of our salvation as it relates to glory is this: as humans we all refused to acknowledge God’s glory and instead sought our own glory. Through this we forfeited the glory God intended for us as his image-bearers. By his grace and through union with Christ, the perfect image, God restores us as full image-bearers to participate in and reflect the glory we longed for the whole time. Thus, we are recipients of glory, are undergoing transformation through glory, and will be sharers of glory. Our salvation is not merely from sin but it is also unto glory. What grace we have received: we who exchanged the glory of God for idols, we who rebelled against God’s glory, have been, are being, and will be completely transformed by the very glory we despised and rejected. Even more, through union with Christ, together we are the church, the new humanity (Eph. 2:11–22; 4:11–16; 4:20–24), the firstfruits of the new creation, bearing God’s image, displaying how life ought to be, and making known the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10–11).”
- “From an even broader vantage point, salvation history is the story of the intrinsically glorious God graciously and joyfully communicating his fullness, chiefly through his creation, image-bearers, providence, and redemptive acts. As his people we respond by glorifying him, and in this God receives glory. Further, through uniting us to the glorious Christ, the perfect image of God, God shares his glory with us. And all of this redounds to his glory, as God in his manifold perfections is exhibited, known, rejoiced in, and prized. In this sense, the entire biblical plot—creation, fall, redemption, and consummation—is the drama of God’s glory. Jonathan Edwards captured it well: ‘the whole is of God, and in God, and to God; and he is the beginning, middle, and end.’” The citation is Jonathan Edwards, “The End for Which God Created the World,” in *God’s Passion for His Glory* (ed. John Piper; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 247.
- <sup>46</sup> Note the play on words: believers are anointed in the Anointed One, Christ.
- <sup>47</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 292–94.
- <sup>48</sup> Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 21.
- <sup>49</sup> Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 313–14.
- <sup>50</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Contours of Christian Theology; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 139–40, 249, 251; for insights related to cosmic glorification, see 252–55.
- <sup>51</sup> D. A. Carson, *A Model of Christian Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10–13* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 88.
- <sup>52</sup> As mentioned previously, “weight of glory” is a paronomasia, since the Hebrew term *chabod* stands behind Paul’s use of *doxa*. At its root *chabod* conveys the idea of heaviness and is used in the OT to speak of God’s glory.
- <sup>53</sup> Note how Paul relates thanksgiving and glory. See 2 Cor 4:15; 9:11–15; also Rom 1:23.
- <sup>54</sup> See the perceptive sermon by John Piper, “He Who Sows Bountifully Will Reap Bountifully,” sermon on 2 Corinthians 9:6–15. Accessed at <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/he-who-sows-bountifully-will-reap-bountifully>.

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# Καταργέω and the People of the Shining Face (2 Corinthians 3:7-18)<sup>1</sup>

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In his book *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, sociologist James Davison Hunter is concerned that the Church of the West now finds itself mired in a media-driven culture.

Reality becomes constituted by the ephemera of image, representation, and simulation. Pseudo-intimacy with well-known personalities provides the primary form and style of communication for a population hungry for significance.<sup>2</sup>

While not buying into his whole program (indeed, I do not recognize myself, nor Union University where I teach, in his description of evangelicals and their lack of emphasis on vocation), I think Hunter has an important point. In our celebrity driven culture, media drives celebrity and celebrity drive media. While media offers amazing means of communication for the sake of the Kingdom—I benefit greatly from well-done blogs that put me in

touch with important trends, books, audios, and movements—if we are not careful, our ministries can get inordinately fixated on the power of a uniquely “glowing face,” those persons who seem to be touched by God for broad impact. Personally, we may get so caught up in our public and publicized ministries, along with our associated “images” and carefully-crafted public platforms that we actually begin to disintegrate in terms more biblical forms of Christian life and ministry. Speaking of celebrity, Hunter notes that biblical leadership is

... the antithesis of celebrity, a model of leadership that many Christians in prominent positions have a very difficult time resisting. Celebrity is, in effect, based on an *inflated brilliance*, accomplishment, or spirituality generated and perpetuated by publicity. It is an artifice and, therefore, a type of fraud.<sup>3</sup>

In 2 Corinthians Paul in part deals with a form of celebrity culture, and for his antidote he presents a crystal-clear picture of authentic ministry, embodied in his own pattern of life and mission. His opponents, teachers with a “christian” veneer, seem to carry out their ministries under the influence of first-century, sophist values.<sup>4</sup> Paul says, for all their “skills” in public speaking (10:10; 11:6) and their claims to be ministers of Christ (11:23), they actually are preaching a different Jesus and a different gospel, and they are ministering by a different spirit (11:4). Although 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 should not be considered *primarily* a polemic against the interlopers of Corinth, it is possible that the apostle presents this “allusive homily”<sup>5</sup> as a biblical word picture of true ministry “glory,” which provides a compelling alternative to the false teachers’ culturally-conditioned understanding of leadership “glory.”<sup>6</sup>

### THREE INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

We begin our investigation of the passage with three introductory thoughts meant to provide a framework, or orientation, for the study. First, the passage falls nicely into two main sub-movements: 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 and 3:12-18. The first focuses on the theme of “glory,” a motif appropriated from LXX Exodus 34:29-35 with its use of the verb *δοξάζω* (*doxazō*). Employing an “argument from lesser to greater,” Paul vies for the greater glory of the new covenant. Constituting a second sub-movement, 2 Corinthians 3:12-18<sup>7</sup>

deals with “Veiled and Unveiled People,”<sup>8</sup> the apostle playing off of the veiling of Moses in LXX Exodus 34:29-35 and underscoring the implications of “veiling/unveiling” imagery for ministry. Paul treats “the veil” as a barrier standing between people and the glory of God, pointing out two sets of contrasts, one having to do with the *practice* of ministry and the other having to do with the *effects* of ministry. As to the former, at 3:12-13a he contrasts the repeated veiling of Moses with Paul’s “unveiled” ministry. As to the latter, in 3:14-16 the apostle sets those who have spiritually-veiled hearts over against those whose hearts are unveiled by Christ. These two sub-movements combine in a way that the whole of 3:7-18 moves from a focus on the glory on Moses’ face, to the superabundant glory on the faces of all those under the new covenant.

Second, and in line with the first point, 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 *focuses* on a contrast of ministries, rather than the abrogation of the old covenant *per se*. Paul offers his reflections in the passage as one significant step in the commendation of his own ministry to the Corinthians. Accordingly, his statements in the broader context of 2:14-4:6, his vocabulary in this passage, and the logic of the passage itself, all suggest that our passage is primarily about a *contrast of approaches to ministry*.<sup>9</sup> Note especially in the span running from 2:14-4:6 the apostle’s repeated references to ministry.<sup>10</sup> Particularly, in 3:6-13 we have a number of contrasts between old covenant ministry and that of the new covenant:

*Old Covenant Ministry*

- ministry of the letter that kills (3:6,7)
- ministry of condemnation (3:9)
- a veiled ministry (3:13)

*New Covenant Ministry*

- ministry of the Spirit who gives life (3:6, 8)
- ministry of righteousness (3:9)
- ministry conducted with openness (3:12)

Thus 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 is not *primarily* about the doing away with the old covenant, although the demise of that institution is inherent in Paul’s words. But Paul focuses on the superiority of his new covenant form of ministry, specifically in the proclamation of the Word of God under the power of the Spirit of God.

Third, a key interpretive issue in the 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 concerns our

understanding of the verb *καταργέω* (*katargeō*), which occurs four times in the passage (2 Cor 3:7, 11, 13–14), twice in the first sub-movement of the passage, supporting the theme of the greater glory of new covenant ministry (3:7–11), and twice in the second sub-movement, supporting the topic of the greater confidence of new covenant ministry (3:12–18). In the first sub-movement the apostle employs the term when dealing with what happened to the glory on Moses' face (3:7, 11). In the second, he addresses what happened to the Israelites whose minds were hardened (3:13–14), as well as what happens to the “veiled hearted” person (3:14–15) who “turns to the Lord” (3:17).<sup>11</sup> This controversial term, therefore, stands at the heart of one's interpretation of the passage and, therefore, one's understanding of the implications of the passage for Christian ministry.

Our specific goal for this article is to explore the meaning of the term *καταργέω* as it is used in context and to demonstrate the impact of a particular reading of the word in clarifying the apostle's intention for this passage. The hope is that as the apostle's intentions become clearer, the implications of the text for contemporary Christian life and ministry will also be clarified. My rendering of 2 Corinthians 3:7–18 is as follows.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Now if the ministry of death, engraved in letters on stones, was attended by glory—with the result that the children of Israel were not able to continue looking at the face of Moses, because the glory of his face was being made inoperative—<sup>8</sup>how could the ministry of the Spirit not be attended by glory to a greater degree? <sup>9</sup>For if in the ministry characterized by condemnation there was glory, to a much greater degree the ministry characterized by righteousness overflows with glory. <sup>10</sup>For really, in this situation, what had been glorified, now has no glory at all because of the glory that outshines it. <sup>11</sup>For if that which was being made inoperative was through glory, to a much greater extent the ministry that remains is attended by glory. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, since we have this kind of hope, we conduct our ministry with a great deal of openness, <sup>13</sup>in contradistinction to Moses. He kept putting a veil over his face with the result that the children of Israel did not look with sustained attention unto the completion of what was being made inoperative. <sup>14</sup>Rather, their minds were hardened. For, until this very day, when the old covenant is read, that same veil remains unmoved, because it can only be made inoperative in Christ. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, right up to the present time, when Moses is read, a veil drapes their hearts; <sup>16</sup>but when a person turns to the

Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup>Now “the Lord” is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup>All of us, with unveiled faces observing the Lord’s glory as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord who is the Spirit.

## THE GREATER GLORY OF NEW COVENANT MINISTRY (3:7-11)

### “Glory” in Paul’s Contexts

In secular Greek usage, the term δόξα (*doxa*) speaks of a sentiment, opinion, or thought (e.g., Plato, *Pol.* 260; Philostratus, *Gymn.* 17). When held in relation to a person, the word connotes one’s fame or reputation, normally used in a positive sense (Demosthenes, *2 Olynth.* 2.15), and often in inscriptions or the papyri it means “esteem” or “honor.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, at 1 Corinthians 4:10 Paul contrasts the Corinthians as “glorious” (the cognate adjective ἔνδοξοι, *endoxoi*) with his ministry as “dishonored” (ἄτιμοι, *atimoi*). At 2 Corinthians 6:8 “dishonor” (ἀτιμία, *atimias*) is contrasted with “glory” or “honor” (δόξης, *doxēs*). Thus Paul is aware of and uses language of “glory” as more commonly understood in his broader culture. It may be suggested, therefore, that the ideal of δόξα or *gloria* (Latin) in the Greco-Roman world has been undervalued as one possible cultural backdrop for our passage,<sup>14</sup> standing over against Paul’s biblical reflections on Exodus 34.

The old republican celebration of glory in the Roman imperial cult during the first Christian century would have made personal glory and the glory of family, city, and empire a high value in Corinthian culture. Cicero notes that the best leaders possess the noble virtue of *gloria* and are led and nurtured by it (*Arch.* 26; *Rep.* 5.7.9). E. A. Judge adds,

By New Testament times the predominant Stoic school of philosophy had raised the estimate [of the value of glory] to a very high level, apparently in response to the cult of glory among the Roman nobility ... It therefore became a prime and admired objective of public figures to enshrine themselves, by actually defining their own glory, ... Self-magnification thus became a feature of Hellenic higher education.<sup>15</sup>

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 Paul does not engage directly the concept of glory as reflected in the broader Greco-Roman culture. Rather, his statements clearly

constitute reflections on new covenant ministry that are offered in light of the biblical text. Nevertheless, his focus on new covenant ministry, along with the “until this very day” of verse 14, and the “right up to the present time” of verse 15, clearly show that the apostle marshals his reflections to make a statement about competing approaches to ministry *in his own day*. We may suggest, therefore, that Paul offers his biblical-theological reflections on glory as a counter-cultural alternative that democratizes the attainment of glory as for all people of the new covenant (3:17-18), not just for “glorified” leaders. If this is accurate, the apostle addresses a cultural value, inappropriately embraced by the Corinthian interlopers and their followers, by offering a biblical-theological treatment of the concept of new covenant glory. To do this the apostle uses as his launch point the glory on the face of a prominent biblical leader, Moses.

There has been good work done on the biblical concept of glory in recent years. For example, Chris Morgan, in a chapter entitled “Toward a Theology of the Glory of God,”<sup>16</sup> does a nice job of lining out the “enormous” challenge of defining the glory of God. He suggests the following categories concerning how glory functions in the biblical narrative:

1. glory is used as a designation for God himself
2. glory sometimes refers to an internal characteristic, an attribute, or a summary of attributes of God
3. glory as God’s visible and active presence
4. glory as the display of God’s attributes, perfections, or person
5. glory as the ultimate goal of the display of God’s attributes, perfections, or person (that is, God’s name, his renown)
6. glory sometimes connotes heaven, the heavenly, or the eschatological consummation of the full experience of the presence of God
7. giving glory to God may also refer to appropriate response to God in the form of worship, exaltation, or exultation

Morgan goes on to suggest that these multiple uses are distinct but related. He summarizes in this way:

The triune God who is glorious displays his glory, largely through his creation, image-bearers, providence, and redemptive acts. God’s people respond by glorifying him. God receives glory and, through uniting his people to Christ, shares his glory with them—all to his glory.<sup>17</sup>

Thus Morgan proposes that the nuances of glory in the biblical story, all central to that story, may be summarized as glory possessed, glory purposed, glory displayed, glory ascribed, glory received, and glory shared. Our passage certainly expresses the last of these categories, as God shares his glory with new covenant believers, through new covenant ministers, manifesting his presence on the faces of his image-bearers<sup>18</sup> through the redemption won by Christ.

### ***Paul's Argument from Lesser to Greater***

Where, then, should we begin with narrowing the scope of our investigation in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18? First, we begin by noting that in our passage Paul is profoundly oriented to the text of Exodus 34, and here we find particular references to a specific manifestation of God's glory. In fact, Paul uses the passage to build his argument for the greater glory found in new covenant ministry. Particularly, in 3:7-11 we find an "argument from lesser to greater" with "glory" as the main theme. An *a fortiori* argument<sup>19</sup> went like this: if something is true in a lesser situation, it certainly is true in a greater situation and has greater implications." At this point, the apostle builds his argument from lesser to greater on the back of LXX Exodus 34:29-35, which reads in part,

<sup>29</sup>And as Moses was descending from the mountain, the two tablets also were in Moses' hands. Now as he was descending from the mountain, Moses did not know that the appearance of the skin of his face was charged with glory (δεδόξασται, *dedoxastai*) while he was speaking to him. <sup>30</sup>And Aaron and all the elders of Israel saw Moses, and the appearance of the skin of his face was charged with glory (ἦν δεδόξασμένη, *ēn dedoxasmenē*), and they were afraid to come near to him ... <sup>33</sup>And when he stopped speaking to them, he placed a covering over his face. <sup>34</sup>But whenever Moses would enter in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the covering until coming out. And when he came out, he would tell all the sons of Israel what the Lord commanded him. <sup>35</sup>And the sons of Israel saw the face of Moses that it was charged with glory (δεδόξασται), and Moses put a covering over his face until he went in to converse with him (Exod 34:29-35; NETS).

Note especially the three uses of δοξάζω, the first and last are perfect passive indicative forms (indicating a state resulting from a past event) and the second a periphrastic construction combining a 3rd singular imperfect

active indicative of εἰμί with a feminine singular nominative perfect passive participle. The form of this participle, and its referent, will be significant as we try to discern Paul's referents in his argument.

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 the comparisons in Paul's argument run as follows:

<i>The Lesser</i>	<i>The Greater</i>
(Old Covenant Ministry)	(New Covenant Ministry)
attended by glory (ἐν δόξῃ, v. 7)	attended by glory to a greater degree (ἐν δόξῃ, v. 8)
[glory of Moses' face made inoperative] (διὰ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τὴν καταργουμένην, v. 7)	
glory was in the ministry of condemnation (δόξα, v. 9)	overflows with glory (δόξῃ, v. 9)
the thing having been glorified has no glory (οὐ δεδόξασται, v. 10)	glory outshines old covenant glory (τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης δόξης, v. 10)
the thing being made inoperative [came] through glory (διὰ δόξης, v. 11)	to a much greater extent that which remains is attended by glory (ἐν δόξῃ, v. 11)

Thus, on every hand, Paul perceives the new covenant ministry to be "greater," that is superior, to the old covenant ministry. The glory manifested in new covenant ministry is much greater than the glory on Moses' face in terms of degree or extent. It overflows and outshines that glory that shone in old covenant ministry.

Second, consider the apostle's specific referent when speaking of that which had been glorified. In verse 7 this is clear enough, for Paul mentions that he has "the glory of Moses' face" in mind, and this accords with what follows. In verse 10 Paul speaks specifically of "the thing having been glorified that now has no glory." Here too he speaks of Moses' face, as can be seen from the Greek OT and the form of the participle in 2 Corinthians 3:10. At

Exodus 34:29b we read:

καταβαίνοντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ ὄρους Μωυσῆς οὐκ ᾔδει ὅτι δεδόξασται ἡ ὄψις τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ λαλεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτῷ. (Exod 34:29 LXX)

Now as he was descending from the mountain, Moyses did not know that the appearance of the skin of his face was charged with glory while he was speaking to him. (Exod 34:29 NETS)

... καὶ ἦν δεδοξασμένη ἡ ὄψις τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ, (Exod 34:30 LXX)

... and the appearance of the skin of his face was charged with glory, (Exod 34:30 NETS)

καὶ εἶδον οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ τὸ πρόσωπον Μωυσῆ ὅτι δεδόξασται, καὶ περιέθηκεν Μωυσῆς κάλυμμα ἐπὶ τὸ πρόσωπον ἑαυτοῦ, ἕως ἄν εισέλθῃ συλλαλεῖν αὐτῷ. (Exod 34:35 LXX)

And the sons of Israel saw the face of Moyses that it was charged with glory, and Moyses put a covering over his face until he went in to converse with him. (Exod 34:35 NETS)

In these verses it was Moses' face that was "glorified," and the perfect passive form of the verb δοξάζω is used in verses 29 and 35. In verse 29 it is "the appearance of the complexion of his face" (ἡ ὄψις τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ, *hē opsīs tou chrōmatos tou prosōpou autou*) that is glorified. In verse 35 it is simply "the face of Moyses" (τὸ πρόσωπον Μωυσῆ, *to prosōpon Mōusē*) that is charged with glory. Note that the perfect passive participle used in 34:30 is in the feminine form because its referent is ἡ ὄψις, *the appearance* of the complexion (τοῦ χρώματος) of his face, ἡ ὄψις being feminine in form.

Back in our passage at 3:10, however, the perfect passive participle serves as the subject of the sentence and is *neuter* in form. Why is the participle neuter here? Because it has a specific referent in context (the gender agreeing with the word to which it refers). It is not "the ministry" which had been glorified, for that word is feminine in form. It is not "the covenant" (3:6) that had been glorified, for that word too is feminine. Paul refers to the same referent as in

Exodus 34, for “the thing having been glorified that now has no glory by comparison” is Moses’ face. Notice the double use to the neuter noun πρόσωπον in 2 Corinthians 3:7, employed specifically in conjunction with “glory.” Note also that in 3:10 the form of the verb, δεδόξασται is exactly the same as in LXX Exodus 34:29, 35, only at 2 Corinthians 3:10 Paul asserts Moses’ face no longer is glorious. The “state” of glory on his face has been negated.

Why, then, did Moses’ face no longer have glory? Two reasons. First, in terms of the Exodus narrative, the glory was snuffed out by the veil. Second, however—and this is the apostle’s main point—it was because the glory of the new covenant ministry now far outshines the glory on Moses’ face, and it outshines that lesser glory both in extent and therefore by degree. In terms of extent, the glory of Moses’ face was limited to one person. The new covenant ministry is “to a much greater degree,” it “overflows,” and it “far outshines [the glory of Moses],” because “we all with unveiled faces ... are being transformed from glory to glory,” as Paul says in verse 18. So naturally, the constantly shining faces of multitudes of new covenant ministers and those to whom they minister far outshine the face of Moses.

### **Rendering καταργέω in 2 Corinthians 3:7, 11**

But this brings us to our important and debated term καταργέω (*katargeō*), found in our first sub-movement in participial form in verse 7 and again in verse 11. Let’s begin with verse 7. Clearly the participle in this case, τὴν καταργουμένην (*tēn katargoumenēn*), delimits the noun τὴν δόξαν (*tēn doxan*). In the history of interpretation, a popular rendering of the participle is as a “fading” glory:

- because of the glory from his face—a fading glory— (2 Cor 3:7 HCSB)
- because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, (2 Cor 3:7 NAS95)
- even though the brightness was already fading away. (2 Cor 3:7 NLT-SE)
- because of its glory, transitory though it was, (2 Cor 3:7 NIV11)

The translation is also followed by commentators such as Harris, Linda Belleville, and others.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, as scholars have shown, the word means no such thing in the ancient world.<sup>21</sup> As BDAG (525-26) notes, there are several possible meanings in the NT:

1. to cause someth. to be unproductive, that is, to neutralize it
2. to cause someth. to lose its power or effectiveness, invalidate, make

powerless, to nullify (most common in Paul; often in legal contexts)

3. to cause someth. to come to an end or to be no longer in existence, abolish, wipe out, set aside

4. to cause the release of someone from an obligation (one has nothing more to do with it), be discharged, be released.

Paul uses the word four times in our passage and does so consistently in terms of the word's intended meaning. At each place the word speaks of something being made *inoperative*, or ineffective, that is of something being *neutralized*.

At 3:7 the term is used to describe what happened to the “glory” of Moses’ face, and a straight-forward reading of Exodus 34:29-35 tells us what happened to the glory on Moses’ face. That glory was made “inoperative” by the veil placed over his face.<sup>22</sup> I therefore translate 3:7, “... the sons of Israel were not able to continue looking at the face of Moses, because the glory of his face was made inoperative.” In other words, the glory got snuffed out by the veil, and according to the narrative, this happened over and over. Moses would remove the veil when he was in the presence of the Lord “until coming out” (ἕως τοῦ ἐκπορεύεσθαι; Exod 34:34) from the Lord’s presence. He put it back on when he was in the presence of the people.

At 3:11 we find a second use of the term. Here it is employed in the form of a substantival participle: “For if *that which was being made inoperative* (τὸ καταργούμενον) was through glory, to a much greater extent the ministry that is here to stay is attended by glory.” Notice that the gender of the passive participle is neuter, so it has a neuter referent. In its gender, voice, and number it parallels the participle in the previous verse (τὸ δεδοξασμένον), which parallels the tense and voice of the same term in the LXX text and clearly refers to Moses’ face. What then does Paul mean that Moses’ face was being made inoperative or neutralized? Again Exodus 34:35:

And the sons of Israel saw the face of Moyses that it was charged with glory, and Moyses put a covering over his face until he went in to converse with him (Exod 34:35; NETS).

So the veil nullified Moses’ glowing face. By contrast, when in 3:11 Paul says that Moses’ face was “through glory,” he means that Moses’ experience of the Lord’s glory rendered him glorious (διὰ with the genitive serves

as a marker of instrumentality or circumstance whereby something is accomplished or effected). Thus it was “through glory” that Moses’ face was made to reflect glory—a thought that parallels what Paul will say about new covenant believers in 3:18. Beholding the glory of the Lord makes one glorious. Yet, in Moses’ case, that glory was snuffed out by the veil placed over his face.

### “THE GREATER CONFIDENCE OF THE NEW COVENANT MINISTRY”

Paul marshals the final two uses of καταργέω in 3:12-18 arguing for the greater confidence inherent in new covenant ministry. As he begins this sub-movement, the apostle now turns from focusing on the different degrees of glory in the two ministries (3:7-11) to how each ministry relates to a veil. Thus he contrasts the two ministries but this time magnifies the differences between the veiling of Moses’ (and those who hear his words with veiled hearts) and the “unveiled faces” of Paul and new covenant believers (3:12, 18). At verse 12 we read, “Therefore, since we have this kind of hope, we conduct our ministry with a great deal of openness, ...” (Ἐχοντες οὖν τοιαύτην ἐλπίδα πολλῆ παρησία χρώμεθα, *Echontes oun toiautēn elpida pollē parrēsia chrōmetha*). The “openness” of which Paul speaks, has to do with the fact that his ministry is not “veiled” as Moses’ ministry was.<sup>23</sup> In 3:13—a highly debated verse—the apostle goes on to explain, and here we find our third use of the verb καταργέω:

in contradistinction to Moses. He kept putting a veil over his face with the result [or for the purpose] that the children of Israel were not able to keep looking unto the completion of what was being made inoperative (τοῦ καταργουμένου).

Again the present participle is neuter and the thing being made inoperative is the neuter word “face” (τὸ πρόσωπον) just a few words earlier in the verse. Accordingly, it was Moses’ face that was “being made inoperative.” This reflects more directly LXX Exod 34:35, which concerns Moses putting the veil on his face. The verse reads, “And the sons of Israel saw the face of Moyses that it was charged with glory, and Moyses put a covering over his face” (NETS).

Yet, the meaning and significance of the term τέλος in 2 Corinthians 3:13 is highly debated. Numerous suggestions have been made. Harris helpfully delineates these for us in two primary categories,<sup>24</sup> those reflecting a teleological

sense (goal, purpose, significance), and those reflecting a temporal sense (end, termination, cessation). My own view aligns more with the teleological interpretations, but I want to suggest that we take a bit different course and consider the phrase εἰς τὸ τέλος as a whole, which only occurs here in this exact form in the NT. This phrase is only found three times in ancient Greco-Roman literature and once in the Pseudepigrapha (*Sibyl.* 12:140). Apart from the fifty-six times the phrase occurs in the preamble of the psalms (which the NETS translates as “Regarding Completion”), it is only occurs twice in the LXX, at Joshua 3:16 and in an alternate reading of Daniel 11:13. Thus, the phrase is rare in our literatures of the era. In every case, however, it seems clear that εἰς τὸ τέλος has to do *with the “completion” of something*. For example, in Plutarch’s work on *Morals* he speaks positively of the work of the Deity as he uses birds to give people direction through soothsaying:

...by means of some of these stopping short, by the means of others directing to completion (εἰς τὸ τέλος) the actions and impetuous impulses of men (Plut., *Soll. an.* 1.22).<sup>25</sup>

Thus εἰς τὸ τέλος stands in contrast to “stopping short.” In LXX Joshua 3:16 we read of the cutting off of the waters of the Jordan as the Israelites crossed that river:

The waters flowing down from above stood still, a single solid heap stood apart very, very far off, as far as part of Kariathiarim, and that which came down came down to the sea of Araba, the salt sea, until it completely ceased (ἕως εἰς τὸ τέλος ἐξέλιπεν). And the people stood opposite Iericho (Josh 3:16; NETS).

So, again the idea seems to have to do with the completion of something. In the alternate reading of Daniel 11:13 we are told that the king of the north “will return and will lead a crowd, larger than the former, and at the finish of (εἰς τὸ τέλος, or “at the completion of”) the times of years he will attack the entrance with a great army and many supplies” (NETS2). Here the phrase can be read as reflecting the completion of a period of time.

Therefore, I suggest that at 2 Corinthians 3:13 we translate the phrase as having to do with something done “unto completion,” specifically “the completion,” or in this case, “the intended outcome” of Moses’ glorified face. What might it mean that Paul ministers “in contradistinction to Moses. He

[Moses] kept putting a veil over his face with the result that the children of Israel were not able to keep looking unto the “completion” of what was being made inoperative”?

Earlier in the Exodus narrative, at 33:16, we find the answer. In Exodus 33 we read of God’s judgment on the golden calf incident, specifically that he himself would not go with the Israelites to the land of promise but would send his angel before them (see Exod 33:1-3). In response, at 33:12-13 Moses cries out to God, and God relents, saying that he will go up with Moses and the people to the land. In 33:15 Moses responds to this new information with, “If you yourself do not go, do not lead me up from here.” He then reflects on the importance of God going with the children of Israel to the promised land in 33:16-17:

And how shall it be truly known that I have found favor with you, both I and your people, other than if you go along with us? And we shall be glorified, both I and your people (καὶ ἐνδοξασθήσομαι<sup>26</sup> ἐγὼ τε καὶ ὁ λαός σου; straightforwardly: “I will be glorified and also your people”), above all the nations that are on the earth.”<sup>17</sup> Then the Lord said to Moyses, “Even this word that you have spoken, I will do for you. For you have found favor before me, and I know you above all others (Exod 33:16–17 NETS).

Thus Moses cries out to God, reasoning that if God goes with them he *and God’s people* will be glorified. It may be suggested that as Paul read his Greek text of Exodus, this passage struck him, for in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 he is concerned with the glorification of all of God’s people. At 2 Corinthians 3:13 Paul asserts that this intended outcome, the glorification of the Israelites generally, was never brought to completion, due to *the hardness of the hearts of the people*: “Rather, their minds were hardened,” a veil, the veil of Moses, standing between them and the glory of God. The veil then becomes symbolic of a dull heart that does not grasp God’s purposes and thus fails to embrace the fullness of the “glorified” relationship God desires with his people. Paul believes this was the case in Moses’ day, and he believes this is still the case in his own day: People have veiled hearts and need the veil dealt with in order to experience the glory of God that shines in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:4). This was not accomplished under the old covenant form of ministry. What is needed is something to change the hearts of people;

they need a new covenant form of ministry that can deal with the condition of the heart and bring glorification to the lives of people.

