

CHAPTER THREE

Analysis

- A. Paul answered the anticipated charge of self-commendation (1-11).
1. He asked two questions (1).
 - a) Are we beginning again to commend ourselves?
 - b) Do we, as do some, need letters of commendation to you or from you?
 2. He gave two answers (2-11).
 - a) As seen in his relation to the Corinthians (2-3).
 - (1) They are his epistle of commendation (2).
 - (a) This epistle is written in his heart.
 - (b) It is known and read of all men.
 - (2) They are also an epistle of Christ (3).
 - (a) It is evident that they are an epistle of Christ.
 - (b) The service of writing was done by Paul.
 - (c) This involves a two-fold contrast.
 - i) It was written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.
 - ii) It was not in tables of stone but in tables that are hearts of flesh.
 - b) As seen in his glorious ministry under the New Covenant in contrast to the glory of Moses' ministry under the Old Covenant (4-11).
 - (1) The source of his sufficiency under the New Covenant is God (4-6).
 - (a) His confidence toward God was in Christ.
 - (b) He explained that in himself he was not adequate for the task (5a).
 - (c) His fitness was from God who made him a minister of the New Covenant (5b-6a).
 - (d) Characteristics of the New Covenant (6b).
 - i) Not of letter but of spirit.
 - ii) The letter kills; the spirit gives life.
 - (2) The contrast between the glory of the Old and New Covenants justifies his glorious ministry (7-11).
 - (a) Contrasted as a ministry of death and a ministry of spirit (7-8).
 - i) The ministry of death (Old Covenant)

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written on stones was with glory so that Israel could not look upon the face of Moses.

- ii) The ministry of the spirit (New Covenant) is with glory, is it not?
 - (b) Contrasted as a ministry of condemnation and of righteousness (9-10).
 - i) The glory of the ministry of righteousness (the New Covenant) exceeds that of condemnation (Old Covenant).
 - ii) The glory of condemnation (Old Covenant) is as nothing compared to the surpassing glory of the ministry of the New Covenant.
 - (c) Conclusion from the contrast: If that which passes away (Old Covenant) was with glory, much more that which remains (New Covenant) is with glory.
- B. Paul explained the reason for his great boldness of speech (12-18).
- 1. As seen in the contrast between him and Moses (12-13).
 - a) His hope in the abiding glory of the New Covenant was the basis of his great boldness of a speech (12).
 - b) Moses, on the other hand, put a veil over his face to prevent Israel from seeing the end of the fading glory on his face (13).
 - 2. As seen in the contrast between those who were reading the Old Covenant and those who turned to the Lord (14-15).
 - a) Their minds were hardened at the reading of the Old Covenant because they were unaware that the veil was taken away in Christ (14).
 - b) Even in Paul's day wherever Moses was read the veil lay on their hearts (15).
 - 3. As seen in the result of turning to the Lord (16-18).
 - a) The veil is taken away.
 - b) The Lord is (identified with) the spirit-covenant (See verses 6 and 8 ASV).
 - c) Where the spirit-covenant of the Lord is, there is liberty.
 - d) Transformation results from looking into the glory of the Lord (as seen in the spirit-covenant).
 - (1) This is to be done with unveiled face as we look

into the mirror—the New Covenant or spirit-covenant—where we see the glory of the Lord.

- (2) The transformation is into the same image from glory to glory—from the Lord of the spirit-covenant.

Self-commendation

Scripture

3:1. Are we beginning again to commend ourselves? or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you?

Comments

Are we beginning again to commend ourselves.—Paul had just written of the glorious triumph of the messengers of Christ and also of the message itself which had to do with eternal life and eternal death. He had indicated that he was adequate for this ministry. In his relationship to Christ as an inspired apostle, he spoke the Word of God with all sincerity. He did not make merchandise of it as some had done. The whole chapter is an explanation of his fitness for the task.

As he often does in his writings, Paul anticipated possible charges of self-commendation. He was well aware of the arrogance of some people at Corinth. See I Cor. 4:18. He knew of those who were bringing false charges against him. See II Cor. 10:10. The message of the Word of God was of such importance to the apostle Paul that he wanted to make sure that the Corinthians would not make the mistake of assuming that what he was writing was idle boasting about his own powers and abilities.

epistles of commendation.—There is certainly a place for letters of commendation. Paul had written many words of commendation about his fellow-workers, Timothy and Titus. In writing to the Philippians about Timothy, he had said, "for I have no man likeminded who will care truly for your state for they all seek their own and not the things of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 2:20-21). The closing words of First Corinthians contain words of commendation about some of the brethren who were also well known to the Corinthians. Paul wrote to the Romans commending Phoebe whom he calls, "our sister who is a servant of the church that is in Cenchrea." He urged them to treat her in a manner befitting the saints and to assist her in what-

ever matter she might have need" (Rom. 16:1-2). This faithful saint had been a helper of many including the apostle Paul. In the closing part of that epistle Paul mentioned a number of the brethren whom he commended in various ways because of their service in the Lord. His commendation of Luke, the beloved physician, is found in Col. 4:14. Mark, for some reason, had not completed the first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas. This became a matter of sharp contention between them when they started on their second journey. Paul refused to take Mark with him. Long afterwards, he wrote to Timothy, saying, "Take Mark and bring him with thee for he is useful to me for ministering" (II Tim. 4:11).

to you from you?—Paul may have had in mind the many who were corrupting the Word of God and who may have brought epistles of commendation of themselves so that they might become established among the Corinthians. Paul knew about those who had caused so much trouble among the Galatian churches. They had come from James, but there is no good reason to assume that he had approved what they were doing. See Gal. 2:12. In the light of James' comments as reported in Acts 15 and Paul's investigation as given in Galatians two, one might readily assume that their claims were false.

Paul needed no letter of commendation to the church at Corinth, for he performed all the signs of an apostle in their midst. See II Cor. 12:12. Neither did Paul need a letter of commendation from them. He had written to them in First Corinthians saying, "If to others I am not an apostle, yet at least I am to you for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord" (I Cor. 9:2). This point is elaborated upon in the two-fold answer that follows.

Our Epistle

Scripture

3:2-3. Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men; 3 being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone but in table that are hearts of flesh.

Comments

our epistle.—The reason he needed no letter from them is seen in the fact that they actually were such a letter. They were his beloved

children in the gospel. See I Cor. 4:14-15. They had become Christians as a result of obedience to the gospel which Paul preached to them. Despite the fact that conditions at Corinth were far from what they should have been Paul was perfectly willing to risk his reputation as an apostle of Christ upon the testimony of the Christian character and conduct of those who were faithful to the Lord.

written in our hearts.—This letter was written in his mind, that is, his understanding and his affections. He knew about the establishment of the church for he was the first one to preach the gospel there, and he had kept in touch with them through the household of Chloe and through the letters which others had written asking questions about their own problems. Paul had just laid bare his own heart as he told them about his anguish and tears and sorrow over those who had failed to come up to the proper standard of Christian character and conduct. He also revealed his anticipated joy which all were to share when he came to them again. The Corinthians knew that he loved them and cared for them as a father for his beloved children.

known and read of all men.—While this epistle was written in the apostle's heart, he says that all men knew it and read it. This undoubtedly means that all who came in contact with the church in Corinth knew of their relationship to Christ. They were also aware of the fact that the apostle Paul had brought the gospel to them. Corinth was a strategic point in which to establish the church, for men from the known world came in and out of that city carrying on their commerce. As they did so they learned about the church of God which was at Corinth.

an epistle of Christ.—As men came to know the life of the church at Corinth, despite all the sordid things that were known about some of them, it became evident that they were an epistle of Christ. A comparison of what they were before and after conversion is given in I Cor. 6:9-11. To see such people after their sins had been washed away by the blood of the Lamb, and to hear them boldly tell of their forgiveness in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ must have made a profound impression on the minds of all who came in contact with them.

ministered by us.—Paul had likened his ministry among them to one who planted and that of Apollos to one who watered. He had served as the masterbuilder to lay the foundation, but another had built upon it. Now he says, "Ye are an epistle which Christ wrote." Paul was the servant of Christ through whom the writing had been

done. But this was said in humility, not self-commendation, for it was the grace of God that had made it possible for him to serve in this capacity. See I Cor. 15:10.

written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.—Paul now contrasts the letter which Christ had written—the New Covenant—with the Old Covenant. The epistle of Christ had not been written with ink, for it was not just a piece of parchment with words written upon it. It was written with the Spirit of the living God through the inspired apostle. It was the message of life unto life and death unto death. It could be read by all those who saw the changed character and conduct of the church at Corinth. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul had made it clear that his message had been the testimony of God about Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He had not spoken the wisdom of men, but the wisdom that had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. See I Cor. 2:1-2, 10-13.