This brings us then to the fourth and final use of the verb *καταργέω* in our passage. In a very nice turn, at 3:14 the veil that made Moses' glorified face inoperative, now, in a figurative sense, lies over the hearts of those reading the old covenant apart from a relationship with the Spirit, in Christ: "For, until this very day, when the old covenant is read, that same veil remains unmoved, ..." But then comes the solution to this problem: "... because it can only be *made inoperative* (*καταργεῖται*) by Christ." Here the veil, that which in Paul's argument thus far has made the glory on Moses' face inoperative, itself gets made inoperative, the nullifier now nullified by Christ!

This of course relates directly to the superiority of new covenant ministry (3:7-11), which by its nature facilitates a superabundance of glory when compared to the ministry of Moses, as stated clearly in the final two verses of the passage:

<sup>16</sup>but when a person turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup>Now "the Lord" is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup>All of us, with unveiled faces observing the Lord's glory as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord who is the Spirit.

This new covenant, transformational process parallels Moses' experience in Exodus 34, for when Paul says, "the Lord is the Spirit" he means that "the Lord" referred to in the OT text is the Holy Spirit. When a person turns to believe the gospel of Christ, under the illumination of the Spirit, the heart is transformed and the person enters the presence of the Lord, personally experiencing the glory of God. This is exactly what Paul notes in 4:6:

Because God, the one having said, "Light will shine out of darkness!" has shone in our hearts the light, which is the the personal comprehension of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

So our passage concludes in 3:18:

All of us, with unveiled faces observing the Lord's glory as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord who is the Spirit.

## CONCLUSION

There are other exegetical details here we do not have space to pursue, but let me summarize what I think is Paul's point. To be a minister living under the grace of new covenant ministry means that we have an open, "unveiled" relationship with the Lord and people, but we confidently proclaim that others can have this relationship as well. They can know the presence of the living God and be transformed on the basis of the gospel, which communicates to us God in all of his glorious goodness. In that wonderful passage, Exodus 34:6-7 we read of Moses' encounter with God on the Mountain, an encounter in which God revealed his glory and "glorified" Moses' face:

<sup>6</sup>And the Lord passed by before his face, and he called, "The Lord, the Lord God is compassionate and merciful, patient and very merciful and truthful <sup>7</sup>and preserving righteousness and doing mercy for thousands, taking away acts of lawlessness and of injustice and sins (Exod 34:6-7 NETS).

Do you not hear the gospel echoed in these words? This encounter with God is not limited to the special "leaders of the glowing face," celebrity figures who have some special access to God. No. Paul says, as we contemplate (gaze at) the Lord's glory all new covenant believers "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory." In other words, we fulfill the original intention missed by the Wilderness generation. We are transformed "from glory" (ἀπὸ δόξης, ἀπό being the source, from the Lord's own glory) "to glory" (εἰς δόξαν, that is, to the glory we display). As we live in the presence of our glorious God, beholding his glory, it changes us in an ongoing way. By living in his presence, his communicable attributes are more and more reflected in our lives: his *peace, mercy, wisdom, freedom, righteousness, beauty, truthfulness, knowledge, goodness* come to characterize us as new covenant believers. As we share in God's glory in this way, because of our union and walk with our Lord Christ, we are transformed. As Michael Horton writes, "What happens for us [in the gospel] is the basis for what happens to us and in us."<sup>27</sup> And Sinclair Ferguson states,

In Scripture, image and glory are interrelated ideas. As the image of God, man was created to reflect, express and participate in the glory of God, in miniature, creaturely form. Retoration to this is effected through the Spirit's work of sanctification, in which

he takes those who have distorted God's image in the shame of sin, and transforms them into those who bear that image in glory ... The mark we were created to reach, but have missed, was glory. We have sinned and failed to attain that destiny. Against this background, the task of the Spirit may be stated simply: to bring us to glory, to create glory within us, and to glorify us together with Christ.<sup>28</sup>

What then is authentic, new covenant ministry? It is the ministry of the gospel, carried out by the life-giving, veil nullifying, Spirit of Christ, who not only illumines the heart but transforms in glory the life, both of authentic Christian ministers and those to whom they minister. May we ever be glorious!

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- <sup>1</sup> This article is adapted from a presentation by the same title at the 2014 national meeting of The Evangelical Theological Society and the fuller commentary treatment of the passage in George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 203-232.
  - <sup>2</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 222-223.
  - <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 260 (emphasis added).
  - <sup>4</sup> See especially Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); *idem.*, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).
  - <sup>5</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 132.
  - <sup>6</sup> As David E. Garland and others point out, the suggestion that Paul addresses directly the false teachers here, to a certain degree, rests on speculation, for nowhere in the passage does the apostle make this polemic overt. Paul's "adequacy" for ministry (3:5) and the "openness" with which he conducts his ministry (3:12) seem to be the primary emphases of this section. Nevertheless, the concerns in our broader context almost certainly mean that Paul at least has the false teachers in mind (e.g., 2:17-3:1). We can agree that the emphasis here seems to be on Paul's rigorous defense of his conduct of ministry, rather than an outright attack on his opponents, but he is *contrasting competing visions of ministry*. Thus, we should see Paul's description of authentic ministry as foregrounded in this passage, with hints of polemic against the false teachers Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible xx; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 242-243. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (NAC; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 99, wisely notes, "Since this text is not an overtly polemical section which castigates opponents, the best procedure for understanding it is to try to grasp its internal logic within its own context. Interpreting what Paul says against some contrived, hypothetical scenario regarding a prior background for the exegesis of Exodus 34 or the reconstruction of the teaching of imagined opponents will only lead us far afield." Accordingly, we offer no hypothetical scenario, nor a reconstruction of the opponents' teaching, but rather suggest that Paul offers a homily on the superiority of new covenant ministry. In the argument from lesser to greater in 3:7-11 Moses' ministry is not denigrated but built upon. Thus, Paul fights the inferior ministry of the opponents, not by attacking them directly but by giving the Corinthians a clear view of authentic, new covenant ministry, a ministry that is "glorious" in its broad impact on the people of God.
  - <sup>7</sup> This second unit includes more personal language. See Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 85.
  - <sup>8</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 276.
  - <sup>9</sup> Paul Brooks Duff, "Glory in the Ministry of Death: Gentile Condemnation and Letters of Recommendation in 2 Cor 3:6-18," *NovT* 46 (2004): 318 notes, "when Paul speaks of 'glory' (δόξα) in connection with his

own as well as the Mosaic ministry, he refers to the presence of God as mediated through each of these *διακονία*.” Jan Lambrecht has pointed out that 3:7-18 is bracketed by 2:14-3:6, on the one hand, and 4:1-6 on the other, the whole being crafted around conceptual parallels and contrasts regarding various visions of ministry. See R. Bieringer and Jan Lambrecht, *Studies on 2 Corinthians* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 112; Louvain, Belgium: Leuven University Press: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1994), 257-294.

A *Christian Ministry*: 2:14-3:6

a	2:14-17:	Ministers
b	3:1-3:	Corinthian Community
a'	3:4-6:	Ministers

B *The Two Ministries*: 3:7-18

1. 3:7-11: Old and New Ministries

a	7a-9b	a <i>minori ad maius</i> reasoning
b	10	statement
a'	11	a <i>minori ad maius</i> reasoning

2. 3:12-18: Moses and Paul, Israelites and Christians

a	12-13a (13b)	We (Ministers)
b	14a-16 (17)	They (Israelites)
a'	18	We (Christians)

A' *Christian Ministry*: 4:1-6

a	4:1-2:	We (Ministers)
b	4:3-4:	They (Israelites)
c	4:5-6:	We (Ministers)

Lambrecht has been followed by numerous commentators, often with slight modifications (e.g., Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 137-139; Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 241; Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994], 189-190). For alternatives on this reading of the structure see Furnish, *II Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 185-186; Linda L. Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul's Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3.1-18* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement series 52; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 177-179.

- <sup>10</sup> In 4:1-6 Paul concludes his treatment of the dynamics that mark a ministry as authentic (2:14-4:6) by echoing numerous themes from 2:14-3:6. These echoes include references to “ministry” (3:6, 4:1), “the word of God” (2:17, 4:2), a posture “before God” (2:17, 4:2), manifestation of the truth (2:14, 4:2), the abuse of God’s word (2:17, 4:2), “commending ourselves” (3:1, 4:2), “people” (ἀνθρώπων, *anthrōpōn*) before whom ministry is accomplished (3:2, 4:2), those who are being destroyed (2:15, 4:3), speaking or preaching the gospel (2:17, 4:5), “Christ” (2:15, 4:5), “ourselves” (3:1, 4:5), “in our hearts” (3:2, 4:6), and “knowledge” of God (2:14, 4:6).
- <sup>11</sup> Scholars have spilled a great deal of ink in treating our passage. For example, see Anthony T. Hanson, “The Midrash in 2 Corinthians 3: A Reconsideration,” *JSNT* 9 (1980): 2-28; Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul's Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3.1-18*; Carol Kern Stockhausen, *Moses' Veil and the Glory of the New Covenant: the Exegetical Substructure of II Cor. 3.1-4.6* (Analecta Biblica: Investigationes Scientificalae in Res Biblicas 116; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989); D. Abernathy, “Exegetical Problems in 2 Corinthians 3,” *Notes on Translation* 14 (2000): 44-56; D. Starnitzke, “Der Dienst des Paulus: Zur Interpretation von Ex 34 in 2 Kor 3,” *WD* 25 (1999): 193-207; Duff, “Glory in the Ministry of Death: Gentile Condemnation and Letters of Recommendation in 2 Cor 3:6-18”; E. Wong, “The Lord Is the Spirit (2 Cor 3,17a),” *ETL* 61 (1985): 48-72; Ekkehard W. Stegemann, “Der Neue Bund im Alten: zum Schriftverständnis des Paulus im 2 Kor 3,” *TZ* 42 (1986): 97-114; H. Kayama, “The Doxa of Moses and Jesus (2 Cor. 3: 7-18 and Luke 9: 28-32),” *Bulletin of the Christian Research Institute Meiji Gakuin University* 23 (1990): 23-48; Herbert Ulonka, “Die Doxa des Mose: Zum Problem des Alten Testaments in 2 Kor 3:1-16,” *EvT* 26 (1966): 378-388; I. Nayak, “The Meaning of *Katoptrizomenoi* in 2 Cor 3, 18,” *Euntes Docete* 55 (2002): 33-44; Jacques Dupont, “Le chrétien : miroir de la gloire divine d’après 2 Cor 3:18,” *RB* 56): 293-411; James D. G. Dunn, “2 Corinthians 3:17: The Lord is the Spirit,” *JTS* 21 (1970): 309-320; Jan Lambrecht, “Transformation in 2 Cor 3:18,” *Bib* 64 (1983): 243-254; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Glory Reflected on the Face of Christ (2 Cor 3:7-4:6) and a Palestinian Jewish Motif,” *TS* 42): 630-644; Martin Hasitschka, “Diener eines neuen Bundes” : Skizze zum Selbstverständnis des Paulus in 2 Kor 3,4-6,” *ZKT* 121 (1999): 291-299; R. B. Sloan, “2 Corinthians 2:14—4:6 and ‘New Covenant Hermeneutics’—A Response to Richard

- Hays," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995): 129-154; R. Randrianarimalala, "'The Lord is the Spirit,' 2 Cor 3:17a," *Hekima Review* 15 (1996): 29-36; S. Grindheim, "The Law Kills but the Gospel Gives Life: The Letter-Spirit Dualism in 2 Corinthians 3.5-18," *JSNT* 84 (2001): 97-115; S. J. Hafemann, "The Glory and Veil of Moses in 2 Cor 3:7-14: An Example of Paul's Contextual Exegesis of the OT - A Proposal," *HBT* 14 (1992): 31-49; Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: the Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (WUNT 81; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995); W. J. Dalton, "Is the Old Covenant Abrogated (2 Cor 3.14)?" *AusBR* 35 (1987): 88-94; W. R. Baker, "Did the Glory of Moses' Face Fade? A Reexamination of *katargeo* in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10 (2000): 1-15; Willem Cornelis van Unnik, "With Unveiled Face: an Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 3:12-18," *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963): 153-169; William J. Dumbrell, "The Newness of the New Covenant: the Logic of the Argument in 2 Corinthians 3," *Reformed Theological Review* 61 (2002): 61-84.
- <sup>12</sup> Note that several times in our translation we render present verbs or participles as reflecting past time (e.g., δὴνασθαι and καταργουμένην in 3:7). The reason for this is that Paul uses the present tense at points to reflect an imperfective aspect in what might be called "text time" or the timeframe embodied in the text's narrative. As a language Greek is aspect prominent, rather than using its "tense" forms primarily to reflect time. At places in our passage, the apostle uses present tense forms while speaking of past events reflected in the narrative of Exod 34.
- <sup>13</sup> E.g., δόξα is associated with honor at Plut. *Rom. Q.* 1.13; *Mulier. virt.* 16; *Cor.* 4.3. The concept of δόξα is widespread in the writings of Plutarch, who, when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, was a child growing up in a wealthy family in Chaeronea, a town about 50 miles north of Corinth.
- <sup>14</sup> See especially James Harrison, who states, "It is a curiosity of Romans scholarship that the Roman context of glory has been overlooked in discussions of Paul's use of δόξα and its cognates," noting that the focus normally and understandably has been on the Jewish background of the word. See James R. Harrison, "Paul and the Roman Ideal of Glory in the Epistle to the Romans" in *The Letter to the Romans* (Udo Schnelle; Leuvena: Peeters, 2009), 329.
- <sup>15</sup> E. A. Judge, "The Conflict of Educational Aims in New Testament Thought," *Journal of Christian Education* 9 (1966): 38-39.
- <sup>16</sup> Christopher W. Morgan, "Toward a Theology of the Glory of God" in *The Glory of God* (ed., Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.
- <sup>18</sup> In the Qumran literature the glory of God on the face of Moses serves as a manifestation of God's presence, but it also parallels Adam being fashioned in the image of God's glory (4Q504). The parallel between Adam and Moses may also be seen in rabbinic texts such as *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 11.3 and *Midrash Tadshe* 4. See Andrei A. Orlov, *Vested with Adam's Glory: Moses as the Luminous Counterpart of Adam in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Macarian Homilies* (<http://www.marquette.edu/maqom/moses1.html>). At points in Second Temple Judaism, the hope was that humanity would be restored to the likeness of God's glory as reflected in Adam. See Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (STDJ 42; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 91-97.
- <sup>19</sup> Referred to as *qal wā ḥomer* ("the light and the heavy"), a *fortiori* ("to the greater"), or a *minore ad maius* ("from the lesser to the greater").
- <sup>20</sup> Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul's Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3.1-18*, 204-205; Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 284; Linda L Belleville, *2 Corinthians* (IVP New Testament commentary series ; 8; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 99.
- <sup>21</sup> See especially Duane A. Garrett, "Veiled Hearts: the Translation and Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3," *JETS* 53 (2010): 729-772; and Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 301-309. Hafemann notes that of the 1300 occurrences of the verb in a range from the 4th Cent. BC to 4th Cent. AD, "only 16 are found in literature outside the NT and its circle of influence." See also e.g., Baker, "Did the Glory of Moses' Face Fade? A Reexamination of *katargeo* in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18," 3-15; Hafemann, "The Glory and Veil of Moses in 2 Cor 3:7-14: An Example of Paul's Contextual Exegesis of the OT - A Proposal," 37-40; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 133-135; Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 147-148.
- <sup>22</sup> A great deal of creative scholarly attention has been given to addressing *why* Moses put on the veil. The straight-forward answer from the narrative (though not stated overtly) is that Moses put on the veil to cover the glory on his face. The point of the passage is not that they were dazzled by the sight (though see Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.70, who states that the Israelites could not look at the brightness of Moses' face, which shone like the sun), nor that the veil was put in place because they were afraid (*contra* Garland, 2

*Corinthians*, 170), although they were afraid of him initially (34:30). Nor was the veil placed over the face of Moses to protect the people from being consumed by God's judgment, an interpretation based on the broad context of Exod. 32-34 but not noted in the immediate passage Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 278-286. See the article on Moses' Shining Face by Joshua Philpot, "Exodus 34:29-35 and Moses' Shining Face," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 23.1 (2013): 1-11, who makes the case that Moses' shining face functions to show the goodness and grace of God to the Israelites, to remind them of God's presence, to distinguish Moses in terms of status, and to facilitate a transition from the rebellion narrative found in Exod. 32-34 (p. 11); the purpose of the veil, according to Philpot, was simply to cover Moses' face (p. 9). As Francis Watson points out, no explanation is given in the OT text concerning why Moses veiled his face. Exod. 34:30-32 seems to suggest that the fear of the Israelites was overcome prior to the veil being put over Moses' face. Later, in verse 35, Moses veils himself but with no reference to fear on the part of the Israelites. The OT text simply places emphasis on the continued process of Moses veiling and unveiling his face. Watson goes on to suggest that "the veil serves to conceal Moses' face only at those times when he is not fulfilling his role as mediator of God's commandments." See Francis Watson, *Paul And The Hermeneutics Of Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Publishers, 2004), 292. The NETS version of the LXX text reads, "And when he came out, he would tell all the sons of Israel what the Lord commanded him. And the sons of Israel saw the face of Moyses that it was charged with glory, and Moyses put a covering over his face until he went in to converse with him" (Exod 34:34b-35).

<sup>23</sup> For a fuller discussion see Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 218.

<sup>24</sup> Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 299.

<sup>25</sup> The other two occurrences in the Greco-Roman literature are found in Aristotle (*Aristot., Pol.* 1301b.20-24; 1331b.35-39), where the meaning is similar. In the first passage, evil is the "outcome" of some forms of government. The latter can be translated as referring to, "the goal and the deeds leading to the accomplishment of the goal."

<sup>26</sup> The term is a cognate with  $\delta\omicron\zeta\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$  (used at 34:29, 35), and overlaps with it semantically. In 33:16-17 it renders the Hebrew term  $\text{נִפְלְאוֹת}$  (*nifl'ot*), a nif. perf. of  $\text{פָּלַח}$ , which means "to be treated as distinct or excellent, or to be wonderful."  $\text{\textepsilon}\nu\delta\omicron\zeta\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omicron\mu\alpha\iota}$  means "to be honored, held in high esteem, or be glorified." It may be that the LXX translators, under the influence of  $\delta\omicron\zeta\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$  at 34:29, 35, rendered the Hebrew to reflect the overarching theme of glorification in the broader context. Wevers suggests that the LXX Exodus translators have taken MT's  $\text{נִפְלְאוֹת}$  as  $\text{נִפְלְאוֹת}$  and points out that the Vulgate reads "glorificemur" at this point. See John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek text of Exodus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 550. Interestingly one version of the Targum on the verse also reflects the tradition of glorification. A translation of that Targum on the verse reads, "But by what shall it be known now that I have found grace and mercy before you, I and your people? Is it not when the glory of your Shekhinah leads with us, and signs and wonders are done with us, me and for your people, more than all the people on the face of the earth." (Exod 33:16 TARG2-E)

<sup>27</sup> Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: a Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 307.

<sup>28</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 139-140.

# What is So New About the New Covenant? Exploring the Contours of Paul's New Covenant Theology in 2 Corinthians 3

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Second Corinthians 3 is a hotly debated and difficult text. For example, Thomas Schreiner says 2 Corinthians 3 is “one of the most controverted texts in the Pauline corpus,”<sup>1</sup> and is “full of exegetical difficulties and knotty problems.”<sup>2</sup> David Garland believes the passage is “notoriously obscure”<sup>3</sup> and Anthony Hanson says it is the “mount Everest of Pauline texts as far as difficulty is concerned—or should we rather call it the sphinx among texts, since its difficulty lies in its enigmatic quality rather than its complexity?”<sup>4</sup> The result has been a hermeneutical maze of literature almost impossible to navigate.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the complexity and difficulty in translating and interpreting 2 Corinthians 3 is matched by its biblical-theological depth and insight.<sup>6</sup> As the growing literature demonstrates, this one chapter leaves readers with a host of themes central to developing a Pauline theology (e.g., law, ministry,

Spirit, glory, covenant). However, our task is not to enter into the myriad of grammatical and interpretive debates (though we will engage some), nor is it to focus on each of the Pauline themes present (see other articles in this issue). Instead, our purpose is to analyze 2 Corinthians 3 with a particular eye on the theme of “covenant.” More precisely, our aim is to better understand the relationship between the “old covenant” and the “new covenant” through the lens of 2 Corinthians 3.

As a word of caution, 2 Corinthians 3 will not tell us everything we need to know about the old and new covenants, nor did Paul intend it to. Yet, 2 Corinthians 3 is a text that sheds considerable light on the structure and nature of the new covenant. Therefore, we will (1) briefly explore the logic of Paul’s argument in 2 Corinthians 3 in order to (2) draw several broad theological conclusions about the newness of the new covenant.<sup>7</sup> As we explore the contours of Paul’s new covenant theology in 2 Corinthians 3, we will have an important question in mind: What is so new about the new covenant?

### **A NEW COVENANT LETTER FROM CHRIST**

The context of 2 Corinthians 3 is key if we are to understand properly why Paul appeals to the “new covenant.”<sup>8</sup> Certain opponents questioned Paul’s credentials, and though innumerable opinions exist as to exactly who these opponents were, it may be the case that such opponents were those whom Paul later on calls “super apostles” (11:5; 12:11).<sup>9</sup> In reality, however, they were “false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (11:13), even promoting another Jesus and another gospel (11:4-5).<sup>10</sup> Such opponents raised suspicions about Paul as to whether his resume was adequate and legitimate. Since Paul did not come to the Corinthians with letters of recommendation or an externally impressive ministry, these opponents—who were all too concerned with charisma, external appearance, and success (e.g., 10:10, 12:1, 12)—scrutinized, criticized, and disparaged Paul’s ministry, which was instead a ministry characterized by suffering and tribulation.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, such opponents had influenced the Corinthians and since certain Corinthians measured success by worldly standards, they considered Paul an embarrassment.<sup>12</sup>

It is conspicuous throughout 2 Corinthians that these opponents, as well as those Corinthians who followed them, made outward appearance the priority and standard by which all else was to be judged, so much so that they exalted

themselves in light of their own credentials, letters of recommendation, and accomplishments.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, their competition was with one another, as they were first and foremost concerned with who was superior, being defined by a spiritualized one-upmanship.<sup>14</sup> They commended themselves even, measuring themselves by “one another” and comparing themselves “with one another” (2 Cor 10:12b). Naturally, they were totally unimpressed with Paul, for though his written letters may have been “weighty and strong,” his “bodily presence” was “weak,” and his “speech of no account” (2 Cor 10:12a). Hence, Paul was now placed in the awkward situation of having to defend himself to the Corinthians when in fact the Corinthians should have been commending Paul (1 Cor 12:11), their spiritual father (1 Cor 4:14-15).

Second Corinthians 3:1-3 conveys Paul’s response. He asks rhetorically whether he is beginning to commend himself again<sup>15</sup> or whether he needs (as some do) to provide “letters of recommendation to you, or from you?” (3:1).<sup>16</sup> While this may be the external standard certain Corinthians had been convinced must be met, Paul answers that such a standard is all wrong in light of who he is (apostle) and what God has done through him (founded the church in Corinth).<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Paul has credentials but they are far superior to physical letters of recommendation or self-commendation. Paul even has a letter, but to the shock of the Corinthians Paul says that the Corinthians themselves are his letter of recommendation, one written on his own heart (3:2).<sup>18</sup> Paul could say this because it was under his apostolic ministry that the Corinthians were converted (1 Cor 3:6). Whether Paul is truly an apostle is verified and proven by the fact that the Holy Spirit, through Paul’s ministry, has regenerated, justified, and is now sanctifying the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:1-2). Paul’s ministry, therefore, is self-authenticating.<sup>19</sup>

While Paul may have initially been placed in an awkward position, Paul has now placed the Corinthians in a *very* awkward position. If they reject Paul’s credentials, his letters of recommendation (i.e., the Corinthians themselves), then they are essentially rejecting the Spirit’s work in their lives as genuine and authentic.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, they *must* acknowledge the superiority of Paul’s “letters” and in doing so they demonstrate that they are saved because of Paul (or more accurately, because of God’s work through Paul). Paul’s point, then, is that there is no better letter of recommendation than the Corinthians themselves because their salvation is the greatest conceivable evidence that

the Spirit is at work through Paul as an apostle. In short, physical letters of recommendation that his opponents so prided themselves in (and subsequently criticized Paul for not having) simply pale in comparison to the salvation of real people under Paul's new covenant ministry.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, Paul can confidently answer his own rhetorical questions, saying, "You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all" (2 Cor 3:2). Furthermore, Paul demonstrates that the Corinthians are letters of recommendation on Paul's behalf precisely because they are ultimately "a letter from Christ" (3:3). Or, stated more precisely, the Corinthians are a letter "produced by Christ" (i.e., genitive of production<sup>22</sup>), which is a Pauline metaphor involving conversion.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Paul is the ministerial messenger and emissary of Christ, the one through whom Christ is working to bring about the conversion and transformation of the Corinthians.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, Christ is the divine author of this tangible letter known as the Corinthians. As we will soon see, Christ writes this letter (via Paul's gospel-centered, apostolic ministry) not with ink, but with the Holy Spirit (3:3; i.e., the Spirit being the instrument of writing). It follows that Paul's new covenant ministry is one empowered by the Spirit (cf. Rom 15:17-19; 1 Cor 2:4-5).<sup>25</sup>

### **THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT OF THE NEW COVENANT**

In that light, Paul feels confident in the legitimacy and authority of his ministry: "Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God" (2 Cor 3:4). However, such confidence, as we would expect, does not stem from Paul himself, but is grounded in Christ (i.e., "through Christ"; 3:4).<sup>26</sup> As Guthrie explains, Paul "expresses an unflinching trust that the source (Christ), effect (the work of the Spirit), validation (the fruit among the Corinthians), and orientation (toward God) of his ministry all mark the authenticity of his work and are summed up with two phrases, 'through Christ' and 'toward God.'"<sup>27</sup> It's notable that Paul, in contrast to his adversaries, is actually inadequate by his own admission, insufficient to "claim anything as coming from us" (3:5).<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Paul remains confident because his sufficiency is from God, "who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant" (3:6a).<sup>29</sup>

Up to this point, we have been intentionally avoiding the "new covenant" language that pervades these verses (3:3-6). But with the context now set, we can see Paul's motivation for appealing to the new covenant in defense

of his apostolic ministry. The place to begin, then, is with verse 3 where Paul says, drawing two different contrasts, that the Corinthians are a letter from Christ delivered by Paul, one written (1) “not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God,” and (2) “not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”<sup>30</sup> If we skip ahead to verses 5 and 6 Paul also says his sufficiency is from God, “who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

What does Paul have in mind by comparing the old covenant with the new covenant in terms of an antithesis?<sup>31</sup> First, Paul intends to highlight the inadequacy and impotence of the Law. When Paul refers to tablets of stone (3:3) and a “letter” that “kills” (3:6), he has in mind the Ten Commandments, or in its broadest sense the Mosaic Law (Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:15; 34:1; Deut 9:10).<sup>32</sup> The Law at Sinai was written on stone by God, delivered by Moses, and for Israel (Exod 31:18). In other words, the letter refers to the old covenant Law without the Spirit.<sup>33</sup> Or as Augustine said (and Luther would agree), the letter refers to “Law without grace.”<sup>34</sup>

To be clear, there is nothing wrong with God’s commands on tablets of stone; they are divinely given and a perfect standard.<sup>35</sup> However, the Law was written by the finger of God on stone, not on the human heart. In other words, while the Law was good (cf. Rom 7:12, 14), it remained external, not internal to Israel. As a result, the Law, being external, could not change Israel’s heart within. The Law “set the standard, but offered no power to reach it.”<sup>36</sup> The Law, in other words, was impotent to produce the obedience that it required.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, since the Law revealed God’s perfect, holy, and righteous standard, the Law served to judge Israel in light of her sinfulness and idolatry (cf. Gal 3:10-14).<sup>38</sup> The Law was incapable of effecting transformation and it could only stand as witness to her condemnation.<sup>39</sup> Israel was a law-breaking bride, full of transgression against the Law. “In this way, what God intended as good is turned into a death-dealing instrument (Rom 7:13)—and the reason? We may refer to Rom 8:3a: the Law is weakened by human inadequacy, ‘the flesh.’”<sup>40</sup> Being children of Adam (Rom. 5:12-17), Israel consisted of sinners, unable and unwilling to obey the Law.

The Law, therefore, only served to expose Israel’s inability and disobedience, her defiance and rebellion. By consequence, the Law exposed Israel’s condemnation before the giver of the Law, who is the holy judge. The Law, in short, told the world that Israel was a covenant breaker, one who had violated

the *pactum* God had graciously established with his people.<sup>41</sup> This explains why Paul can speak so negatively about a letter written with ink (as opposed to one written through the instrumentality of the Spirit),<sup>42</sup> one written on tablets of stone (as opposed to one written on tablets of human hearts; 3:3), for the “letter kills” (3:6).<sup>43</sup> We can agree, therefore, with Harris when he says that Paul “recognized not only its [the Law’s] impotence to impart life (Gal. 3:21) but also its ability to bring death [Rom. 7:10].”<sup>44</sup>

In contrast, the Spirit of the new covenant gives life (3:6; cf. Rom 8:2-4; Gal 6:8).<sup>45</sup> As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:3, the Corinthians are a letter from Christ written “with the Spirit of the living God” on “tablets of human hearts.”<sup>46</sup> Paul appears to be merging allusions<sup>47</sup> in order to draw out a contrast: while the Law was limited to the *external* (commandments on tablets of stone), in the new covenant the Spirit writes *internally* (upon the heart).<sup>48</sup> As we will see shortly, Paul is highlighting the fulfillment of God’s promise to write the Law on the heart of his people by and through the Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

Second Corinthians 3:6 draws a similar contrast. We cannot miss how Paul creatively turns the conversation from “letters” of recommendation (3:1) to the “letter” that kills, namely, the Law (3:6). Once again, Paul’s aim here is to contrast the old covenant with the new covenant.<sup>50</sup> In the old covenant, the Law meant the spiritual death of Israel (even physical death at times). She could not keep the Law, resulting in judicial punishment.<sup>51</sup> However, the ministers of the “new covenant” have great news: while the letter brought death, the “Spirit gives life.”<sup>52</sup>

In order to understand Paul’s contrast better, it should be observed that Paul’s language in 2 Corinthians 3:3-6 is intentionally loaded with OT imagery. Paul’s reference to tablets of stone in contrast to tablets of human hearts, as well as his contrast between the external letter of death and the internal Spirit of life, is undoubtedly drawn from at least three well-known passages whereby God promised the arrival of the new covenant.<sup>53</sup> For our purposes, we must pay attention to precisely what God, through Jeremiah and Ezekiel, promised the new covenant would be like in its structure and nature.