not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh.—"Tables of stone" suggest the Old Covenant, that is, the Ten Commandments. See Ex. 34:28-29; Deut. 4:13. "Hearts of flesh" suggest the New Covenant. See Jer. 31:31-34 as quoted in Heb. 8:8-13. The essential difference in the two is indicated by the fact that the New Covenant became a living reality in the lives and hearts of those who became obedient to the gospel of Christ. This is the reason that the Corinthians were both an epistle of commendation of the apostle Paul and an epistle which Christ had written through the ministry of His inspired apostle.

Paul's Glorious Ministry Under the New Covenant

Scripture

3:4-11. And such confidence have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God; 6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. 7 But if the ministration of death, written, and engraven on stones, came with glory, so that the children of Israel could not look stedfastly upon the face of Moses for the glory of his face; which glory was passing away: 8 how shall not rather the ministration of the spirit be with glory? 9 For if the ministration of condemnation hath glory, much rather doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. 10 For verily that which hath been made glorious hath not been made glori-

ous in this respect, by reason of the glory that surpasseth. 11 For if that which passeth away was with glory, much more that which remaineth is in glory.

Comments

And such confidence have we.—Despite the hardships which Paul faced at Corinth, his ministry is characterized by confidence and triumph. His confidence was through Christ, for he knew what Christ had done for him. He knew of His resurrection which demonstrated that He had conquered Satan. He had surrendered to the risen Christ on the Damascus road. He had committed himself wholeheartedly to the service of the Lord. He remembered that day when Ananias told him to get himself baptized that his sins might be washed away, because he had called upon the name of the Lord. He had been summoned as an apostle of God. He was convinced that the way of victory was through Jesus Christ. He was never ashamed of Him nor of His gospel, for he was confident that it was the power of God to save the believer, whether Jew or Greek.

our sufficiency is from God.—That is, it is God who made him adequate for the task of preaching the Word that dealt with eternal life and eternal death. God had revealed the message through the Holy Spirit to the apostles and thus equipped them for the glorious ministry under the New Covenant. No one without that divinely revealed message could possibly undertake such a ministry.

How unfortunate that many who undertake the work of the ministry today seem called upon to substitute the wisdom of man for this divinely revealed message of God. Paul's confidence in this message is expressed in his word to Timothy, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Tim. 3:16-17). He did not hesitate to urge Timothy to preach the Word; to be urgent in season, out of season; to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching. See II Tim. 4:2. The same divine Word which Paul preached will equip the consecrated minister of today who has the courage to preach this message of eternal life and everlasting death.

ministers of the new covenant.—A covenant is an agreement. When that covenant is between God and man, God Himself dictates all the conditions of the covenant as well as the blessings involved in it. Man agrees to the terms of the covenant in order to enjoy its blessings.

In the case of the Old Covenant which was given at Mt. Sinai, God revealed the commandments to Moses. The people entered into the covenant relationship when they said all that the Lord has spoken, we will do. See Ex. 19:8. Subsequently, all who were born into the family of the Jews were parties to that Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant only those who are born of the water and of the Spirit are parties to the New Covenant—a spiritual birth in contrast to a physical birth.

The New Covenant is the gospel of Christ that promises remission of sins and eternal life to the believer whose faith is expressed through obedience to the commandments of Christ. Every individual who comes into this New Covenant relationship with Christ through the new birth, publically and in the sight of God as he makes the good confession, promises to be obedient to its terms and pledges his allegiance to Christ. To say that I believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God is to endorse all that is involved in ones total relationship to God through Jesus Christ. As Christ, He is our Prophet. Through His prophetic office the message of the Bible was revealed from heaven. See Heb. 1:1-2. As Priest He shed blood for the remission of sins. Significantly, in instituting the Lord's Supper, He blessed the cup and said, "This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for the many unto the remission of sins." As King, He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God in fulfillment of the promise of God made to David. See Acts 2:25-36. He exercises His authority as well as His watchcare over His people through the inspired Word spoken through the apostles. All of those who pledge themselves to keep the terms of the New Covenant must let the Word of Christ dwell in them richly in all wisdom and teaching. See Col. 3:16.