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that

they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezek 11:19-20).

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ezek 36:26-27; cf. 37:3, 14).

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:31-34).

Unmistakably, Paul is building off of both Ezekiel and Jeremiah (cf. Deut 30:6).<sup>54</sup> As the Lord promised through Ezekiel, the new covenant is one in which God himself surgically implants a new heart/spirit, removing the one of stone (i.e., one that is lifeless and dead) and placing within a heart of flesh (i.e., one that is alive and beating).<sup>55</sup> As Paul will do, Ezekiel emphasizes the Spirit, and notice that the Spirit, unlike the letter, doesn’t work on stone tablets, but within the human soul, so that God’s commands are actually loved and obeyed.<sup>56</sup>

**Table 1**  
**New Covenant in Ezekiel and Jeremiah<sup>57</sup>**

Ezekiel 11	Ezekiel 36	Jeremiah 31
God puts one heart and new spirit within	God gives new heart and new spirit within	New covenant not like old covenant, which Israel broke

God removes heart of stone and gives heart of flesh	God removes heart of stone and gives heart of flesh	God puts his law within, writes it on their hearts
People will keep rules and obey	God puts his Spirit within	People belong to God
People belong to God	God causes people to obey	Not necessary to tell neighbor to “Know the Lord” for all will know the Lord, from least to greatest
		God forgives their iniquities

Jeremiah’s language is similar, exhibiting an even more explicit contrast between the new covenant of the Spirit and the old covenant God made with Israel’s fathers. In the old, Israel broke the covenant and was incapable of keeping it. The Law was strictly external. However, in the new, God’s laws are not limited to stone, but placed within. While in the former God’s finger wrote the Law on rock, in the latter God’s finger writes upon the human heart itself. Unlike the old, where not all Israel was Israel, in the new covenant *all* of God’s people will know the Lord and all their sins and iniquities will be forgiven (31:34).<sup>58</sup>

The contrast between the old and new could not be greater, and hence the contrast between the death-dealing Law and the life-giving Spirit could not be more vivid.<sup>59</sup> Certainly Paul is emphasizing the notable discontinuity between the two in light of the latter surpassing and eclipsing the former.<sup>60</sup> And in view of where Paul places his confidence (in contrast to his opponents), this new covenant emphasis only serves to demonstrate that Paul’s ministry does not rely upon human ability, credentials, or accomplishments, but entirely upon Christ and the Spirit, who alone can save.<sup>61</sup>

**THE PERMANENT AND SURPASSING GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT**

Paul accentuates the contrast between the letter and Spirit, and between life and death, even more so when he compares the old covenant under Moses with the new covenant of the Spirit. In doing so, Paul is contrasting two covenants in order to show the superiority of the latter over the former

and the inherent inferiority of the former to the latter.<sup>62</sup> Notice how the two compare with one another in Table 2:

**Table 2**  
**Two ministries, two covenants<sup>63</sup>**

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Ministry of the letter (3:6)	Ministry of the Spirit (3:6)
Ministry of death (3:6, 7)	Ministry of life (3:6)
Carved in letters on stone (3:7)	[Corinthians] written on human hearts (3:3)
Glory limited (3:7, 10)	Glory unlimited (3:8, 9)
Brought to an end (3:7)	Permanent (3:11)
Ministry of condemnation (3:9)	Ministry of righteousness (3:9)

The result of this eschatological dichotomy, as Meyer observes, can be summarized under two broad categories: (1) the *ineffectual* power of the old covenant versus the *effectual* power of the new covenant, and (2) the *temporal* nature of the old covenant versus the *eternal* nature of the new covenant.<sup>64</sup> Table 3 reflects these two comparisons:

**Table 3**  
**Nature of the two covenants**

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Ineffectual power	Effectual power
Temporal nature	Eternal nature

In order to understand the contrast further, particularly why the Mosaic Law/covenant is now obsolete in light of the new covenant of the Spirit, we must take into consideration Paul's exposition and interpretation of Exodus 34:29-35 in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11.

Exodus 34 occurs after Israel worshipped the golden calf (Exod 32). Moses broke the tablets that contained the Ten Words when he saw Israel's idolatry, symbolizing the breaking of the covenant by Israel (32:19). God, however,

graciously renewed his covenant with Moses and Israel, making new tablets (34:1-28). Moses was with the Lord “forty days and forty nights” when “he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” (34:28). These tablets of stone represented the covenant and would be placed in the ark (Exod 24:12; 25:16; 31:18; 32:15); hence the label “tablets of the covenant” (Deut 9:9-11).<sup>65</sup>

When Moses first came down from Mount Sinai with the tablets in hand, he was unaware that the skin of his face was brightly shining since he had been talking with God (Exod 34:29). When Aaron and the people saw Moses’ face “they were *afraid* to come near him” (34:30). Why? Israel was afraid because the brightness symbolized the presence-glor<sup>66</sup> of God and in light of Israel’s sin such brightness conveyed judgment and wrath, especially in light of her recent idolatry and the judgment that resulted (cf. 33:3-5).<sup>67</sup> As Hafemann explains, “The presence of God’s glory means Israel’s death.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, Moses’ face was a reminder that God was holy and Israel was very sinful, deserving condemnation.<sup>69</sup> More to the point, the brilliance of Moses’ face reiterated to Israel that as a sinful people God could not dwell with them lest they be consumed (though there is far more to the veil than just fear, as we shall see).<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, when Moses finished speaking with the people, he would place a veil over his face, keeping Israel from the presence of God. This practice continued each time Moses went into God’s presence. Moses would return, tell the people what was commanded, and then Moses would cover his shiny face with a veil until next time (34:34-35). While Moses does not specify this explicitly, it is a legitimate inference<sup>71</sup> to say that the veil not only kept Israel from seeing the brightness-glor<sup>72</sup> of Moses’ face—given Israel’s *fear* of divine judgment<sup>72</sup>—but also from seeing the transient, temporary nature of its radiance, symbolizing the impermanence of the old covenant and its eventual termination.<sup>73</sup> It is upon such an inference that Paul, in 2 Corinthians 3:7-13, argues that the glory of the Mosaic covenant has been brought to an end, giving way to the eternal glory of the new covenant.<sup>74</sup> As Paul says in 3:13, Moses “would put a veil over his face”—Why exactly?—so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.”

Commentators rigorously debate whether the purpose of the veil was meant to accommodate Israel’s *fear*, thereby mercifully protecting sinful, stiff-necked, hard-hearted Israel from God’s consuming glory (e.g., Scott Hafemann<sup>75</sup>), or

whether it was meant to keep Israel from seeing the *transient, fading* glory of Moses' face which was being brought to an end, ultimately representing the transitory nature of the old covenant (e.g., Murray Harris, Jason Meyer<sup>76</sup>). We cannot explore the legions of arguments on both sides, but I see no reason why both aspects cannot be present, as each appear to be legitimate inferences drawn from the text and do not necessarily entail contradictory conclusions. (Though it may be wise, as we will note shortly, to adjust the latter view. Rather than saying that the glory of Moses' face, and thereby the glory of the old covenant, *faded* we should instead say that it was *rendered inoperative/ineffective*, which more accurately fits the translation of the text.) Is it inconceivable that Moses veiled his face to mercifully keep Israel from divine judgment *and* to keep Israel from beholding that which was being rendered inoperative and ineffective as the new covenant approached?<sup>77</sup> After all, the Exodus narrative highlights the *fear* of the people (34:30), while Paul highlights the *temporary, evanescent nature* of the old covenant's glory (2 Cor 3:14).

It does seem, however, that in *Paul's* retelling of Exodus 34 it is the impermanent nature of the old covenant that is his main focus, as Paul nowhere mentions Israel's fear (as Exod 34:30 does), but strictly focuses on the nullification of the old covenant instead.<sup>78</sup> In other words, while it is true that the veil accommodated Israel's fear of God's judgment (and therefore the veil was a means of divine mercy), perhaps the *primary* reason for the veil in Paul's mind is that it kept Israel from seeing the reality that the old covenant would be brought to an end (i.e., Paul's argument is *eschatologically* driven).<sup>79</sup> According to Kruse, Paul "saw in the passing radiance of Moses' face a symbol of the abolition of the old covenant under which Moses ministered. He inferred that Moses lacked boldness because he knew the old covenant was to be abolished and he veiled his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the radiance associated with the old covenant."<sup>80</sup> Or as Harris brilliantly explains, when Moses veiled his face "he was *dramatizing* the impermanence of the newly established order." In other words, "Time after time his veil effected an eclipse of glory, an acted *parable* for the spiritually perceptive of the coming eclipse of the glory of the Sinai covenant."<sup>81</sup> Dramatization, parable—these words vividly capture what Moses was doing, namely, picturing the coming eclipse of Sinai's glory.

What is Paul's point, then, in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11? Simply put, the glory of the new covenant makes the old covenant obsolete, for the glory

of the former far surpasses the glory of the latter.<sup>82</sup> Notice the logic in Paul's argument. The Sinai covenant, he says, is a "ministry of death, carved in letters on stone" (3:7).<sup>83</sup> Yes, it was glorious; after all, it was God-given and divinely initiated, communicating God's perfect Law to his sinful people.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, it was ineffectual and incapable of saving, for it was carved on tablets of stone (3:7), not on tablets of human hearts.<sup>85</sup> Paul illustrates his point by drawing attention to the disturbing reality that "the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end" (3:7). The inferiority of the old covenant is evident in Paul's argument from the lesser to the greater: the new covenant ministry of the Spirit has far more glory (3:8).

It must be noted that scholars fiercely debate whether *καταργουμένην* (from *καταργέω*; 3:7, 11, 13, 14) conveys something that is "fading," "culminating," "abolished," "nullified," "made ineffective," or "rendered inoperative."<sup>86</sup> Scott Hafemann and Duane Garrett, however, make a substantial case from other NT uses of *καταργέω* that the correct translation is to "render powerless" or to "make inoperative or ineffective."<sup>87</sup> Guthrie concludes that Paul must be conveying that "the glory was snuffed out by the veil."<sup>88</sup>

Regardless, what is undebatable is that the glory suffusing Moses' face—and therefore the glory of the old covenant (cf. 3:11, 13)—has been terminated. As Martin says, "impermanence has given way to that which has come to stay."<sup>89</sup> Therefore, whether the sense of the text is that the glory actually faded or was rendered inoperative and powerless, the end result was that it was temporary in nature and has been cancelled.

Furthermore, it was absolutely necessary that it be "made null and void"<sup>90</sup> because the ministry of Moses (i.e., Law) was a ministry of *death* (3:7) and *condemnation* (3:9).<sup>91</sup> It was a ministry of death and condemnation because man could not keep God's holy Law.<sup>92</sup> As Paul says elsewhere, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).<sup>93</sup> And as God himself says in Exodus 34:7, he "will by no means clear the guilty." The consequence of law-breaking is certain death (e.g., Exod 35:2). The Law, therefore, only reveals our incompetence, inability, and guilt. The Law cannot regenerate, justify, and sanctify; the Law can only condemn those guilty of breaking it (cf. Rom 7:10; 8:1-11).<sup>94</sup> Hence, the glory of the "ministry of condemnation" was ephemeral and has now passed away with the advent of Christ.

How much more so, then, will the "ministry of righteousness" (i.e., the

Spirit's new covenant ministry) exceed the ministry of condemnation in its glory (3:9), for it does not bring death but life.<sup>95</sup> The former is appropriately titled the ministry of *righteousness* because unlike the covenant with Moses, in the new covenant God's people are not only forever acquitted, but they have imputed to them the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor 5:21) so that they are justified in God's sight on the basis of Christ's new covenant work (Rom 3:21-26).<sup>96</sup> Not only are sinners justified, but sanctified as well, for the Spirit writes God's laws on the heart so that *all* of his new covenant people walk in his ways and obey his commands, just as God promised through Ezekiel (Ezek 36:27; cf. Rom 8:3-4).<sup>97</sup> Certainly this is something the Mosaic Law could never offer or accomplish.

Therefore, argues Paul, the glory of the new covenant far surpasses (and outshines) the glory of the old covenant, so much so that Paul can say in 3:10 that "what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it."<sup>98</sup> As represented in the veiling of Moses' face (3:13), the glory of the old covenant is now obsolete and inoperative. "For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory" (3:11).<sup>99</sup> Once again (cf. 3:7), Paul is using a lesser to greater contrast (*a minori ad maius*) to prove the superiority of the glory of the new covenant.<sup>100</sup> The result is that the glory of the Law, visibly portrayed in Moses' face, has diminished before the glory of the gospel in the face of Jesus Christ.<sup>101</sup>

Though this will be discussed further below, 2 Corinthians 3:11 demonstrates that the Law under Moses was never intended to be permanent, nor was the old covenant administration.<sup>102</sup> It came to an end when Christ spilt his blood (i.e., the blood of the new covenant; Luke 22:20; cf. Rom 7:1-4; 9:4; Gal 3:22-4:6; Eph 2:15-16; Col 2:16-17).<sup>103</sup> A new, superior covenant has arrived in its place, one whose glory cannot be rendered inoperative like the radiance of Moses' face and one which will not deal death but life everlasting.<sup>104</sup> This was the covenant prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah prophesied would come, thereby superseding the covenant at Sinai.

### **THE UNVEILED FACE OF THE NEW COVENANT**

Having such a profound hope in the new covenant work of the Spirit (3:12), one can see why Paul is so bold. While the covenant under Moses, and its glory, was made void and null, Paul ministers under the new covenant

which is not only effective due to the life-giving Spirit, but is permanent and accessible in its glory.<sup>105</sup> Paul's hope and boldness (and every new covenant believers' by default) is in direct contrast to Moses "who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end" (3:13).<sup>106</sup> Paul's hope, in comparison, is grounded upon the new covenant whereby the Spirit not only grants new life, but God himself guarantees that the glory of the new covenant is permanent (3:11).

Paul, in verses 13-15, returns once more to the imagery of Moses' veil, and he does so in order to show typologically and metaphorically the contrast between those still stuck in the old covenant and those in the new covenant.<sup>107</sup> As before, Paul aims to highlight once more the ineffectual and temporal nature of the old covenant in contrast to the effectual and eternal nature of the new covenant.<sup>108</sup> Just as the veil covered Moses' face, so does a spiritual veil remain over the hearts of unbelieving Israelites "to this day" (3:14, 15; cf. Deut 29:4; Isa 6:9-11).<sup>109</sup> Paul persuasively drives this point home by describing the unbeliever as possessing a hardened mind.<sup>110</sup> "Saying that the mind of Israel was hardened means they did not have the Spirit."<sup>111</sup>

The Israelites, including many in Paul's day, knew the OT backwards and forwards. Yet, Paul can say that their minds were hardened because every time they read the "old covenant" they refused to believe it pointed forward to Christ and the redemption that comes through him. Though they heard the old covenant read, they could not (and would not) accept its fulfillment in the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, and his new covenant (cf. 2 Cor 3:15). As a result, certain Jews of Paul's day could not perceive that the old covenant had come to an end.<sup>112</sup> It's as if a veil remained over their "hearts" (3:15), keeping them from seeing and savoring the gospel.<sup>113</sup> As a result, they remained cut off from its glory.<sup>114</sup>

What a contrast there is, as Guthrie notes, between the "hardening or dulling of the mind" and the "open-faced experience of the glory of God."<sup>115</sup> Certainly the hard, blind, dull heart Paul makes reference to was apparent among Jews in Jesus' day for though he taught Israel concerning himself and the kingdom of God, they remained hardened and blinded to his mission and identity (e.g., John 12:40; Isa 6:10; Luke 24:27-46). Just as the veil kept Israel from the privilege of viewing the glory of the Lord—i.e., the veil being not only an instrument of mercy but divine judgment—so did a spiritual veil cover Israel's hearts in the first century, shielding her from seeing the glory of

God in the gospel of his Son (2 Cor 3:14-15; cf. Ps 95:8; Heb 3:8, 15; 4:7).<sup>116</sup>

However, “through Christ” (3:14) this veil is removed, taken away and abolished when the sinner is converted to the Lord (3:16).<sup>117</sup> The Law could not remove the veil, for the Law only revealed the hardness of man’s mind. Only in Christ can the veil be lifted once for all.<sup>118</sup> Conversion, in other words, changes everything, for the veil that previously blinded the sinner (cf. 2 Cor 4:4) is now removed when one turns to the Lord (3:16).<sup>119</sup> While previously the sinner was blind to divine glory, now his eyes are unhindered from seeing such glory (3:18).<sup>120</sup> While before, like Israel, he was cut off from seeing and experiencing God’s presence, now he knows God’s presence first hand for he beholds the glory of the Lord with an “unveiled face” (3:18). Just as Moses stood face-to-face with the Lord, so does the new covenant believer see the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:4-6).<sup>121</sup> In this sense, then, “every Christian has become a Moses.”<sup>122</sup> Such is the marvel of the new covenant in contrast to the old.

## **2 CORINTHIANS 3 AND THE NEWNESS OF THE NEW COVENANT**

As mentioned at the start, 2 Corinthians 3 tends to be a hermeneutical labyrinth. No doubt, some will disagree with our interpretation. Nevertheless, interpreters may agree on one thing: Paul is drawing a contrast between the old covenant, characterized by the Mosaic Law, and the new covenant, characterized by the Spirit. In what follows, we will labor to take yet a further step, transitioning from exegesis to theology, specifically Paul’s new covenant theology. To be sure, 2 Corinthians 3 does not provide us with a full biblical or systematic theology of the new covenant, nor does it solve all debates between covenantal systems. However, 2 Corinthians 3 does reveal some of the most basic building blocks to the new covenant. We will consider merely three as we paint with very broad strokes in order to draw out the implications of Paul’s new covenant theology.

### ***1. The old covenant and the Mosaic Law are now obsolete, for the new covenant supersedes the old covenant.***

Unlike the new covenant, the old covenant was not intended to be eternal. Consider, for example, the titles used of the new covenant throughout the OT. The phrase “everlasting covenant” is used sixteen times in the OT (three of those times in the context of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which Paul plays off of

in 2 Corinthians 3).<sup>123</sup> However, never is this label used of the old covenant nor is the old covenant ever referred to as a permanent covenant.<sup>124</sup> In fact, Paul says just the opposite in 2 Corinthians 3, unapologetically announcing that the old covenant and its glory (along with its Law of death) has been brought to an end (3:7, 11, 13), whereas the new covenant and its glory (along with its Spirit of life) is here to stay (3:11). We must conclude, therefore, that the old covenant and its Law are now obsolete, much in contrast to the new covenant. Or as Schreiner has said, “Paul evidently has constructed an antithesis in which one covenant is said to remain forever, while the other (the Mosaic) is coming to an end.”<sup>125</sup> The Mosaic covenant “has reached its fulfillment in Jesus Christ” and this “fulfillment means that the Mosaic covenant no longer is in force.”<sup>126</sup> Hence, it is right to call the covenant of Sinai an “old” covenant.

One of the entailments of the temporary nature of the old covenant in 2 Corinthians 3 is that new covenant believers are no longer under the Mosaic Law. It is not sufficient to say that in the new covenant the old covenant is merely confirmed, reestablished, or renewed. Rather, with the coming of Christ and the Spirit, God really has created and inaugurated a brand new covenant. As Seifrid asserts, “In Jesus Christ ‘the letter’ has been done away with ... Paul describes the Law as ‘the *old* covenant’ (3:14; cf. Heb. 8:13). Moses, who is read in the synagogue, gives way to Christ and to the Spirit, who is present in the apostolic proclamation (3:15-18).”<sup>127</sup> The Mosaic Law, which was part and parcel of the old covenant, is now obsolete. The new covenant believer is no longer under its administration and rule, nor is he bound to it. Since the letter kills (3:6) and functions within a ministry of death and condemnation (3:7, 9), this certainly is good news to those under its enslaving domain.

Lest the charge of antinomianism follow, we must quickly qualify that though the new covenant believer is no longer under the Mosaic Law, nevertheless, the righteousness of God contained therein is in many ways manifested in the new covenant where the believer is now under the Law of Christ.<sup>128</sup> Or as Gentry and Wellum put it, the righteousness of God “demonstrated in the old covenant has been enshrined and incorporated into the new.”<sup>129</sup> One might wonder, then, how such an incorporation manifests itself in the new covenant life of a Christian. Gentry and Wellum explain:

As a Christian, I am not bound by the Ten Commandments, because they are part of an agreement between God and Israel that does not apply to me. My relationship to God is based upon and defined by the new covenant. Nonetheless, within the new covenant the divine instruction calls me to love my neighbor so that adultery, murder, stealing, etc., are still covenant violations. The righteousness of God has not changed.<sup>130</sup>

In light of Jeremiah (31:31-34) and Ezekiel's (11:19-20; 36:26-27) prophecies, we see such a principle applied by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3. In the old covenant, the Law without the Spirit only brought condemnation for the unregenerate. However, in the new covenant the Spirit regenerates all of God's people and bestows upon them the power to obey God. The Spirit writes God's moral law upon the heart. Therefore, the "moral norms of the law can now be kept because of the internal working of the Spirit of God. The law is no longer just an external standard; it is also an inward delight."<sup>131</sup> Granted, in the new covenant it is not the Mosaic Law in view; however, the righteousness of God found in the Law has not ceased, but has been enshrined and incorporated into the Law of Christ, which the Spirit-filled believer is now capable of following.

One last observation is in order before we move forward. If the old covenant is now obsolete, it is obsolete because the new covenant has superseded it, as was God's intention. The old covenant, in other words, finds its *telos* in the new covenant, due to the redemptive work of Christ and the effective application of that work by the Holy Spirit upon our hearts. To be more precise, the old covenant finds its *telos* in the new covenant precisely because the new covenant *fulfills* the old covenant (cf. Jer 31:31-34).<sup>132</sup>

To qualify, this does not mean (as some might assume) that the old covenant no longer has value. To the contrary, it does carry tremendous value for as we learned in 2 Corinthians 3 it came with glory of its own. Furthermore, its Law is and remains the Word of God, canonical and God-breathed, and therefore profitable for instruction (2 Tim 3:16-17). At the same time, we must recognize that this side of the cross we have entered into a *new* covenant, one that has brought to fulfillment through Christ what the old covenant could only foreshadow and anticipate through types and patterns and at times through explicit prophecy. The eschatological goal of the old covenant has been inaugurated in Jesus and the new covenant

cut by his own blood. So the new covenant supersedes the old covenant, but it does so as that which brings to fulfillment the promises and types of the old covenant.

But now the question must be raised: In what way does the new covenant fulfill the old covenant? This question brings us back to the very heart of Paul's logic in 2 Corinthians 3.

***2. The solution to the problem inherent in the old covenant is found in the new covenant's structure and nature.***

As seen already, Paul contrasts two covenants by comparing the Law to the Spirit (2 Cor 3:6, 8, 17). One deals death, the other deals life. The Law, though good in and of itself, brought man face to face with death, precisely because the Law revealed his inability to meet God's standard. Because man's heart was hard, rebelling against his Creator, the Law came along and not only exposed man's rebellion but declared him guilty and therefore worthy of condemnation. Paul says it best: "the letter kills" (2 Cor 3:6). So he calls the old covenant the "ministry of death" (3:7) and "condemnation" (3:9). He even uses the imagery of Moses' veil to explain that Israel, given her hardened mind, has a veil over her own heart (3:14-15). Paul's language is rooted in the OT where repeatedly we read that Israel was stubborn in heart (Deut 29:29; Jer. 3:17; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17; Ps 81:12). At the center of this problem is Israel's covenant infidelity; she is a covenant breaker.<sup>133</sup>

However, in 2 Corinthians 3 the apostle Paul, building off of Jeremiah and Ezekiel's prophecies, demonstrates that the new covenant carries with it the *solution* to this deadly problem inherently manifested in the old covenant. While in the old covenant Israel did not and could not remain faithful to the covenant, in the new covenant all covenant members are born again and therefore capable of faithfulness.<sup>134</sup> While in the old covenant the Law was written externally, on tablets of stone, incapable of creating heart change, in the new covenant the Spirit writes God's commands within, upon the heart, so that real change occurs as a result.

Jeremiah 3:16-18 promises this much when it says that the Ark of the Covenant would no longer be needed in the new covenant.<sup>135</sup> The Ark carried within it God's instruction, his laws. However, a day was to come when God's people would no longer point and say, "The ark of the covenant of

the Lord” (Jer 3:16). Instead, “It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again” (3:16). Why? It shall no longer be needed for at that time the people “shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart” (17). As Jeremiah will explain later on in 31:31-34, in the new covenant God places his commands within, writing it upon the heart, so that all of his people know him personally. “Thus the people of God will faithfully keep the new covenant. God’s instruction will be internalized, it will be ingrained in their thinking, feeling, and planning.”<sup>136</sup>

It’s no surprise, then, that when Paul compares and contrasts the old covenant with the new covenant, this is the very point he labors to make. As he explains in 2 Corinthians 3:3, in the new covenant the Corinthians (and all believers by inference) are a letter written not with ink but with the Spirit, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Death is no longer their fate for they are no longer under the Law’s condemnation. Instead, they are alive due to the internal, heart-changing work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:6, 16-17). As a result, the veil that was over the heart has been removed and every believer shares the privilege of Moses, namely, beholding with an unveiled face the glory of the Lord, which results in Christ-like transformation (2 Cor 3:16-18).

Given Paul’s contrast, we are left to conclude that the new covenant is far superior to the old covenant, for (1) the former’s glory is eternal and therefore much greater than the temporary glory of Moses’ face, and (2) the former is far more effective, regenerating instead of killing. In short, such superiority is rooted in a simple fact: the new covenant, both in its eternality and effectiveness, has the solution to the problem the old covenant could not solve.

One might ask, then, what is so *new* about the new covenant? Answer: Since the new covenant carries with it the solution to the old covenant dilemma, the new covenant must be new in its *structure* and *nature*.<sup>137</sup>

The old covenant involved a “tribal” approach, whereby God dealt mostly with leaders in Israel (prophets, priests, and kings), rather than with every covenant member. In other words, the permanent structure (and problem) of the old covenant was that it had to be forever mediated, as seen when Paul refers to the mediatorial role of Moses in 2 Corinthians 3, a role that necessarily kept the people from beholding the glory of God. Gentry and Wellum helpfully elaborate upon what this “tribal” structure looked like and how it stands in contrast with the structure of the new covenant:

Despite remnant themes and an emphasis on individual believers, the Old Testament pictures God working with his people as a tribal grouping whose knowledge of God and whose relations with God were uniquely dependent on specially endowed leaders—thus the strong emphasis on the Spirit of God being poured out, not on each believer, but distinctly on prophets, priests, kings, and a few designated special leaders (e.g., Bezalel). Given this hierarchical structure of the covenant community, when these leaders did what was right, the entire nation benefited. However, when they did not, the entire nation suffered from their actions. ...But what Jeremiah anticipates is that this tribal structure is going to change [Jer. 31:29-30]. ...the covenant community [Christ] mediates is not structurally the same as the previous covenant communities. Those who come under his mediatorial rule and reign include both believing Jews and believing Gentiles, and one enters this relationship, not by physical birth, circumcision, or the Torah, but through spiritual rebirth and faith. Only those who are in faith union with their covenant head are his family, and *all* of his family know God and have access to God through Christ.<sup>138</sup>

While the old covenant involved a *physical* relation between the covenant mediator and the seed, as is evident from Adam to David, with the advent of Christ and his kingdom the new covenant involves a *spiritual* relation between the Mediator and those he has purchased.<sup>139</sup> As a result, in the new covenant all of God's people have the Spirit, having been born again, and all of God's covenant recipients know the Lord.<sup>140</sup> This is the very exciting news that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel announce, as do other prophets like Joel (2:28-32).<sup>141</sup>

It should be added, in light of our focus in this essay, that for Paul, who is building off of these prophets, such a change in the *structure* of the new covenant is assumed throughout 2 Corinthians 3 and is the basis on which Paul erects his new covenant theology. Note not only Paul's confidence but the confidence he expects his Corinthian readers to possess as well. It is a confidence rooted in the ministry of the new covenant where, unlike Israel's mixed community, every one of God's people has been given new spiritual life by the Spirit (3:6). Paul's new covenant ministry is not a ministry of condemnation, as was the case with the ministry of the old covenant (i.e., a ministry of death), but instead it is a ministry that breeds life and gives righteousness freely (3:7-9). Unlike the old covenant, in the new covenant

there is a type of boldness that defines every member, for every covenant member sees the Lord with an unveiled face (3:12-16), something that could not be said of Israel at Sinai. No longer is this privilege limited to Moses, but due to the priestly work of Christ and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost all new covenant members stand in the shoes of Moses now. While Paul doesn't touch on the structure as explicitly as he does elsewhere, nevertheless, it is present, assumed everywhere in his language about the *efficacy* of the life-giving Spirit, the *permanent* glory of the new covenant, and the immediacy found in the *open-faced* access to the glory of God, all of which old covenant Israel lacked in full.

Furthermore, a change in nature is part of this structural difference as well. Not only is there an immediacy between God and the new covenant member thanks to the once-for-all mediatorial work of Christ—an immediacy that involves a spiritual relation between the mediator and his people as opposed to a physical one—but there is also an internal, spiritual change in the person as well. As God promised through Jeremiah (31:33-34), and as Paul hints at in 2 Corinthians 3:3, 6, 7, the Law is no longer *external*, on tablets of stone, but is now *internalized*, since the Spirit has written his commands upon the heart, resulting in authentic obedience. The forgiveness of sins follows as well, which is also promised in Jeremiah 31 and assumed in 2 Corinthians 3, particularly in how Paul contrasts condemnation (old covenant) and righteousness (new covenant; 3:9). To put the matter theologically, all of God's new covenant members are both regenerated and justified (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25).

To clarify, we are not denying that old covenant members were regenerated and justified (as if there are two peoples of God and two ways of salvation). Contra certain forms of dispensationalism, from start to finish redemptive-history has one people of God and one plan of redemption in Jesus Christ. However, contra certain forms of covenant theology, we would also be mistaken to assume, based on this rich redemptive-historical continuity, that Israel and the church are virtually the same. To the contrary, much changes in structure and nature now that Christ has secured redemption and the Spirit has been universally distributed upon God's people. The major difference is that in the new covenant *all* covenant members are born again (Jer 31:31-34), and not only born again but justified, which simply was not the case in the old covenant as "not all Israel was Israel" (Rom 9:6).<sup>142</sup>

Or to rephrase the matter in light of 2 Corinthians 3, in the new covenant the *normative* experience of every member is life in the Spirit and a lifting of the veil to behold the glory of the Lord (3:16-18). Paul assumes this when he utilizes Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. Therefore, while there may be one people of God and one plan of redemption, the church is defined by a new reality: rather than being a mixed entity as was the case with Israel, the church is a *regenerate* body of *believers*.<sup>143</sup> This is the great hope the prophets foretold and longed to see.

Thus, there is an *efficacy* to the *scope* of the Spirit's work in the new covenant that sits in stark contrast to the *impotence* of the old covenant letter, the latter of which cannot regenerate and transform. And such an efficacy is inherently tied to Paul's emphasis on the *permanence* of the new covenant, for unlike the glory of Moses' face which was rendered inoperative and had to be covered up with a veil, the glory of the new covenant shines brightly for all new covenant members to see and experience. Its brilliance is accessible and eternal in nature.

**3. The new covenant, therefore, is ontologically superior to the old covenant.**

Given the change in structure and nature, we must now conclude with a final question: Is the new covenant ontologically superior? The answer must be yes.<sup>144</sup>

In light of what we have seen in 2 Corinthians 3, we cannot agree with those who say that the newness of the new covenant has nothing to do with its *nature* and *structure*, as if it is a mere renewal of the old covenant.<sup>145</sup> Take, for example, the role of the Spirit. It's not as if the new covenant is new simply because it brings with it *more* Spirit.<sup>146</sup> Such an assumption misses the contrast Paul draws in 2 Corinthians 3. The newness of the new covenant is that while the old covenant was characterized by the letter, the new covenant is totally different, for it is characterized by the Spirit. In short, the Spirit is *inherently* part of the new covenant, which is why the new covenant produces life whereas the old covenant produced death because it was *inherently* characterized by the letter.

Therefore, the differences between old and new are not merely *quantitative*, but especially *qualitative*. As Meyer has put it, the "new covenant is an eschatological advance over the old."<sup>147</sup>

The presence of the Spirit is an intrinsic element of the new covenant, while the old covenant is largely defined in terms of the Spirit's absence. Therefore, the intrinsic element of the new covenant is the Spirit while the intrinsic element of the old covenant is the letter. The old covenant could not change Israel's spiritual condition because it did not possess any intrinsic provisions for changing the heart. The genius of the new covenant comes in its different design. God made the new covenant with the intrinsic provision of the Spirit for changing the heart of its covenantal members.

Therefore, the character or ontological elements of the covenants determine the results that flow from the covenants (death or life). The new covenant produces life because of its essential character consists of the life-giving presence of the Spirit. The old covenant produces death because of its essential character consists of the impotent letter, which is not able to effect a change within the covenantal members.<sup>148</sup>

Such a contrast is apparent when one looks at Israel in comparison with the new covenant community. Israel was a nation, consisting of ethnic Jews. One entered into this nation, and therefore into the covenant community, through birth. But such an entrance in no way initiated or created a change within, that is, a change of the heart. In fact, physical birth and entrance into the community was shortly followed by an introduction to the death-dealing letter.<sup>149</sup>

The new covenant, however, is entirely different. Covenant membership is not based upon physical birth but *spiritual birth*, which is accomplished by the Holy Spirit resulting in faith-union to Jesus Christ. Unlike the letter, the Spirit gives life (2 Cor 3:6), and in contrast to the mixed community of the old covenant, every covenant member has a heart change effected by the Spirit.<sup>150</sup> Paul describes the result in 2 Corinthians 3: Every new covenant member beholds the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face (2 Cor 3:16, 18). The result is the type of transformation (cf. 2 Cor 3:18) that the prophets promised would only arrive in the new covenant, and it is a heart change they promised would characterize all new covenant members (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27).

Therefore, while the old covenant is ontologically connected to the Law which kills, the new covenant is ontologically connected to the Spirit who gives life.<sup>151</sup> It is precisely because the new covenant is (1) a ministry of *life* and (2) a ministry that *eternally* abides that its glory is inherently superior

to the glory of the old covenant ministry.<sup>152</sup>

There can be no doubt, then, that the new covenant and its glory is inherently superior to the old covenant and its glory, for the former is neither limited in its power or scope (to save) nor temporary in its nature. No doubt, Paul would have agreed with the author of Hebrews who strongly asserts that the new covenant is “better” for it is “enacted on better promises” and is superior to the old covenant which was far from “faultless” (Heb 8:6, 7). After quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34, as Paul alludes to in 2 Corinthians 3, the author then concludes, “In speaking of a new covenant, he [God] makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13). The ontological superiority of the new covenant could not be stated any stronger!

It is no wonder why Paul, in his defense of his apostleship, has the superior argument, for his ministry is entirely grounded upon a superior covenant, and the Corinthians are living proof that such a covenant has arrived, just as the prophets promised.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schreiner, book review of *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, by Scott J. Hafemann, *JETS* 41, no. 3 (1998): 493.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 129. For an introduction to some of these knotty problems, see Linda L. Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul's Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3.1-18* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991); Carol K. Stockhausen, *Moses' Veil and the Glory of the New Covenant: The Exegetical Substructure of II Cor. 3,1-4,6* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989); Otfried Hofius, “Gesetz und Evangelium nach 2. Korinther 3,” *Paulusstudien* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989), 75-120; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 122-153.

<sup>3</sup> Garland specifically has in mind Moses' veil. David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (NAC 29; Nashville: B&H, 1999), 183.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony T. Hanson, “The Midrash in II Corinthians 3: A Reconsideration,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 9 (1980), 19. Also see Duane A. Garrett, “Veiled Hearts: The Translation and Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3,” *JETS* 53, no. 4 (2010): 729.

<sup>5</sup> As Van Unnik has remarked, after decades of research “there is hardly a single point on which expositors agree.” W. C. Wan Unnik, “‘With Unveiled Face,’ An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 3:12-18,” *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963): 153-169.

<sup>6</sup> All Scripture is from the ESV.

<sup>7</sup> Space is limited, so I will not be exploring, in a systematic fashion, the various systems (dispensationalism, progressive dispensationalism, progressive covenantalism, covenant theology). However, the discerning reader will notice how the conclusions reached in this article will sympathize with “progressive covenantalism.” See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Paul's use of “new covenant” appears to be equated with the gospel (e.g., 2 Cor 4:3-6). See Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (NSBT; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 192.

<sup>9</sup> James D. G. Dunn, “Did Paul Have a Covenant Theology? Reflections on Romans 9.4 and 11.27,” in *The*

- Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period* (ed., Stanley E. Porter and Jacqueline C. R. de Roo; JSJSup 71; Leiden/Boston: E. J. Brill, 1993), 299. Kruse believes the individual at the root of this criticism may be the offender who caused pain in 2 Cor 2:5 and the one who did wrong in 7:12. He “received moral support at least from the ‘false apostles’ who had already infiltrated the church.” Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians* (Rev. ed.; TNTC 8; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 123.
- <sup>10</sup> William J. Dumbrell, “The Newness of the New Covenant: The Logic of the Argument in 2 Corinthians 3,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 61, no. 2 (2002): 61; Gordon D. Fee, “Another Gospel Which You Did Not Embrace: 2 Corinthians 11.4 and the Theology of 1 and 2 Corinthians,” in *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker* (ed., L. A. Jervis and P. Richardson; JSNTSup 108; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 111-133; Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (NAC Studies in Bible & Theology 6; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 67; Randall C. Gleason, “Paul’s Covenantal Contrasts in 2 Corinthians 3:1-11,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (1997): 63.
- <sup>11</sup> “The fundamental error of the Corinthians, according to Paul, lies in their assumption that the legitimation of an apostle—and therewith the Gospel itself—is subject to human judgment. Everything is to be judged according to appearance.” Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014, 104-105. To qualify, it’s not the case that Paul thought letters of recommendation were inherently wrong. When Apollos arrived at Corinth he possessed a letter of recommendation from the Ephesians (Acts 18:27). Furthermore, Paul wrote letters of recommendation on behalf of others (Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 16:10-11; 2 Cor. 8:22-23; Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7-8, 10; Phlm. 10-12, 17-19). In 2 Corinthians 3, however, Paul’s point is that (contrary to his opponents’ criticism) he needs no letter of recommendation since he was the founding apostle of the Corinthian church. Having planted the church in Corinth is a far superior proof of his apostleship. See Gleason, “Paul’s Covenantal Contrasts,” 67; Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 123; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 156; Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 116 n. 13. Moreover, Plummer points out that to “bring another letter would amount to a personal insult to the Corinthians; it certainly would ignore the past and present work of Christ in their hearts. They themselves were Paul’s testimonial, guaranteeing his apostolic status and authority.” Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1915), 81.
- <sup>12</sup> “The Corinthians imagine that Paul has somehow wronged and, indeed, defrauded them.” Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 99 (cf. 107). Harris says their charge may have sounded like this: “Since Jerusalem is the fount of Christianity, those working outside Jerusalem must be able to give proof of their commission by letters of recommendation. We brought you Corinthians commendatory letters from Jerusalem and you yourselves have supplied us with such when we have visited other places. Why should you regard Paul as an exception? Does not his unconcern about letters of recommendation prove he is an intruder and imposter?” Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 261.
- <sup>13</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 196. Seifrid believes we should not assume that Paul’s opponents were Judaizers or Hellenistic “divine-men.” Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 100-110, contra Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 160-161; Dumbrell, “The Newness of the New Covenant,” 62; Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 260; Gleason, “Paul’s Covenantal Contrasts,” 65.
- <sup>14</sup> It is not accidental that Paul had to address, in 1 Corinthians, the arrogance (3:21; 4:6, 8, 18–19; 5:2, 6) and self-centeredness (6:12; 8:9; 9:12; 10:23) that often characterized the Corinthians and resulted in ecclesiastical division.
- <sup>15</sup> Paul uses the word “again” in light of 2 Cor. 2:14-17. Paul does commend himself in other places (4:2; 6:4), though he seems to know how to keep it in balance (2 Cor. 5:12; 10:18). See Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 123.
- <sup>16</sup> “Some people had come to Corinth with letters of recommendation because they needed them and had apparently asked the Corinthians for letters to facilitate the next people of their mission. These people were probably critical of Paul for not doing so.” Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 124.
- <sup>17</sup> “Paul’s work as an apostle speaks for itself, especially his founding of the church in Corinthian (10:12-18; cf. 1 Cor. 4:14-17; 15:10).” Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 116.
- <sup>18</sup> For Paul’s use of “heart,” see 2 Cor. 1:22; 2:4; 3:2-3, 15; 4:6; 5:12; 6:11; 7:3; 8:16; 9:7. For Paul, the heart typically refers to the very nucleus of the human person, where a person’s affections, will, mind, etc. can be found. See W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 508. However, some scholars argue that Paul, in 2 Corinthians 3:2, does not mean “our hearts” but “your” hearts.

- This argument is made on the basis of a textual variant. See A. E. Harvey, *Renewal through Suffering: A Study of 2 Corinthians* (Studies of the New Testament and Its World; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 47-48; C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Black's New Testament Commentary; London: Black, 1973), 96; J. Murphy-O'Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: University Press, 1991), 32 n. 23; Margaret E. Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (ICC: London: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:224. However, Meyer counters: "hēmōn enjoys superior textual support and makes sense in the context. Naturally, the one commended received and carried the commendatory letters. Therefore, Paul carried the Corinthian letter of recommendation not on him, but in him, that is, on his heart." Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 68 n. 23. Also see Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 157 n. 289; R. B. Sloan, Jr., "2 Corinthians 2:14-4:6 and 'New Covenant Hermeneutics'—A Response to Richard Hays," *Bulletins for Biblical Research* (1995): 5:135-136.
- 19 E. Gräßer, "Paulus, der Apostel des neuen Bundes (2 Cor 2,14-4,6)," in *Paolo-Ministro del Nuovo Testamento (2 Co 2,14-4,16)*, (ed., L. De Lorenzi; Serie Monographique de Benedictina 9; Roma: Benedictina Editrice, 1987), 15.
- 20 Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 158; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 127; Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 117.
- 21 As John Chrysostom said, "What letters would have done to gain respect for the apostle, the Corinthians achieve by their life and behavior. The virtues of disciples commend the teacher more than any letter." Quoted in Gerald Bray, ed., *1-2 Corinthians* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 7; ed. T. C. Oden; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 213. Also see Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 157; C. F. D. Moule, "2 Cor 3:18b," in *Neues Testament und Geschichte* (ed.; H. Baltensweiler and B. Reicke; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1972), 232.
- 22 While some translate the genitive Χριστοῦ (*Christou*) as objective (i.e., letter about Christ), Wallace and Guthrie translate it as a genitive of production. "In keeping with the figurative language used by the apostle thus far in the chapter, the Corinthians as his letter of recommendation have been produced not by Paul himself but rather under the initiative and authority of Christ (cf. 1:1). This places Paul's ministry in sharp contrast to those who bring credentials from human agents (i.e., the 'some' of 3:1). Paul's letter of recommendation, the Corinthians themselves, has been produced by the Lord Christ." George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 190; cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 104-105.
- 23 Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 116. In contrast to the ESV and NIV, however, Seifrid argues for a "genitive of content" and believes the Corinthians are a letter in which Christ is present. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 113.
- 24 Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 265; Gleason, "Paul's Covenantal Contrasts," 67-68. However, Hafemann qualifies that we should not view Paul as merely a messenger. "Paul's use of the verb *diakoneo* ('to serve, minister') in 3:3 to describe his activity of bringing Christ to the Corinthians indicates that he is much more than simply a courier delivering a letter (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15; 9:1-2; 2 Cor. 10:14; 11:2." Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 117 n. 14. In that light, it may be fitting to listen to Garland who argues that we should translate 1 Cor. 3:3 as "ministered by us" since "it implies that Paul is instrumental in producing and delivering the letter without specifying how" and the verb "to minister" and the nouns "minister" and "ministry" "refer to Paul's work of the gospel." Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 159. Also see Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:225.
- 25 Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 125
- 26 Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 167; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 163.
- 27 Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 194.
- 28 "We cannot avoid concluding that this remark [v.5] is polemically slanted and addressed to Paul's adversaries who made it their boast that they were the 'well-endowed ones,' with pneumatic gifts and imposing credentials to support their claim." Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (2nd ed.; WBC 40; Waco: Word, 2014), 194.
- 29 Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 173-174; Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 196; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 163. In this sense, Paul is like Moses since Moses' sufficiency was also from God: Exod 3:1-4:17. (The same is true of the prophets: Judges 6:11-24; Isa 6:1-8; Jer 1:4-10; Ezek 1:1-3:11.) See Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 113.
- 30 This meshing of imagery can appear confusing since ink and stone don't go together. But we must recognize that Paul (as he often does) is moving from one word picture to another in order to draw two different comparisons (one between ink and Spirit; the other between tablets of stone and tablets of hearts). In the first illustration Paul has in mind the instrument of writing (ink vs. Spirit), while in the second he has in mind the object (stone vs. hearts). See Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 117; Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 69 n 27; J. Murphy-O'Connor, "The New Covenant in the Letters of Paul and the Essene Documents," in *To Touch the Text: Biblical and Related Studies in Honor of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S. J.* (ed., Maurya P. Horgan and Paul

- J. Kobelski; New York: Crossroad, 1989), 196. Also, notes Garland, "Paul chooses stones because he will draw a comparison between his ministry for Christ and Moses' ministry for the law." Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 159.
- <sup>31</sup> Such an antithesis is common throughout Paul's writings and only serves to highlight the newness of the new covenant. As Martin explains, the new covenant was not "renovated Judaism" but rather "a new chapter in God's dealing with humankind, 'the eschatological new redemptive order.' ... Paul loves to set 'old' and 'new' in antithesis as marking the transition from the old order of sin and death to the new, eschatological age of fulfillment in Christ (Rom. 7:6; 1 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 4:24; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9-10)." Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 195. Martin is quoting Ernst Käsemann, "The Spirit and the Letter," in *Perspectives on Paul* (trans., M. Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 150. On the origins of Paul's "new covenant" language, see Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 174-175.
- <sup>32</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 192; Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 69; Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 129; Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 111; Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 115; Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 160, 169. Contra Thomas E. Provence, "'Who is Sufficient for These Things?' An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians ii 15-iii 18," *Novum Testamentum* 24 (1982): 64-65.
- <sup>33</sup> Hafeman, *2 Corinthians*, 131; idem, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 81; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1995), 167-168.
- <sup>34</sup> As quoted in Bray, ed., *1-2 Corinthians*, 216-218. Luther said: "The letter is nothing but THE LAW WITHOUT GRACE. We on the other hand, may say that the Spirit is nothing but GRACE WITHOUT LAW." Martin Luther, "Concerning the Letter and the Spirit," in *LW* 39:189.
- <sup>35</sup> Therefore, we must be careful not to overemphasize the negative aspect of the letter. See Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 166.
- <sup>36</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 216. Also see Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 127; Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 69, 84; Hays, *Echoes*, 131; Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 363; Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 130; Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, 118.
- <sup>37</sup> Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 269-275.
- <sup>38</sup> Gleason, "Paul's Covenantal Contrasts," 76-77, nicely summarizes the Law's effect: "First, the Law reveals sin; for apart from the Law a person would have no knowledge of sin (v. 7). Second, the Law provokes sin (v. 8). This further explains how the Law reveals sin. The sinful nature or sin principle is lifeless (dead) until the Law provokes it to commit acts of disobedience, thereby becoming 'utterly sinful' (v. 13). Only then can sin clearly be recognized for what it is. This is confirmed elsewhere in 4:15. 'Where there is no law, neither is there violation' (cf. 5:13). Third, the Law judges sin (7:8-10), resulting in death for the sinner because sin is deceitful (v. 11) and causes death (v. 13). In this way a ministry based on the Law of the Mosaic Covenant is described in 2 Corinthians 3 as 'the letter' which 'kills' by bringing 'death' and 'condemnation.' It 'kills' because it declares what God demands without giving sufficient power to fulfill it, and then pronounces the death sentence on all those who break it."
- <sup>39</sup> Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 269-275. Schreiner qualifies that when Paul refers to the "letter," the "emphasis is on the inability of the law to transform people. It does not, strictly speaking, refer to legalism [contra Charles E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1975, 1979), 2:854; rightly Bernard Schneider, "The Meaning of St. Paul's Antithesis: 'The Letter and the Spirit,'" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15 (1953): 164.], though the law apart from the Spirit may be used for legalistic purposes. The letter of the law refers to what is written in the law—its commands, statutes, and prescriptions. The law was a glorious revelation from God, and its commandments are good (Rom. 7:12). The issue is not with the content of the law, nor with what the letter of the law says. The problem with the law is that it produces no power to obey, for in the time of Moses the Spirit was generally withheld from God's people, and the law without the Spirit produced death. The law without the Spirit is a dead letter which does not and cannot generate life." Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 130.
- <sup>40</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 216. Also see Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 164-165.
- <sup>41</sup> One might object that the Law was meant to bring life, therefore it is unjustified to view it so negatively here. True, the Law is holy and good (e.g., Deut 6:4-6; 11:18), but it is only life-giving if it can be obeyed perfectly. Otherwise, it is an instrument of death and condemnation. Should one be capable of obeying the Law perfectly, then the Law would save. However, never is this the case in Scripture, for all fall short. See Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 241.
- <sup>42</sup> "When ink is written on a page of paper, the page receives the image but makes no response. The letters

remain only lifeless squiggles unless there is something to make sense of them and respond to them. A response comes only from human hearts in which the words are sown, take root, and produce fruit." Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 159.

- <sup>43</sup> On the Spirit's work of giving life, see Mark A. Seifrid, "Unrighteous by Faith," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (vol. 2; ed., D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2004), 134; Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 82. Hafemann, however, does not believe that there is a negative vs. positive, external vs. internal contrast here, as if Paul is making a negative statement about the Law by associating it with stone. "The reference in 3:3 to the 'tablets of stone' is part of a long tradition in which this designation is at the least a normal, neutral way of referring to the law, and more likely functions to emphasize its permanence, divine authority, honor, and glory (cf. 3:7, 9, 11!)." Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 117 n. 16; cf. Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Ministry in the Spirit: Paul's Defense of His Ministry in II Corinthians 2:14-3:3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 215. However, the broader thrust of Paul's description of the Law is very negative and pejorative. Paul's point is to show that the letter of the Law kills and is inadequate. It doesn't get more negative than that! See Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:227-228.
- <sup>44</sup> Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 273.
- <sup>45</sup> Also consider Rom 4:17; 8:11; 1 Cor 15:22, 45; 2 Cor 1:9; Gal 3:21.
- <sup>46</sup> More literally: "tablets that are hearts of flesh" or "flesh-heart tablets." See Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 69; Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 116.
- <sup>47</sup> "This sphere of the 'tablets of human hearts' as the authentic place of Christian ministry stands in contrast to 'stone tablets.' Exodus 31:18 refers to the 'tablets of stone' inscribed by 'the finger of God,' and Paul probably merges allusions at this point: the replacement of stony hearts (Ezek. 36:26-27) dovetails with the writing of the law (Jer. 31:33) on the tablets of stone (Exod. 31:18). These latter two allusions mark a turning in Paul's imagery to the topic of the law, anticipating the Spirit/letter contrast in 3:6 and the contrast between new-covenant ministry and Moses's ministry through a veil in 3:7-18." Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 193.
- <sup>48</sup> Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, 117.
- <sup>49</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 125; Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 70; Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 312.
- <sup>50</sup> Stephen Westerholm, "Letter and Spirit: The Foundation of Pauline Ethics," *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 238-239; Schneider, "The Meaning of St. Paul's Antithesis," 163-207; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 421; Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. J. R. de Witt; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 215-219; Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 81. Contra Hafemann who denies that Paul in 2 Cor. 3:6 contrasts Law and Spirit. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 132.
- <sup>51</sup> Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, 111-112; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 166. On the curses of disobeying the Law, see Deut. 28:15-68; 29:21-28; Lev. 26:14-39.
- <sup>52</sup> Cf. Rom 2:29; 7:6; Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 275. The Letter/Spirit contrast has been a subject of enormous debate. Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 79-80, summarizes the debate into three views (though more could be listed): hermeneutical, legal, and allusive.
- "(1) The hermeneutical reading states that texts can be read literally (i.e., the letter of the law) or 'spiritually.' Few scholars advocate it in its original form today, but it has been revived in a modified form by some prominent scholars." E.g., Ehrhard Kamlah, "'Buchstabe und Geist,' Die Bedeutung dieser Antithese für die alttestamentliche Exegese des Apostels Paulus," *Evangelische Theologie* 14 (1954): 276-282; Käsemann, "The Spirit and the Letter," 155; Peter Richardson, "Spirit and Letter: A Foundation for Hermeneutics," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 45 (1973): 208-218; Hays, *Echoes*, 126.
- "(2) The legal reading holds that 'letter' (*gramma*) is a synonym for 'law.' This view subdivides between those who understand 'letter' as an unqualified reference or a qualified reference to the law." E.g., James D. G. Dunn, "2 Corinthians 3:17: The Lord Is the Spirit," *Journal of Theological Studies* 21 (1970): 310; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 1:234-236; Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 176; Stockhausen, *Moses' Veil*, 79; Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 305-306; Andrew A. Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 81; Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 171.
- "(3) The allusive reading believes that 'letter' (*gramma*) stands for a distorted understanding of the law, which the legalists held." Provenca, "'Who Is Sufficient,'" 68; Käsemann, "The Spirit and the Letter." I agree with Meyer that the "legal reading" is closest to the text. For a critique of the other views and a case for the legal reading, see Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 80-81; Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 127; Gleason, "Paul's Covenantal Contrasts," 70-78. For an extended treatment of the issue, also see Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 130-150.

- <sup>53</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 192-193; Gleason, "Paul's Covenantal Contrasts," 69; Dumbrell, "The Newness of the New Covenant," 63-64; Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 117-118; Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 264-265.
- <sup>54</sup> See esp. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 119-188; Stockhausen, *Moses' Veil*, 57; Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, NJ: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 46-47; Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 71; contra D.-A. Koch, *Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums: Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus*, Beihefte zur historischen Theologie 69 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1986), 45. Paul will do the same in his exposition of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:25 where he refers to the cup of the new covenant, again a reference back to Jer 31:31-32. Also consider Heb 9:15-28. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 126-127.
- <sup>55</sup> Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 169, 177. I believe the Spirit's supernatural work of regeneration is in mind in these texts. See Matthew Barrett, *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 137-141.
- <sup>56</sup> Therefore, these allusions to Ezekiel and Jeremiah "make clear that the new covenant does not completely jettison the law but offers a new way to keep the law through this transformed heart ... The law demands obedience; the Spirit gives it (Rom 8:3)." Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 177. Hafemann helpfully qualifies that "Paul is not merely pointing to the fact that the eschatological promise of Ezekiel is now being fulfilled. He is also asserting that it is being fulfilled through his own ministry, since Paul is the one through whom the Spirit came to the Corinthians." Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Ministry in the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of II Cor. 2:14-3:3 within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/19; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 222.
- <sup>57</sup> Some of the descriptions in this table have been paraphrased for the purpose of setting these verses in comparison.
- <sup>58</sup> Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 176-177.
- <sup>59</sup> This is not to suggest that the Spirit was not active in the Old Testament. However, Paul's aim here is not to point out the similarities between the two covenants, but their differences. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 275 no. 42.
- <sup>60</sup> Therefore, merely calling the new covenant a "renewal" is insufficient. See Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 72-75.
- <sup>61</sup> Some say Paul's is not contrasting two covenants but two ministries. E.g., Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 449. But note Harris: "Such a distinction is difficult to sustain given the above set of antitheses, where one may justifiably equate 'the old covenant' with 'the ministry/dispensation of death' and 'the ministry/dispensation of condemnation,' and 'the new covenant' with 'the ministry/dispensation of the Spirit' and 'the ministry/dispensation of righteousness.'" Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 280.
- <sup>62</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 129; Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 179; Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 271; Gleason, "Paul's Covenantal Contrasts," 67. Contra Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 270-271, 316-317, 323-325, 379.
- <sup>63</sup> Some of the phrases in this chart may not be used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 to directly refer to the old or new covenants. However, they do relate indirectly, so I have listed them here for simplicity.
- <sup>64</sup> Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 63. Also see Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 187-188. On the eschatological nature of these two epochs, see James D. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 149.
- <sup>65</sup> Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 207.
- <sup>66</sup> Dumbrell defines glory as "the radiant outward manifestation, or personal inward awareness, of the divine presence." Dumbrell, "The Newness of the New Covenant," 70. Garrett defines glory as "the transformative grace of God that is displayed within the two covenants; it is not a glowing face or any other superficial splendor. As such, the 'glory' of verse 7 is Moses' experience of God's grace on Mt. Sinai in the course of his pleading for Israel's forgiveness, and this glory was reflected in his shining face." Garrett, "Veiled Hearts," 751. Hamilton's definition may be best: "The weight of the majestic goodness of who God is, and the resulting name, or reputation that he gains from his revelation of himself as Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer, perfect injustice and mercy, loving-kindness and truth." James Hamilton, Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 58-59.
- <sup>67</sup> Notice Moses' mention of fear in Exod 20:20 right after the Ten Commandments: "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin." Seifrid observes: "Israel, which has already failed the Lord's tests, is not able to endure his voice. Consequently, the Law is mediated in the final form of commandments written in stone. It is precisely this element of the narrative that Paul takes up explicitly and emphatically (vv. 3, 7). He says nothing of the golden calf. That the commandments are given in written form signals Israel's distance from God and the broken communication between them."

- Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 154.
- 68 Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 144. Contra Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 755, who denies that fear had anything to do with it and instead says the veil was necessary because Israel could not handle the brightness of Moses’ face and it being a “freakish phenomenon.” Garrett, however, completely ignores Exod. 34:30, which says that Israel was “afraid,” indicating there was a sense of fear of judgment. In his reaction against Hafemann (which I generally agree with), I think Mayer may go slightly too far in seeing no to little place for “fear” in Exod. 34. Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 91. Also see Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 298 n. 23; Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 292; Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 618-619.
- 69 One might ask why, then, did Moses reveal his face at all? To begin with, it is often necessary that divine revelation be accompanied by divine glory. Therefore, once Moses finished communicating God’s oracles his face was immediately covered. Also, the sight of Moses’ face reminds the people that God truly is present and Moses, as mediator, is to be listened to and obeyed. Additionally, the open face of Moses reveals, even if it be but for a short time, the potential of what life might be like to one day live in the presence of God permanently.
- 70 “The Exodus narrative makes clear that viewing the glory of a righteous and holy God can be extremely hazardous for iniquitous humans. Moses had asked to see God’s glory (Exod 33:18), but God warned him that gazing directly into the face of God was fatal (Exod 33:20). Moses hid his face at the burning bush because he was afraid to look at God (Exod 3:6). When God placed Moses safely in the cleft of a rock, covered him with his hand, and revealed only his back (Exod 33:21-23), Moses’ face still shone from his encounter with God. Moses alone caught a fleeting glimpse of God’s frightening majesty and splendor and lived to tell about it (Exod 33:17-23). By contrast the Israelites had continuously grumbled against God, mutinied against Moses, and bowed down to a golden calf. Their sinful condition put them in jeopardy to look even at this glimmer of God’s glory reflected in Moses’ face.” Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 172-173; cf. Provence, “Who Is Sufficient for These Things?” 71.
- 71 Harris calls it an inference that Paul finds in the OT text itself. Paul “may have inferred the diminution of the radiance from the OT text itself. If Moses was radiant whenever he emerged from ‘the tent of meeting’ after an encounter with Yahweh (Exod. 34:35a) and his veil then prevented any prolonged sight of his face (Exod. 34:35b), it is natural to deduce that each encounter with Yahweh brought about a ‘recharging’ with glory, which in turn implies a loss or fading of glory.” Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 285.
- 72 Not only did Israel have a fear of divine judgment, but the veil itself can be seen as a means to divine judgment. As Seifrid explains: “Moses’ veiling of his face was an act of judgment that prevented the sons of Israel from looking upon (*antēnizō*) its glory (v. 13).” Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 155 (cf. 164).
- 73 Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 132; Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 293; Harris, *The Second Corinthians*, 285. Contra Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 144. Dumbrell argues that Paul’s point is not that “the glory on Moses’ face was fading, which may have been so since he comes in the unique role of covenant mediator, but that the covenant revelation itself which communicated the reflection on Moses’ face was not to endure ... Paul is not concerned with the question of ‘fading glory’ on Moses’ face but with a glory evoked by the reception of the old covenant ministry, a glory finally to be replaced by the glory associated with the new covenant ministry, since this is the later point of comparison.” Dumbrell, “The Newness of the New Covenant,” 72.
- 74 “The thing being brought to an end is the old covenant in v. 11; thus the force of the substantival participle relates to the whole complex of the old covenant. The contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant is between something being brought to an end and something that will endure. In other words, Paul presents this eschatological contrast in terms of impermanence and permanence. Paul can affirm both the glory of the old covenant and the termination of the old covenant and its glory because of the eschatological arrival of the new covenant.” Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 93.
- 75 Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 144, 146, 207-215, 224, 288-289, 354-358; idem, *Paul, Moses and the History of Israel*, 223-224, 281-282, 310-313. Also see Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 186-188; Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 88.
- 76 Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 297-298 (cf. 298 n. 23 for Harris’ critique of Hafemann); Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 86-99.
- 77 E.g., Martin seems to affirm both: “Why did the lawgiver place a veil over his radiant face (v 13; Exod. 34:33)? Part of the reason was to prevent the people’s disappointment when they saw the glory fading; but Exod 34:30 reports that ‘they were afraid to come near him,’ partly because of the ‘radiation’ of his face.” Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 217.
- 78 To clarify, I am not saying that Paul is contradicting the Exodus narrative or that Paul is going beyond the true sense of the OT text (e.g., James Dunn, “2 Corinthians 3:17,” 311. Rather, Paul is interpreting the

- text correctly, perhaps even stressing its eschatological implications in light of the new covenant. Paul is, as Dumbrell has said, interpreting the OT “within its own literary context.” William J. Dumbrell, “Paul’s Use of Exodus 34 in 2 Corinthians 3,” in *God Who Is Rich in Mercy: Essays presented to Dr. D. B. Knox* (ed., Peter T. O’Brien and David G. Peterson; Homebush West, NSW: Lancer Books, 1986), 190.
- <sup>79</sup> Critics will ask, “In hiding the brightness of his face by a veil, is not Moses dishonest to keep from Israel the transient nature of the old covenant?” The answer, however, is that the veil not only acted as a means of mercy, but as a means of judgment. Ironically, while Hafemann uses the above question to criticize the view that the veil is meant to hide the transient nature of the old covenant’s glory, Hafemann himself recognizes that the veil is “an act of judgment because of the hardness of Israel’s heart.” Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 144. Also see idem, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 330. On the veil as both an act of divine mercy and judgment, see Dumbrell, “The Newness of the New Covenant,” 76.
- <sup>80</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 132. Harris adds, commenting on 2 Cor 3:13, “At stage 3 [Moses speaking to the people about the divine commandments with unveiled face] the people would have been dazzled by the brilliance of Moses’ face (3:7) and would probably have noticed some fading of the brilliance even as Moses addressed them (this seems implied by the expression ‘gaze right to the end of what was fading’).” Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 297.
- <sup>81</sup> Emphasis added. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 300.
- <sup>82</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 204-207.
- <sup>83</sup> It’s debated as to whether Paul has in mind an objective genitive (a ministry producing death) or an adjectival genitive (ministry associated with death). The NLT, NIV, and NET represent the former while the ESV, HCSB, and NASB the latter. I tend to agree with the latter translations. See Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 206-207.
- <sup>84</sup> Paul’s point is that, although the old covenant with its regulations pronounced doom on the disobedient, its inauguration and administration were marked by glorious phenomena, beginning with the awe-inspiring outward manifestations of God’s presence at Sinai (Exod 19:16-22) and continuing with the reflected glory of Yahweh on Moses’ face after his second period of communing with God on the mountain (Exod 34:28-35).” Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 282-283.
- <sup>85</sup> Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 180-181.
- <sup>86</sup> Translations that go with some form of fading away include the HCSB, NIV, TNIV, NASB, CEV, REB, NJB, NRSV, RSV. Also see works such as Philip E. Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 109; Linda Belleville, *2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 104; Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 293; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (trans., Roy A. Harrisville; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 85; F. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 191. Watson and Harris argue that though the exact translation is not “fade,” nevertheless, this is the sense of the text. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 284; Watson, *Paul*, 294 n. 42; Belleville, *Reflections of Glory*, 204-205.
- However, others argue that “fade away” is not a satisfying translation or interpretation, and instead they prefer “to render powerless” or “make inoperative.” Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 739-46; Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 301-313; idem, *2 Corinthians*, 147-148; Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 212; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 184-185. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* 155, differs slightly, arguing for “to do away with” or “to bring to nothing” (i.e., abrogate).
- Still others go with a translation that says it was being brought to an end. See Simon J. Kistemaker, *II Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 118-119; Victor P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 207; Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, 52. A contemporary translation that is similar is the ESV: “the outcome of what was being brought to an end.”
- Furthermore, there is also considerable debate as to why it either fades or is made inoperative. For example, Hays, *Echoes*, 134, says “the glory turns out to have been impermanent not because it dwindled away but because it has now been eclipsed by the greater glory of the ministry of the new covenant.” I agree with Meyer, however: “There need not be an either/or equation here, however. God could bring an end to the old covenant by the greater glory of the new covenant, and the ‘fading’ character of the old covenant glory could testify of that eventual eclipse.” Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 92 n. 109. See also Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 289.
- <sup>87</sup> Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 286-309; Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 739.
- <sup>88</sup> Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 212. And again: “So his face was made ‘inoperative’ in the sense that the glory was snuffed out” (217).
- <sup>89</sup> “That radiance [from Moses’ face], however, faded in time and at length disappeared. From the lawgiver, Paul argues to that which he represents, viz., ancient Judaism whose glory, once historically a reality, is now fading

- away; indeed, its day is over, and its impermanence has given way to that which has come to stay, viz., the gospel (vv. 10-11).” Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 216. Emphasis added.
- <sup>90</sup> Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 750.
- <sup>91</sup> The “Law itself bring death, and not merely Moses’ deficient administration of it.” Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 151; contra Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 146-147.
- <sup>92</sup> Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 183-184. Also, the “genitive form may be taken as ‘adjectival,’ that is, the ministry was characterized, or marked by, condemnation.” Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 212-213.
- <sup>93</sup> “How it brought death is best understood in the light of Romans 7:10, where the apostle says that ‘the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.’ Although Leviticus 18:5 promised life to those who kept the commandments, Paul knew that no-one does so in fact, and as a result the law could only pronounce the verdict of death over transgressors.” Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 129.
- <sup>94</sup> See Garland who lists four ways the Law and the ministry of Moses deals death. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 171-172.
- <sup>95</sup> On the semantic relationship between covenant and righteousness, see Petrus J. Gräbe, *New Covenant, New Community: The Significance of Biblical and Patristic Covenant Theology for Contemporary Understanding* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 115-16.
- <sup>96</sup> Righteousness in 2 Cor. 3:9 is to be understood forensically. See Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 185; Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 214; Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 157. However, Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, 113, understands righteousness as both forensic and relational.
- <sup>97</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 130.
- <sup>98</sup> Guthrie insightfully observes how the glory of the new covenant surpasses the glory of the old covenant both in extent and in degree. “In terms of extent, the glory of Moses’s face was limited to one person ... This is both a superabundance of glory in terms of extent (it reaches farther) but also degree (there is a lot more of it). The glory of Moses’s face was quashed, snuffed out by a veil. So naturally, the constantly shining faces of new-covenant ministers and those to whom they minister will far outshine his face.” Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 216. One of the weaknesses of Hafemann’s study (cf. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 270) is that he denies that there are “degrees” or “amounts” of glory, rejecting the view that Paul has in mind ontological inferiority or superiority. Meyer, however, provides a helpful corrective to Hafemann in *The End of the Law*, 88-90.
- <sup>99</sup> Notice, while 3:7 referred to the glory of Moses’ face, now Paul seems to widen his use of glory to refer to the entire Mosaic (old) covenant in 3:11. Thielman explains the grammatical transition: “The English phrase translates a participial phrase that, significantly, is in the neuter gender (*to katargoumenon*). This means that Paul cannot be referring simply to the transitory ‘glory’ of the Mosaic ministry, as he had done in verse 7, for the term *glory* in Greek, *doxa*, is a feminine noun and would have required a feminine participle. Paul’s use of the neuter participle shows that he means that the entire Mosaic ministry—the Mosaic covenant, its sentence of condemnation and the death that it dealt to those who disobeyed it—is passing away.” Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, 113. Also Dumbrell: “Paul in vs.11 transfers the *katargeo* terminology from its restricted use in vs.7 as a direct reference to the glory on Moses’ face, to the old covenant ministry conceived as a whole.” Dumbrell, “The Newness of the New Covenant,” 75. Furthermore, we must not miss Paul’s theological point: Moses’s face symbolically represents the old covenant (the ministry of death and condemnation) and the glory that was brought to an end.
- <sup>100</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 207; Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 189. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 323, denies that the ministry of the Spirit is more glorious because the ministry of death was inferior. However, Garland is right to say, “But implicit in this comparison of ministries is the inferiority of one compared with the other. One has greater glory because it has life-giving effects.” Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 175.
- <sup>101</sup> Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 290.
- <sup>102</sup> Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 178. How are we to interpret 3:11 (“For if what was being brought to an end...”)? Hafemann argues that the verb means ‘to nullify.’ So Moses veiled his face to nullify the effects of divine glory. Scott J. Hafeman, “The Comfort and Power of the Gospel: The Argument of 2 Corinthians 1-3,” *RevExp* 86 (1989): 339. However, Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 91-92, gives three counter arguments: “First, the contrast in v. 11 demonstrates that the verb bears the nuance of something coming to an end versus something remaining, not between something nullified and not nullified. Second, the parallel in vv. 14 and 16 argues against this position. Verse 14 may mean that the veil is nullified in terms of its effects. However, in the parallel v. 16 Paul emphasizes that the veil is ‘removed’ (*periaireō*), not nullified. In other words, Paul provides the necessary clues for reading the verb as abolished in this context because of the parallel term *periaireō*. Third, the Exodus text itself does not support Hafemann’s position. ... I contend that the force of

- the verb relates to the existence of the object. Therefore, what Paul is describing with the term *katargeō* in 3:7, 11, 13, 14 is not simply becoming ineffective but is being brought to an end.”
- <sup>103</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 131.
- <sup>104</sup> Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 276.
- <sup>105</sup> “Paul’s hope relates to the permanent character of the new covenant of which he is a minister. He has no fear that this covenant will be superseded, and for that reason he can be very bold.” Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 132. Also see Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 188-189; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 179; Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 337.
- <sup>106</sup> Scholars debate as to whether *τέλος* means termination/end (temporal sense) or goal (telic sense), or both (culmination). Those who read *τέλος* as temporal include Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 133; Furnish *II Corinthians*, 207; Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, 97; Barret, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 120. Hafemann, however, makes a case for “outcome.” Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 309-312. Meyer, however, makes a strong case, contra Hafemann, for the temporal sense, arguing that when Paul refers to “what was fading away” (HCSB), he is referring to the old covenant as a whole. Meyer, therefore, translates 3:13: “[Moses put a veil on his face] in order that the sons of Israel might not gaze on the end of the thing being brought to an end (i.e., the entirety of the old covenant, including its ministry and its glory.)” Meyer defends the temporal view with two arguments: “First, Paul has repeatedly emphasized the transitory nature of the old covenant in 3:7-11, and so the temporal sense rests on solid ground because it naturally fits the context. ... Second, though this view creates a tautology [the end of the thing being put to an end], Pauline precedence favors this nuance when these two terms come together.” Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 96. [Similar to Meyer, see Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 1993], 133; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 219 n. 28.] Nevertheless, Meyer goes on to qualify that “one could adopt the telic or culmination idea and argue that Israel did not see the transitory dimension of the Sinai covenant because they did not grasp its goal. This interpretation states that God did not intend the Sinai covenant to remain (3:11) because its provisional purpose was to point to the greater glory of the new covenant (3:7-11). Now that the goal of the old covenant has come, it has come to an end. This reading could also fit the joining of ‘goal’ (*telos*) with ‘to abolish’ (*katargeō*) in that the old covenant has reached its culmination (*telos*), so the Lord has put an end (*katargeō*). On the other hand, if ‘end’ (*telos*) means the termination of the old covenant, then it still pointed forward to a greater covenant by nature of its obsolescence. In other words, the temporal idea still has a prospective flavor.” Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 96.
- <sup>107</sup> Is Paul speaking out of his own personal conversion experience? See Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 172, 184.
- <sup>108</sup> Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 94.
- <sup>109</sup> “The people should obey the law in order to escape the curse, and yet Moses recognizes that God has not given them the ability or heart to do so. He knows they will not obey given the state of their hearts (Deut. 29:22-28); 30:1). Paul is probably reflecting on this state of affairs when he says, ‘their minds were hardened’ (2 Cor. 3:14); that is, their minds were hardened by God so that they did not observe the law. Interestingly, biblical writers can speak of people being hardened by God and at the same time see them as responsible for sin.” Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 131.
- <sup>110</sup> Cf. Rom 11:7-8, 25. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 202.
- <sup>111</sup> Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 131.
- <sup>112</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 133; Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, 116.
- <sup>113</sup> “When the Jews of Antioch, Ephesus, or Corinth hear the law read in the Sabbath worship of the synagogue (vv 14-15), they fail to perceive its true significance. They imagine that it is the final revelation of God, not (as Paul has shown) a preparatory agency making them ready to receive the Christ (Gal 3:24). Therefore they remain hardened and blinded (4:3-4; Rom 11:25), in spite of their inestimable privileges as God’s ancient people to whom the law was first entrusted (Rom 3:1-2; 9:4-5).” Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 217.
- <sup>114</sup> Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 372.
- <sup>115</sup> Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 222. Also see Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 193-194.
- <sup>116</sup> There is an “analogy between the spiritual condition of the Israelites of Moses’s day, symbolized by the veil on Moses’s face, and the spiritual condition of those who have yet to have their hearts transformed by the Spirit of the new covenant.” Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 223.
- <sup>117</sup> Paul seems to be intentionally adapting Exod 34:34: “Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out.” See Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 134. Also note how the divine passive is used, meaning that it is the Lord who takes away the veil. See Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 309.
- <sup>118</sup> Much debate exists as to whether “Lord” in 3:16 refers to God the Father or to Christ. Regardless, Paul’s point is not obstructed either way.

- <sup>119</sup> "Paul is saying, in effect, that only as Israelites turn to Christ, on the basis of the preaching of the gospel, will they discern the inner meaning and glory of the old covenant. Apart from Christ those who remain under that covenant remain veiled to the eschatological glory to which it pointed." Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 195 (cf. 199). That conversion is in view, see Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 194; N. T. Wright, "Reflected Glory: 2 Corinthians 3," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird* (ed., L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 183.
- <sup>120</sup> Paul reveals the Trinitarian agent who brings about this conversion in 3:17: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." To clarify, Paul is not falling into some type of modalistic heresy by equating the Lord (God the Father?) with the Holy Spirit, as if the two are actually the same person. "The expression *the Lord is the Spirit* is not a one-to-one identification, but rather a way of saying that under the new covenant we experience the Lord as the Holy Spirit." Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 135. In other words, Paul is identifying the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Lord (i.e., Yahweh), as the one who removes the veil of hard-heartedness. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 196.
- Also, freedom in 3:17 is freedom from the veil and a freedom to behold the glory of God. See Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 401; idem, *2 Corinthians*, 160; Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 103-104. Such liberation, however, is not liberation unto absolute autonomy (i.e., antinomianism), but liberation unto Christ and his kingdom. To state the matter otherwise, the veil is removed and as a result we behold *not* the glory of the old covenant but the glory of the new covenant, namely, the glory of the Lord. What is the consequence of beholding the glory of the Lord? Transformation. (Some believe behold here should be reflect, as in a mirror. But beholding is a better translation. See Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 136; Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 100-103; Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, 105; Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 317.) Cf. Rom 6:1-4; 8:1-7; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15. In short, in seeing we are transformed. Paul likely has in mind what theologians call "sanctification." Once the veil is removed the believer now undergoes a progressive process in which seeing the glory of the Lord results in the sinner himself being transformed into the very image of Christ "from one degree of glory to another" (cf. Rom 8:17, 29-30). Therefore, seeing the glory of the Lord has the effect of being set more and more in line with that glory. See Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 215; Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 136-137; Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 274, 317. On the relation between image and glory, see Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 139-140. Again, Paul says, this is the work of the Spirit ("For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit")
- <sup>121</sup> Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 225.
- <sup>122</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 217. Hays is insightful: "It was the privilege of Moses alone to glimpse Yahweh's glory when he saw his 'form' (Num. 12:8) and his 'back' (Exod. 33:23), but now all Christians without distinction are privileged to witness that glory. Moreover, although Moses' face was unveiled when he was conversing with God and was reporting God's words to the congregation, it was thereafter veiled until he returned to the Lord's presence (Exod. 34:33-35). Christians, however, see the divine glory with permanently uncovered faces." Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 313. Also see Wright, "Reflected Glory: 2 Corinthians 3:18," 184; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 198.
- <sup>123</sup> Gentry and Wellum observe how "everlasting covenant" is used two times of the covenant with Noah (Gen 9:16; Isa 24:5), four times of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:7, 19; Ps 105:10; 1 Chron 16:17), one time of the covenant with David (2 Sam 23:5; 2 Chron 13:5), and three times of covenant signs (Gen 17:13, Exod 31:16; Lev 24:18). Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 475.
- <sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 476.
- <sup>125</sup> Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 132. Also see Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, 117; Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 306; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 177-178; Dumbrell, "The Newness of the New Covenant," 66.
- <sup>126</sup> "The commandments in the Mosaic law are still part of the Word of God, but they no longer function in the same way now that the fulfillment of what the Old Testament promised has come. For example, physical circumcision pointed to the spiritual circumcision of the heart, and the reality of the latter displaces the need for the former." Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 244.
- <sup>127</sup> Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 123.
- <sup>128</sup> "Freedom from the law for Paul does not mean freedom from 'ought.' It means freedom from the power of sin which uses the law to produce death. Death and sin are the result when the law confronts an unregenerate person. In other words, the law without the Spirit leads to death. But those who have the Holy Spirit have the power to keep the law." Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 245.
- <sup>129</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 513.
- <sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 513. Cf. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 131. Those who hold to covenant theology will instead appeal to the threefold distinction of moral, civil, and ceremonial in order to say that the first continues while the latter

two are obsolete. However, such a distinction is hard to justify from the text itself, especially Exodus and Deuteronomy. As Gentry and Wellum argue, this “classification is foreign to the material and imposed upon it from the outside rather than arising from the material and being clearly marked by the literary structure of the text.” They go on to explain why: “In fact, the ceremonial, civil, and moral laws are all mixed together, not only in the Judgments or ordinances but in the Ten Words as well (the Sabbath may be properly classified as ceremonial). Those who claim the distinction between ceremonial, civil, and moral law do so because they want to affirm that the ceremonial (and in some cases, civil) laws no longer apply but the moral laws are eternal. Unfortunately John Frame in his new and magisterial work on *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* and Bruce Waltke in his equally magisterial *An Old Testament Theology* perpetuate this tradition. This is an inaccurate representation of Scripture at this point. Exodus 24 clearly indicates that the Book of the Covenant consists of the Ten Words and the Judgments, and this is the covenant (both Ten Words and Judgments) that Jesus declares he has completely fulfilled [Matt. 5:17] and Hebrews declares is now made obsolete by the new covenant [Heb. 8:13]. What we can say to represent accurately the teaching of Scripture is that the righteousness of God codified, enshrined, and encapsulated in the old covenant has not changed, and that this same righteousness is now codified and enshrined in the new” (355).

<sup>131</sup> Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 244.

<sup>132</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 604.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 503, 506.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 506.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 506-507.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 507.

<sup>137</sup> Here I am following *ibid.*, 647ff. Gentry and Wellum add a third point that is very important: “3. Related to the previous two points, the newness of the new covenant, at its heart, is found in the promise of *complete forgiveness of sin*.” However, since our focus is 2 Cor 3, and Paul more or less assumes this third point instead of explaining it (as he does elsewhere), I have left it out.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 647.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 648.

<sup>140</sup> It is not the focus of this essay, but I would argue that it is precisely because of this structural change that the new covenant community is not a mixed community like Israel, but a regenerate community, one in which all God’s people are born again believers. Hence the rationale for believer’s baptism in the new covenant.

<sup>141</sup> Note Carson: “Jeremiah understood that the new covenant would bring some dramatic changes. The tribal nature of the people of God would end, and the new covenant would bring with it a new emphasis on the distribution of the knowledge of God down to the level of each member of the covenant community. Knowledge of God would no longer be mediated through specially endowed leaders, for *all* of God’s covenant people would know him, from the least to the greatest. Jeremiah is not concerned to say there would be no teachers under the new covenant, but to remove from leaders that distinctive mediatorial role that made the knowledge of God among the people at large a secondary knowledge, a mediated knowledge.” D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 152. Also see William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1984), 177-178; Paul R. House, *Old Covenant Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 317-321.

<sup>142</sup> “We are *not* to conclude from this that no Old Testament saint knew God, was regenerated, or was forgiven of his or her sins. Instead, under the old covenant these realities were true for the remnant (elect) within the nation in a typological, shadowy, and anticipatory way. Old Testament believers had access to God only mediately, *through* the priesthood and tabernacle/temple structures; their access was not immediate. In the same way, the elect under the old covenant were regenerate, but this was not true of the entire community, and even the elect did not experience the full new covenant realities of the Spirit’s work. Their sins were also forgiven (see Gen. 15:6), yet this was not based solely on the sacrificial system but came about as they also believed God’s promises and looked forward to God’s provision of a greater sacrifice to come (see Rom. 3:21-26; Hebrews 9-10). However, the main point to stress is that Jeremiah is signaling that, under the new covenant, what was true of the remnant (elect) within Israel will now be true of the *entire* covenant community and in greater ways. Instead of Israel of old, which in *its very makeup and nature* was a ‘mixed’ group, the anticipation is that the *entire* people will be characterized by: (1) the saving knowledge of God; (2) regeneration; and (3) the declaration of justification.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 687-689 (cf. 648-649).

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 686. This point, however, should not push us to then side with dispensationalism. As Gentry and Wellum qualify, “This is *not* to say, contra dispensational theology, that Israel is ontologically different

than the church and thus still has privileges distinct from Christ and the church. Rather, the *newness* of the church is a redemptive-historical newness, rooted in the coming of Christ and the inauguration of the new covenant. In him, all of the previous covenants, which in type, shadow and prophetic announcement anticipated and foreshadowed him, have now come to their *telos*." *Ibid.*, 684-685.

- <sup>144</sup> Contra Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 270-271, 316-317, 323-325, 379; *idem*, *2 Corinthians*, 151-152, 159. Note that there is a difference between saying the *new covenant* is ontologically *superior* and the *church* is ontological *new*. I am not saying the latter. In other words, the new covenant may be ontologically supreme to the old covenant, but that differs from saying that, in contrast to Israel, the church is ontologically new. I agree with Gentry and Wellum when they specify that the "church is *new* but not ontologically so." To say that it is ontologically new would be to say that it is totally and absolutely unlike Israel, as older forms of dispensationalism have argued. However, while there may be discontinuity in the structure and nature of the new covenant, so that it is ontologically superior to the old, nonetheless, we should not go so far as to say that there is no continuity between Israel and the church. For example, Heb 8-10 does apply Jer 31, a passage that addresses Israel, to the church in the new covenant. So there must be a *typological* connection. At the same time, we must also counter certain forms of covenant theology which would go to the other extreme, seeing the church as merely a replacement or substitution for Israel. In such a model the church, like Israel of old, still remains a mixed community and it is not until the last day that the covenant assembly is fully regenerate. However, this model ignores Heb 8:6 where the perfect passive demonstrates that there is an "already" to the "not yet" eschatology of the church. In other words, the new covenant people are already a regenerate people. This point is made in more detail in *ibid.*, 688-689.
- <sup>145</sup> E.g., Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 133, 163-173, 284-285; *idem*, *2 Corinthians*, 134, 146-147. Note Seifrid's corrective: "The claim that the old and new covenants are somehow the same because the 'content' of the Law is communicated or imparted by both of them is built upon a flawed and fatal abstraction ... Just as the form of the new covenant differs from the covenant made at Sinai, so its content radically differs from the old covenant. They differ as much as a demand differs from a promise, condemnation differs from righteousness, and death from life." Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, 122-123. Contra N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 123-125.
- <sup>146</sup> Contra Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 284-285.
- <sup>147</sup> Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 111.
- <sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 112. Meyer goes on to anticipate Hafemann's objection: "Hafemann would respond by claiming that these facts do not call his thesis into question because they [old and new covenants] both have the capacity to kill. ... His position falters because of a failure to properly distinguish the differences between the two covenants. While the apostles are an 'aroma of death leading to death' for those who are perishing (2 Cor 2:16), this fact does not mean that the gospel 'kills' those *in the new covenant* like the law killed those *in the old covenant*."
- <sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.
- <sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>151</sup> "The Spirit is so inextricably bound *with the new covenant* that there is no category of the 'gospel without the Spirit' for those *in the new covenant*." *Ibid.*
- <sup>152</sup> Or as Garrett says, the "glory [of the old covenant] was experienced under the constraints of a covenant that was deadly and 'becoming void.' The new covenant is a ministry of life, and thus it by definition has far more 'glory.' This greater glory is the fact that the new covenant is abiding, not dependent on human ability, writes its precepts on the heart, and carries a sure offer of forgiveness and life." Garrett, "Veiled Hearts," 751.

# “We are the Temple of the Living God” (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1): The New Covenant as the Fulfillment of God’s Promise of Presence

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## INTRODUCTION

Evangelical Christians from various perspectives have wrestled with how the New Testament (NT) relates to the Old, and, more specifically, how the new covenant relates to the prior biblical covenants. Should the relationship primarily be cast in terms of *continuity*, such that the nature and structure of the new covenant are in essential continuity with the nature and structure of previous covenants? Or should the relationship primarily be understood in terms of *discontinuity*, such that the newness of the new covenant is emphasized? No doubt, such themes of continuity and discontinuity are located along a spectrum, but different points along the spectrum delineate some of the key differences among theological systems today. To put it simply, one’s view of how the new covenant relates to the old will determine in large part what theological system is embraced.<sup>1</sup>

In order to be faithful to Scripture, we must pay close attention to the contours and nuances of the text itself. It is easy to overemphasize biblical continuity at the expense of discontinuity, or vice versa. Our job as interpreters is to trace the storyline of redemption so we can carefully discern what elements of the new covenant are in continuity with the old and what elements are discontinuous. Elements of abolition and fruition, of mystery and fulfillment, form the nexus of the issue.

The focus of this article will be on elements of *continuity* within Paul's theology of the new covenant. Specifically, I will argue that the new covenant is in significant continuity with previous biblical covenants in that it fulfills the intention or goal of the Old Testament's (OT) promise of God's presence among his people. The *telos* of the covenants was tied to the establishment and maintenance of God's everlasting presence, a goal that in Paul's theology was climactically fulfilled in the new covenant. Such teleological continuity among the covenants is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, the center of which includes a catena of Scriptural citations that together paint a portrait of the centrality of the promise of God's presence within the Sinai covenant, the prophets' restoration oracles, and the covenant with David.

### **THE HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT OF 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1**

Paul penned 2 Corinthians in order to defend the legitimacy of his apostolic ministry. At the time of writing, Paul had already planted the church at Corinth and had met subsequent opposition with a "painful visit" followed by a "tearful letter" (2 Cor 2:1-4; 7:8). Titus, who had delivered the "tearful letter," reported to Paul in Macedonia that the letter had been well-received and that the Corinthians had repented and sided with Paul. Among other things, then, 2 Corinthians expresses Paul's joy for their repentance and desire to see them encouraged in the faith (2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:5-16).<sup>2</sup>

In the midst of this historical narrative, which is introduced in 1:15-2:13 and concluded in 7:5-16, is a lengthy theological section on Paul's gospel and the new covenant (2:14-7:4). This section is crucial to Paul's purpose, for it defends the content of his gospel and his method of ministry. The foundation of his ministry was the new covenant itself, which held the promise of full forgiveness of sin for the repentant as well as divine power to live in significant obedience (cf. Jer 31:33-34). The Corinthians had not recognized their spiritual poverty but imagined themselves fully

able to please God by their own strength. But Paul reminded them that their repentance was in accord with his gospel of the new covenant and entailed elements of transformation.