This New Covenant was given in promise to Abraham in the Scripture which says, "In thee shall all the nations be blessed." See Gal. 3:8. It was given to Abraham some four hundred and thirty years before the covenant at Sinai, but was not annulled by that covenant. See Gal. 3:16-17. It came to its fulness with the preaching of the gospel on the Day of Pentecost. All those who accept its terms become sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. "for as many as are baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27). Furthermore, "if you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's offspring and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

God was a party to two covenants at the same time, but they were not in conflict because they served different purposes. One

was with Abraham and Christ; the other, the Ten Commandments, was with Israel. It was added, Paul says, because of transgression. There was a time limit on it, for it was to last until the promised seed of Abraham should come—that is, Christ. It served in the capacity of a trusted slave who watched over a child until his majority, and as such held sin in check until Christ came. But since it was a law that could not make alive one who had died in sin, it was necessary that the promise to Abraham be fulfilled in Christ and be put into effect through the preaching of the apostles. On the Day of Pentecost, the apostles told those who were guilty of crucifying the Son of God to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins, for the promise—that is, the promise God made to Abraham—was to them and to their children and all that were far off, as many as the Lord God should call unto Himself. See Gal. 3:19-22; Acts 2:38-39.

not of letter but of spirit.—This expression is found three times in Paul's writings: once in this epistle and twice in Romans. The first instance in Romans is found in 2:29. There he uses "letter" as a symbol of outward conformity to the Law that had been written on the tables of stone. On the other hand, he uses "spirit" as a symbol of the inward life of the individual, Jew or Gentile, who actually carried out the provisions of the Law. Moses had written that the one who actually carried out the righteousness which is of the Law lived thereby. See Romans 10:5. Paul had said that not the hearers of the Law but the doers of the Law shall be justified. See Rom. 2:13. Such persons showed the works of the Law written on their hearts, that is, they understood what was right in God's sight and willingly complied with it. This was not, as some have contended, an impossible thing. Moses wrote, "This commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it" (Deut. 30:11-14). John says, "This is the love of God that we keep this commandment: and his commandments are not grievous" (I John 5:3).

The second instance in Romans is found in 7:6. The same basic idea is seen in this context. Newness of spirit refers to the new life in Christ which was characterized by intelligent, willing, loving

obedience to Him. Oldness of letter, on the other hand, referred to the life under the jurisdiction of the Law. Because of violation of the Law, life was characterized by sinful passions that brought forth fruit unto death. In II Cor. 3:6, Paul uses "letter" as a symbol of the Old Covenant just as he had done in Romans, and "spirit" as a symbol of the life under the New Covenant. Keeping in mind Paul's use of these terms will aid in interpreting 3:17-18.

Two further observations need to be made: (1) "letter" is not contrasted with the Holy Spirit. Verse three plainly indicates that the epistle of Christ had been written with the Holy Spirit, but in verse six "spirit" (spelled with a small "s") is used as a symbol of the New Covenant; (2) There is no justification whatever for the assumption that letter and spirit refer to a literal interpretation of the Word of God as opposed to a so-called "spiritual" interpretation. All of God's Word is "spirit and life" (John 6:63).

The Word is directed to intelligence of man and it appeals to his heart. It shows the way to forgiveness and purity in Christ. It is life, for obedience to it brings the gift of life eternal.

for the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life.—This unfortunately has led some to assume that an attempt to actually obey God's Word results in death. How can such a view be harmonized with what James plainly says? "Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only deluding your own selves" (James 1:21-22). Why then did Paul say that the "letter killeth"? Remembering that letter stands as a symbol of the Old Covenant, we may read "the Old Covenant killeth." The answer to the problem is clearly indicated in the Scriptures for Hebrews says that the Old Covenant gave place to the New because God found fault with those under the Old Covenant. He found fault with them because they continued not in His covenant. See Heb. 8:7. Paul shows that by the works of the Law no human being is pardoned in God's sight. See Rom. 3:20. By works of the Law he has in mind those ceremonies such as the animal sacrifices which only served to remind the one who had broken God's law that ultimately Christ would come providing the sacrifice that would actually blot out sin. See Rom. 3:25. He further states that if there had been a law given which would make alive then righteousness (pardon) would have been of the law. See Gal. 3:21. He also states that the law is not a matter of faith but "he that doeth them shall live in them" (Gal. 3:12). "Spirit" which stands for the New

Covenant gives life. Under this covenant the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, actually cleanses the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. See Heb. 9:14. The testimony of the Holy Spirit is given in Jer. 31:31-34 and in Heb. 10:16 in these words: "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord. I will put my laws on their hearts and upon their minds also will I write them and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more." As sin reigned in death, even so grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21).

The Glory of the Old and New Covenants

Scripture

3:7-11. But if the ministration of death, written, and engraven on stones, came with glory, so that the children of Israel could not look stedfastly upon the face of Moses for the glory of his face; which glory was passing away: 8 how shall not rather the ministration of the spirit be with glory? 9 For if the ministration of condemnation hath glory, much rather doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. 10 For verily that which hath been made glorious hath not been made glorious in this respect, by reason of the glory that surpasseth. 11 For if that which passeth away was with glory, much more that which remaineth is in glory.

Comments

But if the ministration of death.—Paul had just spoken of the Old Covenant under the figure of the letter that kills. Now for the same reasons he speaks of it as a ministry that produced death. Nevertheless, he declares that the ministry that produced death—a letter which was engraved on stones—came with glory. Paul was not one to criticize the Law of God. Although he had violated it and as a result had died, he insisted that the law was holy and the commandment was holy and righteous and good. See Rom. 7:9-12. He is now about to contrast the glory of the Old Covenant with the glory of the New that brought him life in Christ. When Moses came down from the mountain after he had talked with God his face shone with a brilliance that made it impossible for the children of Israel to look intently at it. They were aware of the fact that Moses had been in the presence of God and that the word he was speaking was

from God. When he finished speaking to them, he put a veil on his face. When he went again to speak to the Lord he took the veil off and came back to deliver the message to the people of Israel and then put the veil on his face again. See Ex. 34:29-35.

which glory was passing away.—The veil kept the people from seeing that the shining brilliance on the face of Moses was gradually fading away. It kept them from assuming that what he had said as the Word of God was only a temporary thing. But see verse fifteen for the distorted view that some continued to hold regarding this matter.

the ministration of the spirit.—Some assume that this is a reference to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and therefore capitalize the word. Let it again be emphasized that Paul has already indicated that the New Covenant came into existence through the work of the Holy Spirit as He spoke through the inspired apostle. The word "spirit" in this verse however is to be taken, as it is in verse six, as a symbol of the New Covenant. As such it is contrasted with the ministry of death which is a symbol of the Old Covenant. The apostles' question was, "If the ministry of the Old Covenant, which was a ministry that brought death, came with glory as indicated by the shining face of Moses, how shall not also the ministry of the spirit-covenant (New Covenant) which brings eternal life be with glory?" The verses that follow indicate the surpassing glory of this spirit-covenant.

for if the ministration of condemnation.—The New Covenant which was symbolized by "spirit" gave life and was called a ministry of righteousness. Paul explained this righteousness as something apart from the Law, as a righteousness of God to which the Law and Prophets had borne witness. It was the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe. It provided pardon from sin for all who fall short of the glory of God—that is, of His approval. That pardon is freely given because of God's grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. He is the One who through His blood blots out sins of those who believe in Him and expresses that belief in obedience to His commands. See Romans 3:21-26; Acts 2:38; 22:16. Righteousness is used in a three-fold way in Paul's writings. First, referring to the fact that God is right or just in word and deed. Second, it refers to the standard of conduct which God requires of His people. Third, it is the status of one whose sins have been pardoned by the grace of God through faith in Christ. Is there any wonder that Paul insists that the glory of this ministry of righteousness exceeds the glory of the ministration that brought

death? The glory of the New Covenant so outshines the glory of the Old as to cause it to appear as if it had not been at all.

For that which passeth away.—Paul explained in Galatians that the Law was to serve until Christ. But since faith in Christ has come, we are no longer under the Law. See Gal. 3:23-25. He also explained that Christ was born under the Law that He might redeem those who were under the Law. See Gal. 4:4-5. In the allegory of Abraham's two sons he again clearly points out that the possession of eternal life was not possible under the Old Covenant, for it belongs to those who enjoy the freedom under the New Covenant. Hager, the mother of Ishmael, represented the Old Covenant. She and her son were cast out—did not inherit the blessing of Abraham. Sarah and Isaac represent those who are under the New Covenant. Paul adds, "Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." He cited the Scripture that said, "Cast out the handmaiden and her son, for the son of the handmaid shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." Christians are children of the free woman—that is, the New Covenant—and are heirs of the promise of eternal life through Christ. See Gal. 4:21-31. This position is reinforced by the writer of Hebrews for he says, "In that he said a new covenant, he hath made the first old, but that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away" (Heb. 8:13).