Why did Paul consider the new covenant to be a solid basis for his ministry? How did he contend for its superiority in comparison to other covenantal contenders? As the argument unfolds, we can see a twofold perspective on the nature of the new covenant that runs along the continuity-discontinuity spectrum. In 2 Corinthians 3:1-18, which contains one of the few places Paul uses the phrase “new covenant” (cf. 1 Cor 11:25), the new covenant is presented mainly in terms of discontinuity, especially as it is contrasted with the old covenant. That discontinuity is emphasized in 3:1-18 is clear, for the very presence of the descriptor *new* (3:6) assumes a contrast with something *old* (3:14).<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 the new covenant is presented mainly in terms of continuity.<sup>4</sup> In this text the term “new covenant” is not found, precisely because Paul is not emphasizing the old/new antithesis but rather the particular ways in which the new covenant fulfills God’s saving promises to his people. Indeed, along with the use of the covenant formula in 6:16, Paul’s use of OT covenant texts shows a remarkable continuity in terms of fulfillment.<sup>5</sup> That it is the new covenant in particular that Paul refers to in 6:14-7:1 is not in doubt, since Paul clarified in 3:1-18 that his ministry was a ministry of the new covenant.

Hence, as Table 1 indicates, Paul defended his apostolic ministry of the new covenant by characterizing it in terms of both continuity and discontinuity. Like a mosaic, these twin elements together provide a holistic and nuanced depiction of the redemptive-historical nature of the new covenant.

**Table 1**  
**Covenantal Continuity and Discontinuity in 2 Corinthians**

<b>Covenantal Discontinuity</b>	<b>Covenantal Continuity</b>
3:1-18	6:14-7:1

For the sake of space, this article will focus on the latter piece of the mosaic, where Paul emphasizes the continuity with the promise of God’s everlasting presence among his people.

**“WE ARE THE TEMPLE OF THE LIVING GOD”: 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1**

Paul’s main point in 6:14-7:1 is expressed at the beginning and end of the text. In 6:14a he commands believers not to be unevenly mixed with unbelievers.<sup>6</sup> This is teased out in 7:1, where on the basis of the promises in 6:16-18 he urges the Corinthians to live holy and undefiled in the fear of God. They were to resist the temptation to find their identity in the unbelieving world but were to act in accord with their true identity as God’s “beloved.” The reasons given in 6:14b-16a bear the same message: just as it is unthinkable for God and his character to join forces and partner with Satan, so it is unthinkable for believers to join forces and partner with unbelievers. Just as righteousness cannot coexist with lawlessness, light with darkness, Christ with Beliar,<sup>7</sup> the believer with the unbeliever, or the temple of God with idols, so the Corinthians must reject or flee from any unholy pact or agreement with unbelievers.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the literary structure of 6:14-7:1 is clear:<sup>9</sup>

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 6:14a     | Do not be unequally yoked  |
| 6:14b-16a | For ( <i>gar</i> ) what fellowship do believers have with unbelievers? |
|           | Righteousness and iniquity   |
|           | Light and darkness   |
|           | Christ and Beliar  |
|           | Believer and unbeliever  |
|           | Temple of God and idols  |
| 6:16b-18  | For ( <i>gar</i> ) Christians are the temple of the living God         |
|           | Lev 26:11-12 (+ Ezek 37:27)  |
|           | Isa 52:11 (+ Ezek 11:17)   |
|           | 2 Sam 7:14 (+ 2 Sam 7:8; cf. Isa 43:6)                                 |
| 7:1       | Therefore, pursue holiness   |

The main point is in 6:14a where Paul urges the Corinthians not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. The five questions that follow in 6:14b-16a ground this point by rhetorically implying the inconceivability of such unequal relationships. The last question brings up the temple of God, which in 6:16b leads Paul to explain that believers actually are God’s temple.

That the temple in 6:16a is not merely illustrative is clarified or explained (16:6b) quite remarkably in the following phrase, for Paul asserts that all



The structure also highlights the imperative of the covenant relationship. If God is to dwell among his people, they must live accordingly. However, it must be noticed that the structure demonstrates that the promises are the foundation and impetus for the commands and not vice versa. William Webb has argued that the promises are the foundation for the imperatives in 6:16-17a but that the imperatives serve as the foundation for the promises in 6:17b-18.<sup>13</sup> But this misinterprets the A – B – B' – A' framework, which shows that the imperatives of separation (B – B') are grounded in and buttressed by the promises of covenant presence (A – A').<sup>14</sup> Here, as elsewhere in Paul's theology, the indicative grounds the imperative—a point Paul wished to emphasize by inserting the inferential conjunction *dio* in 6:17.<sup>15</sup> Paul's theology does not detract from the necessity of the imperative, but rather undergirds and propels it.

Finally, the structure highlights the veracity of God's word by utilizing strategically-placed biblical citation formulas: at the beginning ("just as God said"), the middle ("says the Lord"), and the end ("says the Lord Almighty"). The strategic placement of the formula reminds the Corinthians that God is faithful to his promises (cf. 2 Cor 1:18-20) and that these promises and commands truly apply to the Corinthians, for they are "just as God said"! More specifically, these citation formulas remind the Corinthians that the divine promise of God's temple presence among his people—indeed, that God's temple would *be* his people—is not new but is rooted in his covenant promises, being echoed and woven throughout the fabric of all of redemptive history. Beginning with Eden's lost paradise (Gen 2-3) and continuing through God's saving acts to redeem a people for himself, Scripture unfolds a story of redemption wherein God has worked to create anew *so that* he may once again dwell with a new humanity in peace and harmony forever. The trajectory of the promise of God's presence is therefore a major theme in the Old Testament, and the trajectory has come to fruition in the inauguration of the end-time temple presence of God among his people: "we are the temple of the living God" (6:16).<sup>16</sup>

Paul traces this trajectory of God's presence by means of citations from the OT. Not surprisingly, given the link between temple and covenant, the trajectory follows the same path as the biblical covenants, for the promises of God's presence are located within specific covenants in the OT.

### **THE PROMISE OF GOD’S PRESENCE IN THE SINAI COVENANT (6:16)**

The first quote (6:16b) most likely derives from Leviticus 26:11-12 and shows that the promise of God’s presence was an integral part of the Sinai covenant. In order to discern the possible theological significance of this text for Paul, we must briefly analyze the content of the promises in Leviticus 26, their Edenic basis in Genesis, and their canonical trajectory in Ezekiel.<sup>17</sup>

Leviticus 26 summarizes for Israel the blessings and curses of the covenant. In vv. 3-13, God offers the blessings, which are conditioned on covenant obedience (v. 3). The blessings revolve around promises of peace and prosperity in the land (vv. 4-10). The climax of the blessings is issued in vv. 11-12, where God promises his own presence, based on a covenant relationship of love and loyalty. His presence is suggested by the presence of his sanctuary or tabernacle (*mishkan*) in the midst of his people, among whom he “walks about” (*hithallek*). The covenant relationship is intact, for “my soul will not abhor you” (v. 11), a reality confirmed by the realization of the goal of the covenant: “I will be your God, and you will be my people” (v. 12). In its placement towards the end of Leviticus, Leviticus 26 provides the hermeneutical lens through which to understand the preceding chapters. Specifically, the statutes and laws given in Leviticus are covenantal and thus exist within the framework of a covenant relationship. The old covenant, given through Moses at Mt. Sinai (Lev 26:46), held before the people a promise of God’s own presence, which would be characterized by love and devotion. The fact that the people of Israel subsequently broke the covenant did not nullify the legitimacy of this offer, as Paul’s citation demonstrates.

In the midst of the blessings of Leviticus 26 there are indications that the basis for the promise of God’s presence is rooted in the Edenic portrait of Genesis 1-3. In Leviticus 26:9, for instance, God promises “to make you fruitful and multiply you,” an allusion to the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28. The point of the allusion is to show that what God had commanded humanity in the Garden was now going to be realized through the establishment of a covenant relationship. Another allusion to the creation narrative is located in the promise that God would “walk about” (*hithallek*) in the midst of his people (26:12). The Hitpael stem of the verb *halak* is used of God only seven times in the OT, the first of which occurs in Genesis 3:8 when God “walks about” in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day.<sup>18</sup> The anthropomorphic portrait of God walking around in the midst of a garden

is meant to indicate the sublime relationship God had with Adam and Eve; God's normative activity in the Garden was to fellowship with humanity, and they with him.<sup>19</sup> The use of *hithallek* in Leviticus 26:12 suggests that the same paradisiacal state, though lost on account of sin, will one day be regained by means of a covenant relationship. In fact, the camp of Israel itself is portrayed in the Old Testament as a sort of new Garden of Eden in which God "walks about" in the midst of his people (see Deut 23:14 [MT 23:15]; 2 Sam 7:6-7; 1 Chr 17:6). Although Israel's sin in the camp kept them from experiencing these blessings in full, the blessings were still legitimately offered as those that would restore the Edenic paradise by means of a covenant relationship.

The enduring legitimacy of the promise of God's presence in Leviticus 26 finds expression within Ezekiel's prophecy as it is recast as a promise of the new covenant. The central concern within Ezekiel pertains to the place and permanence of God's sanctuary. Because of the people's abominations committed in and around the temple (Ezek 8:5-18), God's glory had departed from the temple (10:1-21), and the covenant curses of Leviticus 26 had come to pass in the exile. Yet God did not forsake his people (cf. Lev 26:44-45) but promised in 11:16 that even in exile he "will be their sanctuary for a little while (*miqdash mē'at*)."<sup>20</sup> This promise was encouraging, to be sure, but only in a restrained and restricted sense, for God's brief presence with his people in exile was but a small ray of hope against the backdrop of impending doom. Nevertheless, it offered a glimpse of hope that God was not finished with his people, but would one day restore them from exile and dwell among them permanently.

Ezekiel 34:25-31 clarifies that God's presence among his people would coincide with the fulfillment of the blessings of Leviticus 26 in what is called a "covenant of peace" (34:25).<sup>21</sup> In this environment there would be an abundance of rain and vegetation, so that food would not be scarce. Wild beasts would be banished from the land, so that God's people might lie down in safety, free from terror of any kind. God himself would dwell among his people, as he would be their God and they his people. In short, this "covenant of peace" would bring about a new Garden of Eden, a paradise that would be regained not through the Sinai covenant but through the new covenant.

**Table 2**  
**A Comparison of Leviticus 26:3-13 and Ezekiel 34:25-31**

<b>Leviticus 26:3-13</b>	<b>Ezekiel 34:25-31</b>
Rains (4)	Rains (26)
Produce of the earth/tree (4)	Produce of the earth/tree (27)
Much food (5)	Much food (29)
Security (5)	Security (25, 27, 28)
Peace (6)	Covenant of peace (25)
Can lie down in safety (6)	Can sleep in safety (25)
No one terrifies (6)	No one terrifies (28)
No wild animals (6)	No wild animals (25, 28)
Covenant (9)	Covenant of peace (25)
Covenant formula (12)	Covenant formula (30-31)
The covenant God who freed from Egypt (13)	The covenant God who frees from exile (27)
	No longer ruled by nations (28-29)

Ezekiel 37 forms the climax of Ezekiel’s restoration oracles, for it brings to a conclusion many of the themes of restoration located earlier in the prophecy. In particular, 37:26-28 describes a new covenant called the “covenant of peace” that would be an “everlasting covenant” (37:26). The everlasting duration of this covenant would entail God’s everlasting and permanent presence in the midst of his people (37:26-28). And this covenant would fulfill the promises of the old covenant, for verse 27 hearkens back to Leviticus 26:11, where God promises that “my dwelling place (*mishkani*) will be among them.” The scene unfolds in great detail in Ezekiel 40-48, where the temple is rebuilt and God’s glory once again fills it. The end of Ezekiel’s prophecy tells the whole story: “The name of the city from that day is ‘The Lord is There’” (48:35).

Hence, the promise of God’s presence in Leviticus 26 is picked up and recast in a new way in Ezekiel’s “covenant of peace.” In Ezekiel God does not

renege on the Sinai covenant's promise of presence, but he locates it within a new and better covenant, which is based on the forgiveness of sins, cleansing from impurity, and the power of the Spirit (see 36:25-29).

The content, basis, and canonical trajectory of the promise of God's presence in Leviticus 26:11-12 provided Paul a rich and robust foundation from which to urge believers to holiness. Indeed, Paul's citation of Leviticus 26 in the context of his new covenant ministry suggests that he was aligning himself with Ezekiel's canonical trajectory.<sup>22</sup> Like Ezekiel, Paul conceived of the enduring legitimacy of God's promise to dwell among his people, and such a promise would only come to fruition in and through a new and everlasting covenant. Certainly there was an irreducible discontinuity associated with this new covenant, but the fact that Paul drew from a canonical trajectory *tethered to and encapsulated by a promise within the old covenant* suggests that for Paul there were significant elements of continuity between the covenants. This continuity is traced along teleological lines, for the old covenant's *goal* or *intention* of a restored Edenic relationship with God by means of a covenant now had finally and climactically come to fruition in the new covenant inaugurated by Christ and enjoyed by the church.

### **THE PROMISE OF GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE PROPHETS (6:17)**

In 6:17 Paul continues the catena by quoting two prophetic texts: Isaiah 52:11 and Ezekiel 11:17. Though Isaiah 52:11 is a command and Ezekiel 11:17 a promise, both texts envision a restoration of previous covenant promises and thus illustrate elements of continuity with those covenants. In particular, Isaiah 52:11 assumes that the Sinai covenant's promise of God's people as a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6) has now become a reality; and Ezekiel 11:17 promises a divine welcome for God's people in fulfillment of the covenant ideal of reconciliation. Paul's linkage of these two prophetic texts, which together offer the hope of a reconciled "kingdom of priests," shows that through the new covenant the hope had become a reality.

#### ***Isaiah 52:11***

In 2 Corinthians 6:17a Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:11.<sup>23</sup> Isaiah 52:1-12 is a unit that foresees the return of the God of Israel to his people, Zion. The text is replete with promises of redemption and salvation, as God promises to bare his arm before the sight of the nations (52:3, 7-10). Everyone among God's

people will rejoice when they hear the good news that God is king and that he is returning to Zion (52:7-8). The return of God to his people signals the return of his people from exile, and the return from exile is patterned after the exodus from Egypt. Just as God had protected Israel during the exodus, so God would surround his people with protection (52:12; cf. Exod 13:21; 14:19). And the second exodus is even better than the first, for just as Israel had left Egypt in haste (Exod 12:11, 33-39; Deut 16:3), so in the new exodus they would not need to go out in haste (Isa 52:12).<sup>24</sup>

Bracketing this good news in the text is a call for Zion to prepare herself for the coming king by acts of repentance and holiness (52:1-2, 11-12). They were to leave behind their old ways of life and walk in new ways, with purity and cleanness.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, the returning exiles in Isaiah 52 are described as priests. For instance, in 52:1 Zion is called to “wear your beautiful garments,” which alludes to the description of the priestly garments as “for glory and beauty” (Exod 28:2).<sup>26</sup> Second, those called to purify themselves in 52:11 are “you who carry the vessels of the Lord.” The Lord’s “vessels” are the articles for the temple that were carried off to Babylon when the temple was destroyed (2 Chron 36:10, 18-19). The individuals who carried these “vessels” were priests, for the only other place where the verb *nasa’* (“to carry”) occurs in connection with God’s *kelim* (“vessels”) is in Numbers 1:50-51, where it was the duty of the priests during the wilderness period to “carry the tabernacle and all its vessels.” As J. Alec Motyer explains, “The ideas of contagion through touching (Lv. 5:2) and of ‘carrying the vessels of the Lord’ are characteristically priestly.”<sup>27</sup> Finally, the description of God as the “rearguard” for his people (52:12) suggests not only his protection of them in the midst of the return from exile but also their priestly status before him. The term “rearguard” occurs elsewhere in the context of the protection of priests who bear the responsibility of caring for the ark of the covenant—the sign of God’s presence (Num 10:25; Josh 6:9, 13).<sup>28</sup> If this is the meaning of God as his people’s “rearguard” in Isaiah 52:12, the indication is that God’s returning people are his priests who are protected by him all around and who serve and minister to him in his presence.

The significance of Isaiah 52, then, is that *all of God’s people* are described as priests before him.<sup>29</sup> This was not a new concept for Israel, although it was new in Israel’s experience. Indeed, the aim of the old covenant, which was not

realized on account of Israel's sin, is spelled out in Exodus 19:5-6, wherein Israel for their obedience was to be a "kingdom of priests" before God. This promise, which unpacks the kingly and priestly aspects of the image of God in the Garden of Eden, held forth the blessing of kingship and dominion over the earth, as well as the blessing of priesthood in the presence of God. Isaiah 52 demonstrates that despite their sin and unfaithfulness to God, God had not given up on this Edenic promise. It would certainly not be realized by means of the broken Sinai covenant, but it would find fruition in and through a new covenant inaugurated through the death of the servant of Yahweh (see Isa 52:13-55:13). This new covenant would entail the transformation of the entire covenant community, who would without exception be consecrated as priests to God. And as such, they would no longer give in to patterns of idolatry and disobedience but instead walk in covenant faithfulness to God.

Hence, in 2 Corinthians 6:17 Paul's application of Isaiah 52:11 to the Corinthian believers suggests that the new covenant—the return from spiritual exile—had arrived by means of the death of Christ (see 1 Cor 11:25) and that as members of this new community all the believers at the church in Corinth were priests and lived in the realm of the holy.<sup>30</sup> For Paul, the inauguration of the new covenant had redefined membership within the covenant people of God along the lines of faith in Christ. Whereas membership within the old covenant community consisted of the believing remnant mixed with unbelievers, the membership of the new covenant community entirely consisted of those with "fleshly hearts" (2 Cor 3:3; cf. Ezek 36:26-27). Now that in Christ Isaiah's eschatological day had arrived—what Paul calls the "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17; cf. Isa 65:17) and the "day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:1-2; cf. Isa 49:8)—Paul was confident that "we all"—not just Paul, but all believers in Christ—had been granted to see the glory of Christ and were being transformed to a greater degree of holiness (2 Cor 3:18). Through Christ Jesus all of God's people had been consecrated to him as "saints" (2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 13:12) and played a priestly role in ministering to one another (2 Cor 9:12). The Sinai covenant's vision of a "kingdom of priests" had been realized, for the Corinthians "are" (6:16)—note the present tense!—the temple of the living God (cf. 1 Cor 3:17). In fact, Isaiah's promise of restoration finds escalation in the new covenant, for the Corinthians do not merely "carry the vessels of the Lord" for the rebuilt temple (Isa 52:11); they *are* the vessels of the Lord because they *are* the rebuilt temple!

“Therefore”—*dio* is a Pauline insertion to the catena in v. 17— they were to live like priests consecrated to God, with purity and devotion. Like priests, they were not to come into contact with what was unholy or defiled; they should “touch no unclean thing” (v. 17) but should “cleanse ourselves from every defilement of the flesh and the spirit” (7:1). This did not mean, of course, that the Corinthians were to remove themselves entirely from the world or to abstain from all forms of communication with unbelievers, but it suggests that their new identity as priests necessitated correspondingly new, priestly behavior. Since they were members of the new creation order, they were to live in the midst of the world in such a way as to be unstained by it. Fellowship and friendship with the world—putting in one’s lot with Christ and Belial—were impossible because of their new identity as priests of God.

That Paul aligned himself with Isaiah’s vision of a restored “kingdom of priests” shows once again elements of continuity between the new covenant and the Sinai covenant. The new covenant certainly was distinct from the Sinai covenant as seen in 3:1-18, but Paul’s use of Isaiah evinces a covenantal consciousness in which the new covenant was in one sense not the antithesis but the climactic unveiling of the *intention* and *goal* of the Sinai covenant in Christ. When placed along the covenantal trajectory of Scripture, the new covenant was not the beginning but the fulfillment of God’s plan for the establishment of a covenantal relationship with a humanity exiled from the Garden of Eden. In this teleological sense, the new covenant finds continuity with the Sinai covenant.

### ***Ezekiel 11:17***

The final phrase of 2 Corinthians 6:17 resumes the promise of God’s temple presence among his people, for God promises to “welcome” (*eisdechomai*) them. It is not certain which OT text Paul has in mind, although within the LXX only Ezekiel has the future first person singular verb *eisdexomai* (“I will welcome”) followed by the second person plural pronoun *hymas* (“you”; cf. Ezek 20:34, 41; 22:19). A further difficulty arises when these examples from Ezekiel are analyzed, for in them God does not promise to save but to judge his people for their disobedience.<sup>31</sup> While it is possible that Paul cited a promise of judgment in order to warn the Corinthians not to mix with idol worship, it is more likely that God’s promise to “welcome” his people is a sign of his saving presence among them. After all, not only

does this interpretation fit better with the rest of the catena, but it also fits better with the flow of Paul's thought, for the catena exists to support the legitimacy of Paul's striking statement that the Corinthians truly are God's eschatological temple (6:16). It is difficult to see how a warning of God's judging presence would support the notion that the Corinthians were God's temple, "just as God said" (6:16a).

A more likely source for Paul's quote is Ezekiel 11:17, where God says of his exiled people, "I will gather (*eisdexomai*, LXX) you from the peoples and I will assemble you from the countries in which you were scattered, and I will give to you the land of Israel."<sup>32</sup> This promise of restoration to the land is similar to other restoration promises with the verb *qabats* / *eisdechomai* (cf. Jer 23:3; Zech 10:8, 10) but with a significant difference: the immediate context in Ezekiel 11:16-20 emphasizes God's temple presence by means of a new covenant relationship. In 11:16 he assures them that despite their current plight in exile God is with them as their "sanctuary." He will be with them but for a little while because he will soon bring them back to the land (11:17), and when they return they will put away their idols (11:18) because God "will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and I will give to them a heart of flesh" (11:19). In essence, "They will be my people, and I will be their God" (11:20). In other words, swirling around the promise of restoration to the land is the reality of God's temporary sanctuary presence in the midst of exile as well as the future promise of a new covenant relationship accompanied by new obedience in the new land. As Ezekiel unpacks the rest of the promises of the new covenant throughout his prophecy, it is clarified that God's future sanctuary—his tabernacling presence—among his people is included as part and parcel of these promises (cf. Ezek 37:26-28; 43:7-9; 48:35).

Hence, the themes of temple, covenant, and land that surround the restoration promise of Ezekiel 11:17 suggest that in 2 Corinthians 6:17 Paul intended the Corinthians to view themselves as those brought back from spiritual exile, for he had "welcomed" them because of the reconciling death of Christ (2 Cor 5:18). Furthermore, he had given them his Spirit in order to signify his presence among them, as well as to guarantee that they would partake in the future welcome party at the resurrection of the dead (2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:5). All this meant that the Corinthians were current heirs of Ezekiel's promise of a future divine welcome based on the inauguration of a

new covenant. The realization of this promise suggests that the new covenant continues and fulfills in an ultimate and climactic way the promise of God’s welcoming presence among his people through a covenant.

### **THE PROMISE OF GOD’S PRESENCE IN THE DAVIDIC COVENANT (6:18)**

Paul’s citation in 6:18 concludes the catena with a reference to the Davidic covenant, which shows that the new covenant fulfills not only the goal of the old covenant but also the Davidic covenant.

In 6:18 Paul cites 2 Samuel 7:14, which as a part of God’s covenant with David issues a promise that God would be the father to the king and the king would be God’s son.<sup>33</sup> In 2 Samuel 7 David expresses a desire to build God a “house,” i.e., a temple (7:2), but instead God promises to build David a “house,” i.e., a dynasty (7:11). This wordplay on the Hebrew term for “house” (*bayit*), links the construction of the temple with the Davidic monarchy.<sup>34</sup> Tomoo Ishida rightly notes, “The Temple was the embodiment of the covenant of David, in which the triple relationship between Yahweh, the House of David, and the people of Israel was established.”<sup>35</sup> Prior to this point in Israel’s history the Ark of the Covenant had been mobile (2 Sam 7:6-7). The temple, on the other hand, was a permanent visible and outward sign that God’s presence was with the king and the people. Hence, if David or his progeny was to build this new and powerful symbol of God’s presence, it needed to be clear that David had not done great things for God, but that God had done great things for David.<sup>36</sup> If God was going to establish a permanent dwelling on Mt. Zion, David needed to know his place under the authority of God as God’s son (7:14). The temple, then, became a powerful reminder of the covenant God had made with David, and conversely, the permanence of the Davidic covenant offered a powerful hope for the permanence of the temple—the expectation of which is clear in the prophetic literature (cf. Jer 33:14-26; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-28; Amos 9:11-12).

Among the many promises enshrined within the Davidic covenant—which included a great name for David and rest from his enemies (7:9-11a)—the promise that the king would be God’s son is at the heart of the covenant relationship. God would act like a father towards his son, which would entail corrective discipline if needed, as well as never-ending steadfast love (*hesed*, 7:15).<sup>37</sup> The notion of a king as the son of God was not a new one, for the idea is present in many societies in the ancient Near East.<sup>38</sup> The king was

to be God's son not necessarily in terms of physical likeness but in other common characteristics and attributes.<sup>39</sup> What this entailed was that in his function as king, the king was the representative authority for the deity in a particular region, whereas in his status as son of the deity, he had been adopted into a covenant relationship with the deity (cf. Ps 2:7). In the same way, when God promised David that he would be a father to David's son and would adopt David's son as his own, he was promising that David's son would be in a covenant relationship with God and would represent God in the presence of Israel and the nations. Just like Adam and Eve were to live out what it meant to be created in God's image and likeness as God's representatives on the earth, so this Davidic scion was to be a faithful and obedient son who modeled for and led God's people toward covenant faithfulness (see Deut 17:18-20).

The early church ultimately saw the promise to David as fulfilled in Christ, for he was the only king in David's line who lived as the faithful and obedient son of God.<sup>40</sup> Even in 2 Corinthians we see indications of this early Christian belief, for in 1:19 Jesus is given such Davidic titles as "son of God" and "Christ." The title "son of God" likely emphasizes Jesus' unique status as God's son, yet the link with 6:18 suggests it is a Davidic title as well. Likewise, the title "Christ," which is not a proper name but a title of Jesus' status as the Jewish Messiah, indicates that Paul held Jesus to be the promised son of David (cf. Rom 1:3-4; 2 Tim 2:8).<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, in 2 Corinthians 6:18 Paul alters the citation from 2 Samuel 7:14 so that it applies the father/son promise of the Davidic covenant to all believers: "I will be your father, and you will be my *sons and daughters*" (cf. Rev 21:7).<sup>42</sup> Whether Paul can legitimately apply the promises of the one to the many is answered in 2 Corinthians 1:20, which contends that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises: "For as many as are the promises (*epangeliai*) of God, they are *yes in him*." In other words, there is no promise of God that comes to fruition apart from Jesus, but it is only "in him" that God's promises are fulfilled. The only other instance of the term "promise" (*epangelia*) in 2 Corinthians is in 7:1, where Paul—again utilizing the plural "promises"—summarizes the promises in 6:16-18 as "these promises" (*tautas tας epangelias*). The verbal link between 1:20 and 7:1 shows that the promises of 6:16-18 are some examples of the many promises of God—including those to David—that find their Yes in Jesus.<sup>43</sup> This link demonstrates that the only

way in which the Davidic father/son promises of 6:18 can be applied legitimately to the Corinthians is through their union with Jesus Christ. Jesus is the faithful son of David who wins victory and acceptance for all those who are united to him by faith (cf. 2 Cor 5:18-21). Through him the benefits of all the covenant promises of God are legitimately applied to Christians, who in Christ are “sons and daughters” of God.<sup>44</sup> As beneficiaries of the promise made to David, all Christians function as kings and priests who rule for God as his image (cf. Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9).<sup>45</sup>

Since the temple was inextricably linked to the covenant with David, the climactic fulfillment of the Davidic covenant in Christ meant for Paul that God permanently had established his dwelling among his people. Since the Corinthians were heirs of the promise to David, then they also were “the temple of the living God” (6:16). The inauguration of the new covenant brought to fruition the promise of God’s temple associated with the Davidic covenant. The arrival of the new covenant did not abolish or do away with the covenant with David, but brought it to its proper *conclusion* or *goal*. It was through the final Davidic king, who won victory for his people, that the new covenant community could now reign with him as a “kingdom of priests.” As we have already seen, this covenantal continuity runs along teleological lines, for the redemptive-historical trajectory of the Davidic covenant finds its goal ultimately in Christ and the new covenant community.<sup>46</sup>

### CONCLUSION AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Hence, in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 the new covenant is portrayed as having significant continuity with the other major covenants of Scripture. In particular, the new covenant fulfills the *intention* or *goal* of the OT’s promise of God’s presence, so that this continuity is to be traced along teleological lines. Significantly, Paul cites from both the Law and the Prophets to demonstrate the extent of this continuity, for in the case of the promise of God’s presence the new covenant fulfills the entire trajectory of the OT.<sup>47</sup> The future-tense promises of the Scriptural catena (6:6b-18) had become for Paul a present-tense reality in Christ: “we *are* the temple of the living God” (6:16a).<sup>48</sup>

With these observations in mind, a few implications are in order regarding issues of continuity and discontinuity in formulating a theological system faithful to Scripture. First, the text applies Israel’s promises to the new covenant community.<sup>49</sup> It is striking that Paul can argue that “we *are* the temple of the

living God” (6:16), and that “*we have these promises*” (7:1). The Corinthian church did not consist only of Jewish believers but of Gentile believers as well; and yet Paul considered all Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, to be legitimate heirs and beneficiaries of the promises of 6:16-18—promises that were made to the Jewish nation (Lev 26:11-12) and a Jewish king (2 Sam 7:14)! This does not mean that the church simply replaces Israel, but that through Christ the church becomes the heir of Israel’s promises through Christ. This observation makes best sense if Paul saw Christ as the last Adam, the true Israel, and the son of David, who alone on account of his faithfulness was the legitimate heir of the covenant promises. No other individual but he could lay claim to these promises, for they were Yes in him (2 Cor 1:20). Nevertheless, this meant that anyone—regardless of ethnicity or genealogy—could also lay claim to these promises through faith in him; anyone could experience Isaiah’s return from exile, Ezekiel’s divine welcome, or David’s reign as God’s son. Sometimes it is averred that there remains two distinct groups within the one new covenant people of God,<sup>50</sup> but Paul’s redemptive-historical and christological hermeneutic within 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 indicates otherwise (cf. Eph 2:11-3:6).