It should be noted that verse eleven refers to the Old Covenant which was passing away. This had been symbolized by the fact that the glory that shone from Moses' face was also passing away. See verse 7.

that which remaineth is in glory—The New Covenant is the abiding covenant. Under it the perfect sacrifice has been made, and no further sacrifice is necessary since the blood of Christ actually cleanses the conscience of the worshipper. See Heb. 10:1-18. The glory of this covenant remains. Its glory is to be found in the fact that it came from God through Jesus Christ as He revealed it by the Holy Spirit through the inspired apostles. See John 16:13-14.

Paul's Great Boldness of Speech

Scripture

3:12-13. Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness of speech, 13 and are not as Moses, who put a veil upon his face, that the children of Israel should not look stedfastly on the end of that which was passing away:

Comments

such a hope.—Paul's hope was based upon the abiding nature of the New Covenant. The blessings of the New Covenant were remission of sins, eternal life in Christ, and the hope of the glory of God. See Rom. 5:1-2.

great boldness of speech.—This is said in justification of his claim that he was adequately fitted for the task of preaching the message of the gospel which dealt with eternal death and eternal life.

not as Moses.—The fact that God spoke to Moses was symbolized by the shining brilliance on the face of Moses when he came down from the mountain, but that message was temporary. Since it was to act as a guardian over God's people until Christ should come, the temporary nature of that message is suggested by the fact that the shining brilliance of Moses faded away. Moses had put the veil on his face to keep the children of Israel from seeing when this happened. It was in direct contrast to the great boldness of speech which characterized Paul's message under the New Covenant which is permanent.

the end of that which was passing away.—Moses did not want the children of Israel to see that the glory had left his face. So long as they were under the Old Covenant, he wanted them to remember that it was God's Word. As Moses prepared the children of Israel to go over into the promised land, he said, "You shall not add to the word which I command you nor take from it that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I commanded you" (Deut. 4:2). No other nation had a God like the Lord God of Israel; no other nation had a law like the law God had given them. See Deut. 4:7-8. The Lord spoke to Joshua as he was preparing to lead the children of Israel in their conquest of Canaan. "Be strong and very courageous being careful to do according to all that Moses my servant commanded you. Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left that you may have good success wherever you go" (Joshua 1:7). Paul reminds us that the law was holy, and the commandment was holy and righteous and good. See Rom. 7:12. All this, however, cannot compare with the surpassing glory of the permanent New Covenant with its blessings of remission of sins and eternal life through Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Some have suggested that "end" may refer to the purpose of the Law of Moses. But certainly Moses was not interested in obscuring that purpose, for he himself had said, "The Lord your God will raise

up for you a prophet like unto me from among you" (Deut. 18:15). Peter quoted Moses and showed that this prophecy was fulfilled in Christ. See Acts 3:20-23. Moses simply did not want Israel to see that the brilliance had left his face for it was a symbol that God had spoken to him.

Hardened Minds

Scripture

3:14-15. But their minds were hardened: for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remaineth, it not being revealed to them that it is done away in Christ. 15 But unto this day, whensoever Moses is read, a veil lieth upon their heart.

Comments

minds were hardened.—This hardness was a subject of the prophecy of Isaiah which was quoted by Jesus in connection with the failure of some to understand the parable of the sower. "By hearing ye shall hear and shall in no wise understand; and seeing ye shall see and shall in no wise perceive. This people's heart is waxed gross and their ears are dull of hearing, their eyes they have closed lest haply they should perceive with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and should turn again and I should hear them" (Matt. 13:14-15). Paul warned his Jewish hearers about the same thing when he spoke to them in Antioch of Pisidia. He said, "Beware therefore lest there come upon you which is spoken in the prophets: Behold ye despisers and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it unto you" (Acts 13:40-41). He also quoted Isaiah's prophecy to the Jews who met with him in Rome. See Acts 28:26-28.