Second, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 suggests that the Davidic kingdom of Christ is already present and that all believers reign with him. Some scholars argue that there must be a future millennial reign of a Davidic king in Palestine for God to be faithful to his promises to David.<sup>51</sup> But the flow of 6:16-18 suggests otherwise, for Paul argues from the assumption in 6:18 that the Davidic promise of sonship has already been fulfilled in Christ. Further, as was argued, the Davidic covenant is inextricably tied to the presence of the temple. If the covenant with David has been climactically fulfilled, then—and only then—can one expect the climactic fulfillment of the end-time temple as well. But since the presence of the temple is precisely what Paul argues for in 6:16, it stands to reason that the Davidic covenant has been fulfilled as well. Hence, the argument that there are physical and national aspects of the Davidic kingdom that must be fulfilled in a future millennial age flies against the face of the present reality of the end-time temple in the church.

Finally, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 suggests that the entire new covenant community is regenerate. Paul’s doctrine of the church as God’s temple suggests that God dwells in and among each member of the community. He anointed them and gave his Spirit as a guarantee of their future inheritance (2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:5; cf. Eph 1:13-14). They were priests to God and as members of the new

humanity and creation order were to reflect God’s image in the world (6:17; cf. 3:18; 5:17). It is clear that they were not sinless—otherwise there would have been no need for “godly grief” (7:10)—but this did not preclude their status as the very temple of God!

These observations do not exhaust the implications of the text, but they provide a way forward in formulating a theological system that carefully traces the nuances of the biblical text, keenly discerns the elements of continuity and discontinuity in the storyline, and is thoroughly based on the new covenant as the climax of God’s redemptive work in Christ.

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- <sup>1</sup> Of course, in some sense it is true that the new covenant is in both continuity and discontinuity with the old. The question before us concerns deciphering *in what sense* this is true. For a good foray into some of the ways theological systems unpack themes of continuity and discontinuity, see John S. Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988).
  - <sup>2</sup> For details on the historical background to 2 Corinthians, see John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: B&H, 1999), 258-59.
  - <sup>3</sup> It is worthwhile to note that even in 3:1-18 there are some elements of continuity between the old and new covenants. For instance, the assumption throughout the passage is that the purpose of both covenants was that God’s people experience God’s glory. The problem in the old covenant was that its “goal” (*telos*) was unattainable because it had no provision to overcome Israel’s hardness of heart (3:13-14). The new covenant is better than the old, not because it has a fundamentally different goal, but because it actually fulfills that goal in Christ.
  - <sup>4</sup> This article assumes—but does not seek to defend—the view that 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 is not an interpolation but is part of the warp and woof of Paul’s flow of thought. For various approaches to the issue, see G. K. Beale, “The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5-7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 550-81; Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 354-60.
  - <sup>5</sup> That the context is quite covenantal is clear from the use of the covenant formula in 6:16 as well as the litany of covenantal promises in 6:16-18 (see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012], 507-08). Conducting a word study of the term *diathēkē* is insufficient to explain fully the covenant concept.
  - <sup>6</sup> While some have argued that Paul is prohibiting participation in idolatrous feasts (e.g., Gordon D. Fee, “2 Corinthians vi.14-vii.1 and Food Offered to Idols,” *New Testament Studies* 23 [1977]: 140-61), one should be cautious against specifying a single application for the prohibition (so Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* [The Anchor Bible, vol. 32A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984], 372; Margaret E. Thrall, *Introduction and Commentary on II Corinthians I-VII* [vol. 1 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary; London: T&T Clark, 1994], 473). If the Corinthians were to accept Paul and his ministry (6:11-13; 7:2-4), then it was necessary for them to live in ways commensurate to their status as God’s people.
  - <sup>7</sup> “Beliar” is related to the term “Belial,” which is a Hebrew term that refers to something worthless or evil; here it is personified as a name for Satan. For a discussion and texts on the use of the term in Jewish literature and at Qumran, see Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 362; Thrall, *II Corinthians I-VII*, 474.
  - <sup>8</sup> Identifying the “unbelievers” (*apistoi*) in 6:14 is the subject of some debate, with many commentators seeing them as non-Christians (e.g., Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 371-72; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 360-62) or Paul’s opponents (e.g., Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* [PNTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014], 289-91; David Starling, *Not My People: Gentiles as Exiles in Pauline Hermeneutics* [Beihefte zur Zeitschrift

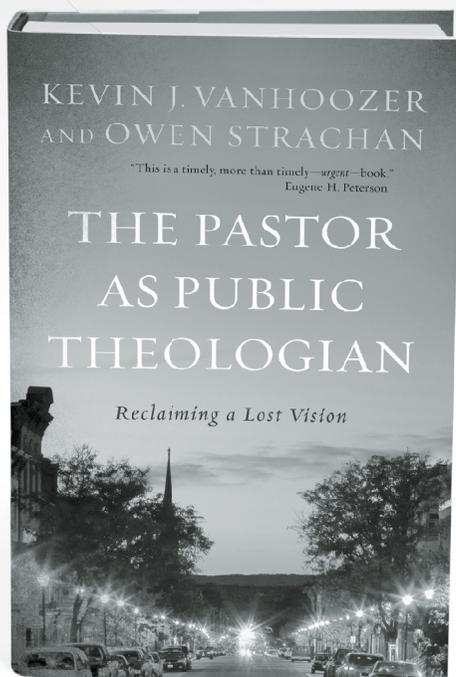
- für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 184; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011], 71-75).
- 9 Adapted from J. Lambrecht, "The Fragment of 2 Cor vi 14-vii 1: A Plea for Its Authenticity," in *Miscellanea Neotestamentica* (ed. T. Baarda, A. F. J. Klijn, and W. C. van Unnik, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 47; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 148.
  - 10 Some early manuscripts read "You are the temple of the living God," whereas other manuscripts render the term plural: "We are the temples of the living God." Although the meanings are not significantly different, the reading "We are the temple of the living God" is the *lectio difficilior* and most likely is the original reading.
  - 11 Cf. Gen 17:7-8; Exod 19:5-6; Lev 26:11-12; Deut 29:13; Jer 32:38; Exod 37:27; Zech 8:8.
  - 12 Adapted from William J. Webb, *Returning Home: New Covenant and Second Exodus as the Context for 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 85; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 32.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, 33.
  - 14 The *kagō* at the end of 6:17 does not mark an inference but a continuation of the covenantal promises of 6:16 (so Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 371; contra Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 374).
  - 15 Paul's A - B - B' - A' framework to show how God's new covenant promises undergird his people's obedience is similar to the framework the Davidic covenant found in 2 Sam 7, where the promises to David undergird and ground the call for obedience from the king (see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 393-95).
  - 16 For a helpful survey of the significance of the theme of God's presence in Scripture and how it relates to the storyline of the Bible, see J. Ryan Lister, *The Presence of God: Its Place in the Storyline of Scripture and the Story of Our Lives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).
  - 17 That Paul cites Lev 26:11-12 is a frequent observation among the commentators (e.g., Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 364), although some think Ezek 37:27 is primarily in view (e.g., Webb, *Returning Home*, 33-37). The citation does not match Lev 26:11-12 precisely, for *enoikeō* is Paul's conceptual equivalent for the MT *mishkani* and the LXX *tēn skēnēn mou* (Lev 26:11). On the one hand, Paul's third person pronominal references in 2 Cor 6:16 more closely match that of Ezek 37:27, as opposed to the second person references in Lev 26:12. On the other hand, the use of *emperipateō* in 2 Cor 6:16 renders the influence of Lev 26:12 certain, for this verb is used only eight times in the LXX (Lev 26:12; Deut 23:15; Judg 18:9; 2 Sam 7:6; Prov 30:31; Job 1:7; 2:2; Wis 19:21). Perhaps we need not choose between the two (contra Webb, *Returning Home*, 37; rightly Thrall, *II Corinthians I-VII*, 477), for Ezek 37:27 itself is a commentary on Lev 26:11-12. Paul's conflation of both texts illustrates his redemptive-historical hermeneutic.
  - 18 The other six instances are Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14 (MT 23:15); 2 Sam 7:6-7; 1 Chr 17:6; Job 22:14; 38:16.
  - 19 The relational aspects of *hithallek* are evident from the many texts where individuals "walk about" with God as a sign of their peace with and devotion to God: Enoch (Gen 5:22, 24), Noah (Gen 6:9), Abraham (Gen 17:1; 48:15), Abraham's servant (Gen 24:40), Isaac (Gen 48:15), a faithful priest (1 Sam 2:30, 35), Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:3 = Isa 38:3), Israel (Zech 10:12), and David (Pss 26:3; 56:13 [MT 56:14]; 101:2; cf. 116:9; 119:45).
  - 20 It is possible that *mē'at* is adjectival instead of adverbial, in which case God would be promising his presence as a "small" sanctuary for his people in exile (in opposition to the expansive edifice Solomon built). But given the later emphasis in Ezek on the longevity of God's sanctuary in the land, the adverbial sense ("a little while") is preferred.
  - 21 That Lev 26 was a significant source for Ezek is confirmed by Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 304.
  - 22 As Seifrid (*The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 296) notes, "Paul thus 'relocates' the Leviticus text to the context of the prophets, and especially Ezek 37:27."
  - 23 Paul alters Isaiah's order of the imperatives, placing the imperative to "touch nothing unclean" last instead of first. He also inserts the phrase "says the Lord" prior to the last imperative for structural reasons to show God's faithfulness to his promises (cf. 1 Cor 14:21; Thrall, *II Corinthians I-VII*, 478).
  - 24 As J. Alec Motyer (*The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 422) explains, "They will experience neither the panic flight of sinners under condemnation nor the opportunist escape of those whose master might change his mind, but rather every favourable circumstance."
  - 25 Contra Motyer (*Prophecy of Isaiah*, 421), it is likely that the original context of the command to "go out from there" in Isa 52:11 was the call to leave Babylon. But Motyer rightly discerns that the solution for Israel's plight was also cast in spiritual terms, since God's return to Zion was predicated on the forgiveness of sin and the transformation of his people.
  - 26 *Ibid.*, 416.

- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 421. It should also be added that the call to bring back the vessels of the Lord suggests that the temple will be rebuilt.
- <sup>28</sup> What is translated as “rearguard” is the Piel participle of the verb *ʿasap*. It only carries the meaning of “rearguard” in a few places in the OT: Num 10:25; Josh 6:9, 13 (cf. Isa 58:8). Num 10:25 says the tribes of Dan formed the “rearguard” of the 12 tribes as they left Mt. Sinai, and at the center was the tabernacle (*mishqan*) and “what is holy” (*miqdash*; e.g., lampstand, altar, ark of the covenant; cf. Num 3:31; 10:17, 21). In Josh 6:9, 13 the priests and the ark were surrounded in the front and back by armed men as they marched around Jericho, whereas in Isa 52:12 God is the one surrounding his people before and behind.
- <sup>29</sup> So Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 370.
- <sup>30</sup> So Seifrid (*The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 298), although it is not Paul’s omission of the phrase “you who carry the vessels of the Lord” that suggests an expanded priesthood, for Isa 52:11 already hints at this reality.
- <sup>31</sup> Frequently the LXX provides *eisdechomai* as a gloss for *qabats* (“to gather”), an action where God “gathers” his people for judgment (e.g., Hos 8:10; Zeph 3:8) or salvation (e.g., Jer 23:3; Ezek 11:17; Mic 4:6; Zeph 3:19-20; Zech 10:8, 10).
- <sup>32</sup> The second person pronoun in the phrase “I will gather you” matches the MT (*wēqibbatsti ʿtkem*), although the LXX has the third person pronoun *autous* (“I will welcome them”). It is possible that Paul cited the MT directly, although it is perhaps more likely that he altered the pronoun to fit the plural imperative verbs of Isa 52:11. Such a shift in pronouns is made more plausible because of the regular occurrence of other pronominal shifts in the citations of 2 Cor 6:16-18.
- <sup>33</sup> Paul uses the second person plural pronoun (“I will be your father”) in place of the third person singular pronoun (“I will be his father”) in order to apply the promise to the Corinthians. Further, the phrase “says the Lord Almighty” at the closing of the catena is not found in 2 Sam 7:14, although it is present in 2 Sam 7:8.
- <sup>34</sup> Thus, Scott W. Hahn (*Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009], 201) rightly notes: “The Davidic monarchy was inextricably bound to the Temple. The building of the Temple was integrated into the terms of the Davidic covenant from the very beginning, as can be seen from the wordplay on ‘house’ (‘temple’ or ‘dynasty’) in 2 Samuel 7:11-13” (emphasis original).
- <sup>35</sup> Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties of Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Fur die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft; New York: de Gruyter, 1977), 145 (as quoted in Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 201).
- <sup>36</sup> As Thomas R. Schreiner (*The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013], 157) notes, “The Lord is pleased that David wants to build him a house, but the danger is that David will think that he has done great things for God. Therefore, the Lord focuses on what he has done for David, pledging to build him an enduring house.”
- <sup>37</sup> On the relationship between conditional and unconditional elements with the Davidic covenant, see Bruce K. Waltke, “The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants,” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration* (ed. A. Gileadi; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 123-39. Ultimately, the promise to David was unconditional because the condition was infallibly fulfilled in Jesus, the obedient son.
- <sup>38</sup> See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 395-97; J. K. Hoffmeier, “The King as God’s Son in Egypt and Israel,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 24 (1994): 28-38.
- <sup>39</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 396-97.
- <sup>40</sup> Cf. Matt 1:1; Luke 1:32, 69; John 1:49; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8; Rev 5:5.
- <sup>41</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 41-55.
- <sup>42</sup> While it is true that Paul’s theology included ontological equality of males and females (see Gal 3:28), the addition of the term “daughters” (*thygatēr*)—a term found nowhere else in Paul’s literature—owes more to his use of Old Testament restoration language (contra Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 371-72; Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 299). As Thrall (*II Corinthians I-VII*, 479) has pointed out, the phrase “sons and daughters” is frequently found in Old Testament restoration contexts and thus served as an apt description for God’s restored people (cf. Isa 43:6; 49:22; 60:4; 49:22; 60:4; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 364).
- <sup>43</sup> Similarly G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 638.
- <sup>44</sup> The term *huios* occurs only four times in 2 Corinthians (1:19; 3:7, 13; 6:18), two of which refer to the “sons of Israel” (3:7, 13), one to Jesus as the “son of God,” and one to all believers as “sons and daughters” of God (6:18). This point strengthens the link between 1:18-20 and 6:16-7:1, suggesting that believers are adopted into God’s family by virtue of their connection with Jesus, the true son of God.

- <sup>45</sup> So Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 299.
- <sup>46</sup> For a helpful discussion showing how the Davidic covenant relates to the other biblical covenants, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity," in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis* (ed. John H. Skilton; Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), 298-318. He unpacks the relationship of the Davidic covenant to the covenant with Abraham, as well as David's own understanding of how the covenant was the *torah* for humanity, i.e., the blueprint for how God would bring the blessing of Abraham to the world.
- <sup>47</sup> Similarly Thrall, *II Corinthians I-VII*, 477.
- <sup>48</sup> Rightly *ibid.*, 479, although there is no need to place the realized promises in a baptismal context.
- <sup>49</sup> Seifrid (*The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 289) rightly notes, "The appeal to Scripture identifies believers with Israel directly and without qualification."
- <sup>50</sup> For example, Robert L. Saucy (*The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: the Interface between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993], 218) contends: "[Israel's] difference lies not on the spiritual plane in their relationship to God, but in their specific identity and corresponding function in God's historical kingdom program. In both Testaments, the identity of 'Israel' is always that historical people descended from Abraham through Jacob that became a nation. Israel was called to witness God's salvation to the other nations as a nation among nations" (cf. *idem*, "Israel and the Church: A Case for Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments* [ed. John S. Feinberg; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988], 242-44). Likewise, Bruce A. Ware ("The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: The Search for Definition* [ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992], 92) suggests, "Between the two extremes of a strict distinction between Israel and the church and a strict identity of Israel and the church there is a middle position that would suggest that Israel and the church share theologically rich and important elements of commonality while at the same time maintaining distinct identities."
- <sup>51</sup> Even the more progressive dispensationalists who operate with an "already/not yet" hermeneutical framework contend that there must be a future fulfillment of Christ reigning in the millennium as the Davidic king. For example, Darrell L. Bock, "Current Messianic Activity and OT Davidic Promise: Dispensationalism, Hermeneutics, and NT Fulfillment," *Trinity Journal* 15 (1994): 55-87; *idem*, "The Son of David and the Saints' Task: The Hermeneutics of Initial Fulfillment," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993): 440-57; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual and National," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments* (ed. John S. Feinberg, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 289-307; and Stephen J. Nichols, "The Dispensational View of the Davidic Kingdom: A Response to Progressive Dispensationalism," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 7 (1996): 213-39. I am indebted to Brent Parker for pointing me to some of these resources.



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# Sermon: A Building from God—2 Corinthians 5:1-10

**THOMAS R. SCHREINER**

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I grew up in the country about ten miles from Salem, Oregon. I always lived in the same house. In fact, my mom continued to live in that house until I was fifty-one years old. I was always excited to return home after leaving home. Usually we would go home once a year, traveling from Los Angeles, California, St. Paul, Minnesota, and Louisville, Kentucky respectively. There were 200 acres surrounding the house, so our children loved going there every summer for vacation. But over the years, as time rolls on, life has a stark way of reminding us where our true home is.

My dad died in 1982 and my mom in 2005 and as a result, we cannot go home anymore. Even if we could go home, it is not the same without my mom and dad there. By these events, God arranges and directs our lives so that we recognize our true home. The Lord wants us to know that our true home is not here on earth. Our loved ones die. Our bodies wear out. Our society changes. Time rolls on. Indeed, our own station in life changes and in one sense, everything is in flux. From our perspective, nothing on this earth is stable. For example, one minute you think Iraq is stable and then

along comes ISIS. Or, on one occasion you are bursting with joy, but then a great sadness or discouragement comes into our lives. Still our sovereign and gracious God has not abandoned us and he has promised that he will never leave us or forsake us. Throughout our lives, our triune God reminds us where our true home is, and as he does so, he wants us to walk by faith and not by sight. He wants us to look forward to the day of resurrection.

That does not mean we check out of present-day life. On the contrary, we are to be fully engaged in what God has for us today. Actually, the truth of the matter is that we will be of more earthly good if we are heavenly minded. If we make earth our heaven, it may turn into a prelude of hell. But if we make earth our way-station to the new creation, we thank God for every gift he gives us, live every day for God's glory, and look forward to the glorious future promised us. Since Jesus is risen and has conquered death, we too will conquer death given our faith union with him.

Our passage today continues the stream of thought from 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 which we looked at last week. Let us read those verses again to pick up where we were last week. Paul writes,

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.<sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,<sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

What is the connection between 2 Corinthians 4 and 5? It is this: the outer self wasting away stands for our bodies that are dying. And the unseen promise we look for is the resurrection of the body. Paul unpacks these truths for us in 5:1-10. We see three truths in these verses. Let us look at each of them in turn.

### **1. PAUL ADMONISHES US TO LOOK AT WHAT WE CANNOT SEE.**

Let us read 2 Corinthians 5:1-5.

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.<sup>2</sup> For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling,<sup>3</sup> if indeed by

putting it on we may not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

Paul begins by saying that *we know*, which means we can be certain that when our earthly tent, the weak bodies we have now, die, then we will have a new resurrection body. Three times in these verses Paul says our present body is a tent. And in verses 1 and 2 he describes our resurrection body as a building or as a house. The bodies we have now are like a tent.

Tents are great for camping but are terrible during storms, for they do not hold up when a storm comes crashing through. Our bodies are pretty good tents, but they last at the longest for a hundred years and then they completely break down, and sometimes they break down long before that. But our resurrection bodies are compared to stable and secure houses. In other words, our resurrection bodies are everlasting. Nothing will shake or destroy the bodies we will receive.

Incidentally, when Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:1 that we have a building from God, do not let the present tense confuse you. He is not talking about the present but the future. He uses the present tense because the future promise is so sure. We are guaranteed as Christians that we will be raised from the dead.

In addition, notice another contrast between our present and future bodies. He says that our bodies now are earthly (v. 1), which is another way of saying that they are mortal (v. 4). In other words, our bodies are dying; they are like tents wearing out, but our future bodies are heavenly. We will be clothed as v. 2 says with our bodies from heaven. A heavenly body is a body that is not corruptible. As Paul says in v. 4 what is mortal is swallowed up by life. So, our heavenly bodies will never die, never get sick, and never get old.

And notice that they are physical bodies! Being without a body as Paul says is like being naked. It is like being unclothed. The Bible does not view life as a spirit as a state of wholeness or completeness. When we die we are with Jesus in our spirits and we exist in a disembodied state until the day of resurrection. As v. 8 says when we are absent from the body we are present with the Lord. Philippians 1 says that if we depart this life, then we go to be with Christ immediately. But it is important to stress, the intermediate state, when we are with the

Lord in our spirits it is not what God intended for us. No, what it means to be complete is to be clothed with a physical body and not to live in spirit kind of condition. And Paul stresses, our bodies will be raised when Jesus comes again.

The Bible is not gnostic. The Bible does not view spiritual life as better than physical life. Our future life is life in the body, but thankfully, it is a body untouched by sin. It is a body that will be raised from the dead and clothed with power and beauty. The perfection of our bodies is implied in verse 1 when he says our future body is not made with hands. This stands in contrast with our present bodies. As verse 2 says, we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven. Verse 4 repeats the idea that we groan now in our bodies, because we are burdened.

Our bodies now are wonderful in so many ways, aren't they? But our bodies cannot match the aspirations of our spirits. They are weakened by disease, by allergies, by injuries, by old age, and finally by death. I still remember when I turned forty-six. Why? Because I could hold my own in basketball one on one against my boys until I turned forty-six. Then I started getting the rebound in my mind but my body was not there. Suddenly, those young guys darted in front of me and got the ball instead. Our present bodies are not immortal but are corruptible and temporary. Roger Federer is an amazing tennis player (my favorite to watch), but as he gets older he has a hard time beating younger players, as we recently witnessed.

Paul says in Romans 8:23 that "we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan, awaiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." God has promised that our longing for a new body will be fulfilled. The burdens we face in our present bodies will be lifted. God has prepared us, as verse 5 says, for this very thing, for this very purpose. What is the purpose in view here? What is the very thing Paul has in mind?

Well, verse 5 goes back to verse 4. The purpose is life, that is, that our mortality would be swallowed up by life. The gift of the Spirit functions as the guarantee, the downpayment, of our future resurrection. So, Paul concludes in verse 5 where he started in verse 1. We know that we will have a resurrection body in the future. We are assured of this because we have the Holy Spirit. No matter how happy your life is now, you still long for something better. We all naturally think how life could be better. There is a longing in us for perfection. There is a sense of incompleteness and an ache in our lives. We are not fully satisfied or fulfilled. We sense that there is more to life. Those desires are not a

bad thing. They remind us that we were made for another world. They remind us that this world is not our home. They point us forward to the resurrection. All of this now brings us to the second truth in these verses.

## **2. PAUL EXHORTS US TO BE CONFIDENT ABOUT OUR FUTURE.**

We see this in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8.

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,<sup>7</sup> for we walk by faith, not by sight.<sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

The main truth is stated twice in verses 6 and 8. We are of good courage. We are confident. Right now we are at home in the body, but being at home in the body means that we are away from the Lord. When we are at home with the Lord, then we are really at home. As Christians we recognize that we are in exile in our present bodies. We are sojourners and strangers. We are not really home yet. As I said earlier we long for heaven on earth. We want the perfect job, the perfect spouse, the perfect family, and the perfect church. Those desires are not wrong in themselves, but we can respond to them in a wrong way. For we can begin to seek heaven on earth and fall into sin.

People say they are not looking for heaven on earth. People say that they know everything is flawed on earth. The problem is that we often live differently than we say; our actions often betray what we say with our words. Our heads say one thing but our hearts say something else, and we often follow our hearts, even when we deny it with our heads. What is an indication that we are falling into this trap? One indication is if you are committing sins forbidden in scripture. Another is if we are grumbling and unhappy and complaining. The truth is that if we are critical and negative about life, then we are looking for heaven on earth. The longings we have for perfection are not wrong, though what we do with those desires may be wrong. They may be wrong because we may end up living by sight instead of by faith.

Paul reminds us where our home is, and encourages us to be confident about our future. So, another temptation we face is discouragement. Discouragement is the opposite of confidence. Satan wants to bring us down, and he does so by getting us to live by sight instead of by faith. He wants us

to think things will not get better. He whispers to us: quit fighting against sin. You will never win. Just give up. You are a total failure. Peter failed too. And he repented and moved forward again. Satan tells us: you do not really help anyone. You are not of any use here. But when we think this we are not walking by faith but we are walking by sight. We face loneliness and discouragement because we are not home yet. And while we are away from home we walk by faith. We trust that God loves us and is working out his plan for us. We get discouraged because we cannot see how he is working out his plan.

Sometimes we feel that what is happening to us cannot be his plan and then we start to doubt him. But we do not walk by sight or by our feelings. We walk by faith. We are confident that God is working his purposes out in our lives. We are going to make it home. This brings us to the third truth in the passage.

### **3. PAUL ENCOURAGES US TO PLEASE THE LORD IN EVERYTHING SINCE OUR FUTURE HOME IS THE ULTIMATE REALITY AND WE WILL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST.**

This truth is clearly taught in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10.

So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.<sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

We need a reason to live. We need a vision to inspire us. We need a cause to give ourselves to. So many of our young people are bored and unhappy, for they do not have a purpose in life. They are not inspired by being told: be yourself. They are not helped when people say: do whatever makes you happy. They need something bigger than themselves. And it is crucial that they give themselves to the right cause.

Recently some young people from the west have joined ISIS in Iraq to devote themselves to a cause. How tragic and sad that they would give themselves over to murder and evil. We can understand that young people are weary of giving themselves to what is trivial. They want to do something great in their lives.

We are told here what God wants us to give ourselves to. We are to make it our goal to please the Lord. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, whether we

eat or drink or whatever we do, we are to do it for the glory of God. Or, as he says in Colossians 3:17, whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him. There is no greater cause than giving yourself to our great God and Savior.

How about you Christian? Have the hustle and bustle of life distracted you from your true goal in life? Have you forgotten your true purpose in life? Have other things inserted themselves so that you have lost your direction and focus? What a good reminder of why we were created. In my own life, I sometimes find myself going along and then the Spirit convicts me: what are you living for right now? What is your purpose in life? You have strayed from me. You are actually living for yourself!

Let us either for the first time or anew today, give ourselves afresh to the Lord. Let us make it our aim, make it our ambition in life to please him, to honor him, and to glorify him. Let us be God-centered instead of man-centered. May God give us a passion to please him instead of people.

Now in 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul gives us a reason as to why we should aim to please God always and everywhere. He tells us that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Yes, Christ is our Savior but he is also our judge. And on the last day he will assess our lives. He will pass judgment on the way we lived. There will be no plea bargains at that judgment. And there will not be any question about what we have done, for he knows everything about us. He knows our actions. He knows our motives. He knows our thoughts. This judgment will be thorough and it will be fair. So, here is a strong motivation to please God in everything. We are heading to a trial. We have a court date set.

Imagine you have a court appointment in the next thirty days and your actions for the next thirty days were going to be assessed. You would think about that all the time and conduct yourself accordingly. Well, in a far greater way, we have a court date coming, where everything we have done and said and thought will be assessed. Paul also tells us what the basis of the judgment will be. Each one of us individually and personally will be judged. And we will be judged by what we have done in our present bodies. We will be judged by what we have done, whether it is good or bad. Is Paul talking about works that are assessed for rewards here or works necessary for eternal life? Paul believes in differing rewards for believers, but there are two reasons which indicate that the thinks of works necessary for eternal life here.

First, the NT says over and over that good works are necessary for eternal life, and these verses fit that theme. For example in Romans 2:6-11 Paul says good works are required for eternal life and that those who do evil works will face God's wrath. In the same way, we see in Revelation 20:11-15, God will assess people according to their works at the Great White Throne judgment. Those who do evil works will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, and will experience the second death forever. We read in Galatians 5:21 that those who practice the works of the flesh will not enter the kingdom of God. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 we are told that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. In Colossians 3:24 those who do good will receive the inheritance, and the inheritance elsewhere in Paul is another way of entering the kingdom, of experiencing eternal life. In Galatians 6:8 we are told that those who sow to the Spirit will obtain eternal life but those who sow to the flesh will be destroyed and corrupted. So, on the basis of these texts, the NT says over and over that good works are necessary for eternal life. It does talk about rewards, but not nearly as often or as clearly. That should hardly surprise us, for the main issue is not what reward we get above eternal life, but whether we will enter life at all. Is it not amazing how some teachers spend much more time and energy talking about rewards than eternal life? That is what they get excited about. It is like people getting more excited about the millennium than heaven.

There is a second reason which supports a reference to eternal life. When Paul speaks of good and evil here, he describes them as a whole. Both good and evil are singular here. I take it from this that our works are examined as a whole. In other words, our works show the quality of person, whether we are good or evil. He is not assessing each individual work but the quality of our life as a whole. Those who are good will receive eternal life, while those who are evil will face final judgment.