at the reading of the old covenant.—Tragically many of the Jews failed to anticipate the coming of Christ and the New Covenant although these matters had been clearly set forth in their Scriptures. They became satisfied that they were the chosen people of God. Their religion had become largely a matter of external conformity to ritual and form. They were interested in the ceremonies and the keeping of feasts and sabbaths. But Jesus asked them on one occasion, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your traditions" (Matt. 15:3)? Now Paul charges them with spiritual blindness and stubbornness, for even in his day they still clung to the Old Covenant as if it were a permanent thing. They refused to admit that

although God had spoken to the fathers in the prophets, that in the end of those days of revelation He had spoken with finality, completeness and authority in the exalted One who bears the name Son. See Heb. 1:1-2.

it is done away in Christ.—Moses removed the veil when he went back into the mountain to talk with God but the veil remained on the hearts of those who heard the reading of the Law of Moses for they were not aware that it is removed in Christ. What God said in the completed revelation of His will in the New Covenant is like speaking to Him face to face. See I Cor. 13:12. The examination of the facts concerning the life, death, and resurrection of Christ should convince one that God's approval rested upon Him. See Acts 2:22-36. The apostle Peter, recalling his experience in the holy mountain when God said this is my Son in whom I am well pleased, said, "We have the word of prophecy made more sure where unto you do well that ye take heed as unto a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts, knowing this first that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation for no prophecy ever came by the will of man but men spake from God being moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Pet. 1:19-21). Paul indicates that God's gospel, which concerns His Son and the pardon that was made possible through His shed blood, is in accord with the testimony of the law and the prophets. See Rom. 1:1-4; 3:21-26.

whenever Moses is read.—Paul had had many experiences with the stubbornness of the Jews who steadfastly refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Disobedient Jews had rejected his message of Christ at Antioch. They led persecutions against him in Iconium and Lystra. They stirred up trouble for him in Thessalonica. Their hatred for him finally led to his arrest in the city of Jerusalem. Throughout his long imprisonment they pressed their charges with the hope of having him put to death. Only his appeal to Caesar prevented his falling into their murderous hands. Their stubborn hearts were veiled so that the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ did not penetrate that veil.

Transformed

Scripture

3:16-18. But whensoever it shall turn to the Lord the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face beholding

as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.

Comments

turn to the Lord.—The only way to remove that veil is to make an honest investigation of the claims of Christ as set forth in the gospel which was preached by the inspired apostles. When it, the veiled heart, turns to the Lord the veil is taken away. Then one can see that God has spoken with finality through the Son in the New Covenant. The veil kept the Jews from seeing that the Law of Moses was supplanted by the gospel. They did not know that God was speaking through Christ, not Moses. See Deut. 18:15. The veil, which Moses removed when he was in the presence of God or speaking to the children of Israel, is taken out of the way when one realizes that God did speak with finality through Christ.

Now the Lord is the Spirit.—The word "spirit" in this verse is rendered "Spirit," assuming that Paul was referring to the Holy Spirit. The Lord is Jesus Christ. See 4:5. See also comment on 1:3. But this is to identify the Lord with the Holy Spirit. We are well aware of the fact that Scripture makes it clear that there is an intimate unity between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. But why should Paul refer to this unity at this point? He had already made it clear that the New Covenant came into being through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit as he directed the minds of those who wrote down the message of the New Covenant. He had also indicated that "spirit" stood as a symbol of the New Covenant. Since in this context he is contrasting the reading of Moses, that is the Old Covenant, with the boldness of Paul's speech in connection with the New Covenant, it is possible that he is speaking about the Lord who is identified with that spirit-covenant. It is to the Lord that the veiled heart was to turn. And that was to be done by the reading of the New Covenant which was symbolized by "spirit" rather than "letter." The New Covenant is the fulfillment of the Old.

where the Spirit of the Lord is.—While this could refer to the Holy Spirit through whom the New Covenant came into being, consistency would suggest that the reference is still to "spirit" as the symbol of the New Covenant. Where the spirit-covenant of the Lord is, there is liberty.

there is liberty.—This is the very issue that Paul discussed with the Galatians in chapters four and five. The New Covenant is represented by Sarah, and the Christian by Isaac. Paul concludes, "Wherefore

brethren we are not children of the handmaid but of the free woman" (Gal. 4:31). Again Paul says, "For freedom, did Christ set us free. Stand fast therefore and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1). This freedom in Christ is within the regulation of the Law of Christ. "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). See also Rom. 8:1-4.