So, I conclude from this that how we live is vital! We cannot just profess to believe in Jesus Christ and not show any fruit and expect to be with Christ forever. Remember the words of Jesus. Some who prophesy in his name and do miracles in his name and cast out demons in his name do not belong to him. Jesus will say to them on the last day: Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

Now here is the question. Does this emphasis on the necessity of good works violate the gospel of Jesus Christ? After all, Paul says repeatedly that

we are not justified by works of law or by works but through faith in Jesus Christ. How can he now say that our works are necessary for eternal life? As we conclude, let me say a few things quickly.

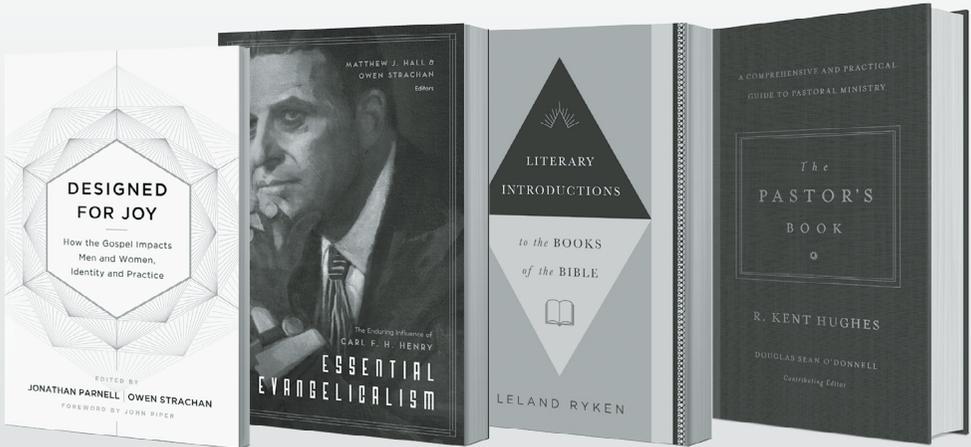
First, Paul says both that works do not justify us and that they are necessary for eternal life. He knew what he was saying. He was not contradicting himself. Scripture is not contradictory but is a coherent word.

Second, our good works cannot be the basis of our justification or eternal life. Scripture is clear. No one is righteous enough to meet God's standard of perfection. Our good works cannot merit God's favor since we fall far short of what God requires.

Third, that is why the Bible says that our only hope of eternal life is the atoning death of Jesus on the cross by which he paid for our sins. We receive such life through faith in what Jesus has done for us.

Fourth, so then what role do good works have? How can Paul say they are necessary for eternal life? The answer is that they are the necessary fruit and evidence of the life that is ours in Christ. They cannot be the basis of our new life since we still sin and we are still imperfect. But there is a change in us as Christians. There is a transformation that has taken place. Good works, then, show that we are really alive. If someone claims to be alive, but shows no evidence of being alive, then that claim is called into question. That is how works function. They are not the basis of our life. Our life comes by the grace of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, but our good works demonstrate that we are truly alive, that we have really been born again. And those who do such good works will be raised from the dead. We will go home to be with the Lord. And we will never wander from home again.

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# Book Reviews

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*Defending Substitution: An Essay on Atonement in Paul.* By Simon Gathercole.  
Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015. 128 pp., \$19.99 Paperback.

Simon Gathercole is senior lecturer in New Testament studies in the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Cambridge and Fellow and director of studies in theology at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge. He has published several books, such as *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary* and *The Pre-Existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke*. His *Defending Substitution* is a welcomed addition to the discussion of atonement in Paul's letters.

In the book's introduction, Gathercole notes that the representation view of the atonement (Christ represented sinners on the cross) has become an accepted view in biblical scholarship, but substitutionary atonement (Christ died in the place of sinners) is hotly contested. Gathercole contends that substitution deserves a place in the discussion of atonement in Paul. Substitution does not have to be exclusive of representation. They can coexist. Accordingly, then, his main argument is that "Christ's death for our sins *in our place, instead of us*, is in fact a vital ingredient in the biblical (in the present discussion, Pauline) understanding of the atonement" (14). While some challenge this doctrine by calling it legal fiction or immoral, and others present philosophical, logical, and exegetical challenges, even the "most weighty exegetical criticisms are unfounded and that there is actually good evidence for seeing substitutionary atonement as intrinsic to the biblical presentation of how God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ" (28).

Chapter 1 addresses the exegetical challenges to substitution. The Tübingen, interchange, and apocalyptic views are among these views. Gathercole is fair in his analysis of these perspectives, arguing that each has its merits. The Tübingen and interchange views share the idea that Christ identifies with us in his death. The apocalyptic view emphasizes Christ's triumph over oppressive hostile powers in his death and resurrection. Yet, Gathercole argues that each share a common problem—they down play individual sins, focusing instead on sin as an entity (47-48, 53-54). In his observation,

it “is a feature of representative understandings of the atonement that they are more corporate in nature. They are therefore not necessarily particularly equipped to incorporate reference to that aspect of human plight that consist of human sins ... *Sins*, transgressions, individual infractions of the divine will are, however, integral to Paul’s account of the human plight” (54). Another important difficulty with these accounts is that each becomes an all-encompassing explanation for atonement in Paul, which is used as a “criterion for whether other elements may or may not be fitted into Paul” (54). Each then becomes its own procrustean bed of sorts. Unfortunately, what often gets lopped off is a substitutionary view of the atonement. The following two chapters will show that substitution indeed deserves a place in the discussion of Paul’s view of the atonement.

Chapter two makes a positive case for substitution by examining 1 Corinthians 15:3: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” According to Gathercole, the central component of Paul’s gospel is Christ’s death “for our sins.” In framing this passage within the larger context of vv. 1-11, Gathercole points to three important statements that testify to the importance of this passage: “through which you were saved” (v. 2); “as of first importance” (v. 3); and “Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach” (v. 11). The former two testify to the central character of the gospel in Paul’s thought. The latter shows that substitution is not unique to Paul, “but the proclamation of the whole apostolic college” (58). Thus for Paul, *and* the other apostles, substitutionary atonement is central to the gospel. Gathercole then explores which Scriptures Paul had in mind, saying that his gospel is “according to the Scriptures.” The closest model to a vicarious death in the Bible is the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, whose “death ... is not merely caused by the sinful behavior of his persecutors but also regarded as punishment *in place of* the people for their benefit” (69). This text underscores that in 1 Corinthians 15:3 Paul desires to express that Christ died “in place of” sinners. In so doing, “Christ dies both in consequence of the transgressions of others and in order to deal with those infractions of the divine will” (79).

Chapter 3 demonstrates that Paul compares Jesus’ death to other examples of noble deaths in antiquity. The starting point for this discussion is Romans 5:6-8. Gathercole argues that in this passage Paul does something subtly different from 1 Corinthians 15:3. While in the latter the Old Testament background to Jesus’ substitutionary death is in view, in the former

Paul “links the death of Christ with other heroic deaths from his cultural environment—what he refers to as the rare examples of death for good or righteous individuals” (86). One such death is in Euripides’s fifth-century play *Alcestis*, where Alcestis dies “instead of” her husband. Her virtuous death was commemorated by philosophers such as Plato and Musonius Rufus, and first-century inscriptions. Philosophical schools, such as the Stoics and Epicureans, mention similar deaths, idealizing death on behalf of a friend. These contemporary examples provide a fitting background for Romans 5:6-8. Even still, Jesus’ death would have perplexed most classical philosophers, who would not have understood why a person would have died for someone with whom he had no relationship or with whom he was at odds. But that’s where the parallels end. Jesus is not your average philosopher from antiquity. Whereas a pagan might dare to die for “a good man” or a “righteous man,” Jesus died for the impious—his enemies—so that they might be reconciled to God (105-106).

The book’s conclusion then summarizes each chapter, showing that substitution is central to Paul’s presentation of the gospel. Even though substitution may differ from representative, or even apocalyptic, views of the atonement, Gathercole argues that they do not have to be mutually exclusive, for there is no reason why each “could not have simultaneously inhabited Paul’s thought” (112). Gathercole helpfully points out that “It is striking how, when Paul comes to summarize his gospel in 1 Corinthians 15, he describes how Christ’s substitutionary death has dealt with sins (15:3) and in the same chapter also goes on to focus on the ultimate conquest of the ‘last enemy to be defeated,’ death (15:26)” (112). He concludes by saying, “We need not be forced to opt either for Jesus’s substitutionary death, in which he deals with sins, or for a representative or liberative death, in which he deals with the power of evil. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder!” (113).

Overall, Gathercole makes a good case for a classical view of the atonement—that Christ died “on behalf of” sinners, in their place. In the process, he interacts fairly with challenges to substitution, acknowledging that each makes a positive contribution to the discussion. He also analyzes central texts such as 1 Corinthians 15:3 and Romans 5:6-8, showing how the former is grounded in Old Testament texts such as Isaiah 53 and the latter is comparable to virtuous deaths in classical literature. Although classical literature only goes so far as to support death for a loved one or friend, Jesus supersedes

expectations by dying for his enemies. Substitutionary atonement, as Gathercole argues, deserves a rightful place in any discussion of atonement in Paul.

Yet the book's brevity is a glaring weakness. Gathercole expects this criticism. After all, he does not intend to write an exhaustive tome. Even still, I think it is important to mention that Pauline texts such as 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, which argues that "Christ died for all," and Galatians 3:13, which testifies that "Christ became a curse for us" on the cross, would have strengthened his argument for substitution in Paul's letters. Also, Gathercole mainly interacts with modern interpreters. It would have been helpful to look at earlier figures who see substitution as significant to the gospel. Among these are Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin. Calvin, for example, argues that Christ is our substitute, taking our punishment and appeasing God's wrath. Examining such comments would have shown that modern interpreters have gone astray from a classical view of the atonement.

Perhaps, then, a follow up to this volume is in order. Admittedly, such a book would be icing on the cake. The present volume does an admirable job of "defending substitution." Thus it achieves its goal—it shows that substitution is vital to Paul's understanding of the atonement, deserving a place in the conversation of atonement in Paul's letters.

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*Luke*. Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament. By Mikeal C. Parsons.  
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015, 426 pp., \$30.00 paperback.

Just as the fifteenth-century Flemish Renaissance painter, Rogier van der Weyden, masterfully depicted Luke as visual artist, similarly Mikeal C. Parsons (Ph.D. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) masterfully paints a portrait of Luke as literary artist. Parsons is the Kidd L. and Buna Hitchcock Macon Chair in Religion at Baylor University as well as the author of several works focusing on Luke-Acts, including *Acts* in Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament and his trilogy on visual exegesis, *Illuminating Luke*, which Parsons co-authored with his wife, Heidi J. Hornik.

Parsons conspicuously places his aim, structural outline, and methodology in his introduction. Parsons states the aim of his commentary as: “to read the final form of Luke’s Gospel within the first-century historical, cultural, rhetorical, and theological contexts in which it was composed as well as the first half of the first-century context, which it purports to recount” (4–5). In terms of structure, Parsons sees five major sections in Luke’s Gospel: 1:1–4:13; 4:14–9:50; 9:51–14:35; 15:1–19:44; and 19:45–24:53. Although sharing some affinity with other major commentaries (especially, Bock 1994–1996, 1:44–48), Parsons’s structural outline of Luke appears to be derived from his own rhetorical analysis of the text (16). Parsons describes his methodological approach as a “reader-centered literary approach” (xi), which focuses on the movement from author to text to audience with primacy given to the text, itself (xii, 3). Such an approach consists of both “historical and hermeneutical” considerations (17). Parsons clarifies: “the commentary attempts to understand the ways in which the rhetorical strategies, literary conventions, and cultural scripts in the final form of Luke were received by the authorial audience ... [while] not a real, flesh-and-blood audience; it is, nonetheless, historically circumscribed” (16–17). Critical to Parsons’s work is a focus on the Lukan rhetorical strategy as well as the concept of the authorial audience. Parsons elucidates: “This commentary is written from the perspective of the authorial audience, that is, the reception of the text by the audience that the author had in mind when he wrote his Gospel ... Presumably the authorial audience knew how to respond appropriately (if unconsciously) to the effects of persuasive rhetoric” (16).

Structurally, Parsons’s commentary consists of a brief introduction (twenty pages), which serves as a prolegomenon to his commentary, five chapters covering the five sections of Parsons’s structural outline of Luke’s Gospel, an impressive bibliography (twenty-four pages) of select works, as well as useful indices of subjects, modern authors, Scripture and ancient sources (vii–viii). Numerous figures, tables, maps, photographs, and structural outline graphics appear throughout the work helping to immerse the reader in the first-century Lukan *Sitz im Leben*, as well as to trace the rhetorical flow throughout Luke’s Gospel. Each chapter consists of a brief overview and graphical outline orienting the reader to the contents of the chapter, an introduction to each section, Parsons’s tracing of the narrative flow, and then concludes with a succinct survey of the theological issues covered and

how they relate to contemporary Christianity.

There is much to commend in Parsons's work. First of all Parsons's work is scholarly, yet accessible. Parsons states that his commentary "is aimed squarely at students" (xi). In this sense, Parsons hits the mark with a commentary that enables "students to understand [Luke] ... as a literary whole rooted in a particular ancient setting" (xi). Second, rather than merely parroting the comments of his predecessors, many of Parsons's insights are fresh and make a novel contribution to Lukan studies. Parsons is not afraid of taking a minority position if that is where his research leads. An example of this is in his view regarding the genre of Luke. Instead of seeing the canonical gospels as *sui generis* (i.e., a genre unto themselves; so Bultmann 1928, cols. 418–22), Parsons sees Luke belonging to the genre of encomiastic *bios* (13). Parsons adds: "Ancient *bioi* focus on elucidating the "essence" of the individual [Jesus the Christ] who is the subject of the biography ... [A biography] whose purpose includes the praise of its subject around a cluster of topics" (13). Unlike some scholars who see the genre of Luke bound to its unity with Acts (so Garland 2011, 28), Parsons sees Acts as having its own independent textual-transmission history from Luke despite their common authorship (11, 19). Third, given its focus on the rhetorical strategies employed by Luke, Parsons's commentary enables its readers to focus on the text of Luke holistically—thus, noticing the connections between the macro and micro structures of the text. In contrast to a standard verse-by-verse exegetical commentary, which often obscures the rhetorical artistry of Luke and these important intertextual, structural connections, Parsons's work shows how each part of Luke's Gospel contributes to Luke's holistic rhetorical strategy.

As good as Parsons's work is, it is not without faults. One such fault (not a fault of Parsons, but the commentary series in general) is the transliteration of all the Greek text. While perhaps aiding the non-specialist, transliteration proffers a frustrating experience to readers proficient with the Greek text. A better solution would have been to offer both the Greek lexemes as well as their transliterated counterparts in brackets. Second, the fact that there are no footnotes makes further research difficult as his readers must continuously look to the back of the book to locate Parsons sources in the bibliography (again, a critique of the series and not Parsons *per se*). Third, and last, Parsons's repeated references to the "Lukan Jesus" (e.g., 301, 304, 340) may give some readers (especially first year seminary students not yet acquainted with this

terminology) the impression that Parsons is arguing for a multiplicity of antithetical Jesus Christs across the canonical gospels—as if Jesus was a wax nose that the gospel writers were free to twist and mould *mutatis mutandis* to fit their own individual theological programs. It seems that Parsons would have better served his readers by having a sidebar discussing the issue of the various portrayals of Jesus throughout Scripture and history (so Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*, 1985), rather than assuming *a priori* that his “authorial audience”—i.e., undergraduate and graduate students—would be familiar with this nomenclature.

In sum, Parsons’s commentary evinces the erudition and fruit of a lifetime of scholarship devoted to the study of the literary artistry of Luke’s Gospel. While I did not agree with Parsons’s conclusions at every point (I would say the same for every other commentary I have read), this work hits the mark and deserves a spot on the shelf of any serious student of Luke’s Gospel. While not a standalone commentary (perhaps best accompanied by an exegetical work such as Bock 1994–1996, Culy, Parsons, and Stigall 2010, or Gundry 2011), it is a valuable tool for anyone who is teaching/preaching through Luke’s Gospel.

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*Persuasive Preaching: A Biblical and Practical Guide to the Effective Use of Persuasion.* By R. Larry Overstreet. Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2014, 298 pp., \$24.99 paperback.

Contemporary society is distrustful of those who seek to persuade, yet understanding the necessity for persuasive techniques. For example, one may be suspicious of a used car salesman but accepting of promotional ploys aimed to get the customer interested in buying a car. This mindset, in addition to several other factors, has influenced the pulpit, resulting in many pastors proclaiming God’s Word without a focus on persuading hearers to respond. Larry Overstreet’s latest work calls preachers back to persuasive preaching by citing scriptural examples and providing personal examples as well.

Overstreet is a retired seminary professor, serving students for 30+ years. He retired as Professor of Pastoral Theology and director of the D. Min. program at Corban University School of Ministry (formerly Northwest Baptist Seminary) but continues to teach adjunctly at Piedmont International University and to serve the local church as interim pastor. He received his Bachelor's Degree from Bob Jones University in Bible and Speech. His Master of Divinity came from San Francisco Baptist Theological Seminary, while his Doctor of Philosophy was received from Wayne State University in Communication, Rhetoric, and Public Address, concentrating his dissertation on the rhetorical value of Aristotle's use of references to deity. Equipped with training in both theology and rhetoric, Overstreet has focused his academic career in practical theology, as is evidenced by his numerous articles, particularly those in *Preaching* magazine. He has also authored another monologue, *Biographical Preaching: Bringing Bible Characters to Life*.

In Overstreet's pastoral experience, he, like many, recognizes a trend of moving away from the giving of public invitations in the last several decades. Additionally, he argues many sermons fail to call the hearers to action, i.e., to respond to the preached word. These two tendencies are indicative of a move away from persuasive preaching. While the concept of persuasion is often offensive in the current culture, the author believes it to be a biblically necessary part of every sermon. The sermon must stress the teaching of God's Word with an unmistakable summons to obey that Word. "This book, therefore, is a call to restore the necessary characteristic of persuasion to our preaching" (4).

The book is divided into four sections: "Issues Facing Persuasive Preaching," "Biblical Support for Persuasive Preaching," "Structuring Persuasive Messages," and "Pertinent Applications in Persuasive Preaching." Various chapters comprise each section. The work ends with an epilogue, five appendices, a bibliography, and three indices.

After a brief prologue that overviews the entire work, Part 1, "Issues Facing Persuasive Preaching," encompasses two chapters. Chapter 1 identifies and defines persuasion. Incorporating aspects of definitions from both Christian and secular communication scholars, Overstreet defines persuasive preaching as "the process of preparing biblical, expository messages using a persuasive pattern, and presenting them through verbal and nonverbal communication means to autonomous individuals who can be convicted and/or taught by

God's Holy Spirit, in order to alter or strengthen their attitudes and beliefs toward God, His Word, and other individuals, resulting in their lives being transformed into the image of Christ" (14). In chapter 2, "Problems Facing Persuasive Preaching," the author briefly summarizes the tenets of modernism and postmodernism and juxtaposes them with nine aspects of truth to which the evangelical preacher holds. In doing so, Overstreet identifies the disjunction between these worldviews and the assumptions that underlie persuasive preaching.

In Part 2, comprised of chapters 3-7, the author gives biblical evidence for his proposition. Chapter 3 begins to consider the specific language of persuasion. Overstreet argues  $\pi\epsilon\iota\theta\omega$  is used in Greek literature with a focus on the *results* of persuasion. The remainder of the chapter summarizes the use of this Greek verb in the Gospels, Johannine literature, and non-Pauline epistles. Overstreet concludes that persuasion was a natural and integral part of first-century life and the ministry of the apostles and NT authors. The fourth chapter considers the uses of  $\pi\epsilon\iota\theta\omega$  in the Pauline corpus, helpfully grouping the uses according to nuance of meaning rather than by epistle. Such categories of meaning include persuasion as "winning over," "obedience," "confidence," "being convicted," "faith," and "emphatic declaration." This chapter concludes with an interpretation of an often-cited passage which seems to contradict Overstreet's proposition, 1 Corinthians 2:4, "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom ..." in which the author succeeds in demonstrating the fallacy of making this passage wholly paradigmatic for all of Paul's preaching.

Chapter 5 examines other Greek words connected to the Apostle Paul and his proclaiming of God's Word so as to piece together a Pauline theology of preaching. Overstreet provides a detailed examination of terms related to preaching and categorizes them based on their nuanced meaning. He concludes that "a Pauline theology of preaching ... is entirely consistent with his preaching being persuasive." While chapter 5 related to Aristotle's *logos* and *pathos*, chapter 6 focuses on *ethos*, the credibility of the speaker. Overstreet provides a brief exegesis of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and 2 Timothy 2:14-16 to demonstrate that Paul sought to persuade his readers by demonstrating his own trustworthiness. Chapter 7, the final chapter of Part 2, considers words in the Old Testament that relate to persuasion and examines them in their context. From these uses, Overstreet derives "Old Testament Principles of

Persuasion,” with one principle presented per word examined. The author’s designation—“principles”—may be too strong, especially since the principle is derived from only one use of the word while other uses are ignored. Rather, this chapter provides information on *aspects* of persuasion gleaned from the specific use of OT words, and those aspects are beneficial.

While Part 2 emphasizes the theory of persuasion—its biblical support, Part 3 focuses on the practice of persuasion in “Structuring Persuasive Messages.” Here Overstreet suggests four types of organizational patterns and devotes one chapter to each (chapters 8-11). These patterns include motivated sequence, problem-solution, cause-effect, and refutation. Each chapter introduces the pattern, discusses the various parts of the pattern, and points the reader to examples in an appendix. The motivated sequence approach helps to focus the sermon on the action expected of the hearers, leading them to consider “Now what?” This sermon approach may be adapted to various types of audiences (favorable, undecided, apathetic, or opposed) and a helpful graphic (131-132) is provided to assist the preacher to craft each part of his sermon with his audience in mind. The problem-solution approach begins by convincing the audience of a pertinent problem and its grounds before presenting a biblical solution. This approach fits well with life-situation preaching. The cause-effect approach is effective to persuade the audience to start or stop a particular action or belief because of its effect on their lives. Overstreet provides a beneficial organizational outline demonstrating how the preacher can emphasize either the cause or the effect (147-148). The refutation approach is especially effective when the audience is opposed to the speaker’s thesis. It identifies the audience’s objections and refutes those objections by providing evidence and logical argumentation.

Part 4 considers three additional topics that relate to persuasive preaching: manipulation, the Holy Spirit, and the invitation. Chapter 12 examines the difference between manipulation and ethical persuasion, citing both secular and Christian scholars. One of the longest and most valuable chapters in the book is chapter 13, “The Holy Spirit in Preaching.” In it, Overstreet provides a biblical theology of the Spirit’s work in preaching and the preacher. Tracing the work of the Spirit, the author notes he communicates, empowers, and demonstrates God’s Word and enables the preacher of God’s Word. The often underemphasized role of the third person of the Trinity is given his due place here. “The Invitation,” chapter 14, presents the motives and bases of biblical

invitations and concludes with characteristics and potential liabilities of invitations. Overstreet's blend of the biblical foundation for the invitation combined with practical advice on giving invitations is a clear strength.

After the body of the work, an epilogue considers the Book of Deuteronomy as four sermons delivered by Moses, followed by five appendices. Appendices A-C outline the uses of *πειθω* in Greek literature. Appendix D parses the use of the word group *πειθω* in the NT. Appendix E provides additional sermon outline examples for each of the four persuasive preaching methods discussed in chapters 8-11. A bibliography and subject, author, and scripture indices conclude the book.

Regarding strengths, Overstreet has done an excellent job building a biblical case for employing persuasion in preaching. He effectively demonstrates that the preacher must be motivated by having transformation take place in his hearers when he crafts and delivers his sermon. Additionally, his investigation of the Greek words related to persuasion is exceptional and the presentation of his results is superb. Other minor strengths are worth mentioning. First, the book provides both the original word and the English transliteration for Hebrew and Greek words, making it accessible to those without knowledge of the original languages. Second, making good use of footnotes, the author points to additional sources where it is not appropriate to develop a point in the body of the work (e.g., 39 fn. 53, 183 fn. 18). Lastly, the sample sermons, both those found in Scripture and those crafted by the author based on Scripture, provide tangible examples to the reader of Overstreet's methods.

Regarding weaknesses, in certain places, the author does not fully develop the context of a reference. For example, in his discussion of perhaps the most explicit statement on persuasion in the NT, 2 Corinthians 5:11, "Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men," Overstreet gives less than one page of consideration. The author does an admirable job on the daunting task of surveying the Bible's theology of persuasion; however, deeper exegesis of a few key passages would be helpful (as is evidenced in his refutation of 1 Cor 2:4, 49-55).

Overstreet's discussion of modernism and postmodernism in chapter 2, while succinct (5 pages), is helpful. However, specific implications of these views on persuasive preaching is not explicitly discussed. That is, while the "Problems Facing Persuasive Preaching" were implied in the author's

discussion, perhaps specific examples would have better contextualized Overstreet's insightful connections. Similarly, while chapter 12 gave an excellent overview of the issues related to manipulation and ethical persuasion, a more thorough discussion of specific practices and why they are categorized as ethical or unethical would add to the usefulness of this work.

In conclusion, *Persuasive Preaching* is written so as to be accessible to both pastors and students, but is not so elementary as to be of little value. Rather, both groups will benefit from Overstreet's arguments and examples and, by God's grace and for His glory, will be persuaded to preach persuasively.

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*Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist: Hercules Collins (1647-1702) and Particular Baptist Identity in Early Modern England.* Reformed Historical Theology 32. By G. Stephen Weaver, Jr. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015, 234 pp., 69,99 €.

Those acquainted with the seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists are familiar with William Kiffin, Hanserd Knollys, and Benjamin Keach. But who is Hercules Collins? This lesser known and underappreciated Particular Baptist pastor is the subject of Stephen Weaver's revision of his doctoral dissertation. His thesis pointedly speaks to the issue of Baptist identity. Weaver argues that "the writings of Hercules Collins demonstrate that he, and by extension his fellow Particular Baptists, viewed themselves as faithfully operating within both the historic Nicene-Christianity shown in the early creeds and the Protestant orthodoxy codified by the Westminster Assembly in the Westminster Confession of Faith" (25). He demonstrates this thesis by showing the influence and representative status of Collins and then, as the title suggests, relaying the evidence that Collins was both orthodox and Puritan and that his Baptist ecclesiology flowed from these commitments.

While Weaver discusses Collins as representative and significant throughout the work, this is the primary objective of the first chapter. Through the narrative of Collins's biography, a strong case is made by highlighting

noteworthy elements of Collins's ministry. He was the third pastor of the Wapping Church from 1677-1702, the oldest Baptist church in London, which was originally pastored by John Spilsbury. Collins was persecuted and imprisoned with other Baptists before the Act of Toleration. He signed the Second London Confession. He was present at all four London general assemblies between 1689 and 1692 and a supporter of ministerial maintenance and the common fund to accomplish it. He was also very well networked, with close ties to Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach.

As a significant but typical Baptist, Collins was orthodox. Weaver demonstrates this in the context of the heretical views propounded by Matthew Caffyn and Thomas Collier. Collins's *An Orthodox Catechism* (1680) included the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, clearly illustrating his Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy. His constructive articulation of orthodoxy in the catechism questions and his signing of the Second London Confession is further evidence of his doctrinal fidelity to the catholic tradition.

Collins also viewed himself as comfortably within the Puritan framework. The definition of Puritanism that Weaver offers is the Reformed regulative principle. While too narrow to account for conforming Puritans like Richard Sibbes or Arminian Puritans like John Goodwin, this definition does capture something of the essence of Puritan movement, namely, to submit faith and practice to the authority of Scripture. The regulative principle was also fundamental for the distinct Baptist ecclesiology. Weaver demonstrates the kinship of early Baptists with Puritans by drawing attention to their Separatist ancestry and adoption of Puritan confessions with minor modification. He shows Collins's particular affinity with the Puritan hermeneutic and preaching method articulated by William Perkins. Further, Weaver equates Collins's approach to persecution with the Puritans. He uses this as an opportunity to expound Collins's two prison writings, but does not provide evidence for what the Puritan approach to persecution looked like. It would perhaps be more helpful to speak in terms of Puritan approaches to persecution, as fleeing, going underground, and bold nonconformity were all frequent practices, and a Puritan theology of suffering, with which Collins seems to have resonated.

That Collins was a Baptist was the result of his consistent application of his definition of the church and the regulative principle. Collins accepted the definition of the church in the Thirty-Nine Articles, but favored John

Owen's. The entailment of a visible church made up of the faithful was regenerate church membership, which in turn necessitated religious liberty and congregationalism. Believer's baptism by immersion was understood to be the plain testimony of Scripture and therefore the logical conclusion of the Puritan regulative principle. Concerning the Lord's Supper, Collins held the spiritual presence view, which includes the spiritual presence of Christ and the spiritual nourishment of believing participants. Weaver offers an extended defense of the reality that this was the understanding of seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists, as apposed to the strictly memorial view. He ably walks the reader through the evidence of confessions, catechisms, and personal writings.

Weaver makes a welcome contribution to the fields of Baptist studies and early modern British history. He provides the most extensive biography of Collins to date and the first sustained discussion of his thought and significance. His work is straightforwardly organized, clear, and for the most part concise. Both scholars and those simply wanting to know more about Baptist origins and early English Baptist life will find this book rewarding. Weaver persuasively defends his thesis that Hercules Collins illustrates an understanding of Baptist identity that includes Christian orthodoxy and Puritanism, with Baptist distinctives emanating from this foundation. Weaver will surely disappoint those who espouse Landmarkism or see soul liberty as the core Baptist tenet, but he offers a historically sound and theologically faithful account of Baptist identity.

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