But we all, with unveiled face.—The reading of the Old Covenant is here contrasted with the reading of the New Covenant. While the Jew read with a veil upon his heart, the Christian—the one who turned to the Lord—is aware that the New Covenant is the abiding message of Christ.

beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord.—See James' use of the mirror as a symbol of the perfect law of liberty, that is, the gospel or the New Covenant. James 1:23-24. It is the glorious, abiding New Covenant that reveals the glory of the Lord. It reveals His deity, His majesty, His power and His authority. It reveals His work as Prophet, Priest, and King. It reveals Him as our example, in whose footsteps we should follow. See I Pet. 2:21. It reveals Him as the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. See I Pet. 1:25. It reveals Him as the One coming again for those who wait for Him unto salvation. God's children will be like Him for they will see Him as He is. See I John 3:2.

transformed into the same image.—The tragic failure of the Jews under the Old Covenant is indicated by the fact that they were not transformed into God's children. Though they claimed God as their Father, the simple truth was that they were filled with hatred for His Son and disregard for His Word. Therefore Jesus called them children of their father, the devil. See John 8:39-44.

Will Christ tolerate anything less than genuine transformation into Christlikeness under the New Covenant? Paul wrote to the Romans and said, "Be not fashioned according to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds so that ye may approve the will of God, the thing that is good, and acceptable in His sight, and complete" (Rom. 12:2). How tragic that many of the Corinthians had failed to see this. Their sin of division was destroying the temple of the Holy Spirit, their immoral conduct defiled the body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and their unChristian conduct made it impossible to keep the memorial feast of the Lord's Supper.

from glory to glory.—The image into which those who turn to the Lord are to be transformed is that of the glorious Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing short of Christlikeness in character and

conduct meets this demand. Paul had written to the Corinthians to say, "Imitate me as I am also an imitator of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1). Guidelines to follow in this matter may be found in I Cor. 13:4-8. Christ demonstrated in His life the meaning of every one of these characteristics of love. Love is the crowning virtue of the Christian life. So the glory of Christ is to be seen in the glorious life of His church. He "cleansed it by the washing of the water with the Word that He might present the church into Himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle of any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:26-27).

even as from the Lord the Spirit.—This glorious transformation comes from the Lord of the spirit-covenant. Again some assume that "Spirit" is in apposition to "Lord" thus identifying the Lord with the Holy Spirit. The point that Paul is making is that the Lord has spoken through the New Covenant in contrast with the fact that Moses spoke through the Old Covenant as God revealed it to him.

Summary

Following the claim to be equal to the task of proclaiming the message of the gospel which was a message of life and death, Paul asked two questions: (1) Is this self-commendation? and (2) We do not need, as some do, letters of commendation to you or from you, do we?

He began his answers by saying, "You are our epistle." Others might need letters of commendation, but Paul didn't. He knew that they had become Christians through his preaching. He had an abiding love for them. They, then, were like a letter written on his heart, known and read by everyone. They knew of his love for them and that they had become new creatures in Christ. Indeed, they were like a letter that Christ had written through his ministers who had preached the gospel to them. It was written on living hearts—the understanding and affections—not stone tablets as if it affected external conduct only. It was not an ordinary letter written with ink, but one written by the Spirit of the living God. Paul was confident of all this because he knew that it had God's approval. God alone had made him equal to the task of being a minister of the New Covenant. This led to a contrast between the Old Covenant—the Ten Commandments given at Mt. Sinai—and the New Covenant—the gospel covenant given in fullness on the Day of Pentecost. He spoke of the Old Covenant as a "letter" covenant, and the New Covenant as a "spirit" covenant.

II CORINTHIANS

To many, the letter-covenant was not obeyed out of love for God. It became a thing that killed, because death was the penalty for breaking it. The spirit-covenant, because it was intelligently, willingly, and lovingly obeyed, was a thing that made alive those who were dead in sin. The spirit-covenant was revealed by the Holy Spirit, but for that matter, so was the letter-covenant, and in some respects it too was spiritual. See Rom. 7:12-14. The expression, "the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life" has nothing to do with the literal interpretation of the Scriptures as opposed to a spiritual interpretation.

Paul contrasted the glory of these two covenants, that is, the Old Covenant which kills and the New that brings life. The Old brought condemnation to the disobedient, but the New brings forgiveness to those who willingly obey it. The glory of the Old was such that the sons of Israel could not look steadfastly at the face of Moses which shone with a brilliant light because he had talked with God who had given him the covenant for Israel. But the glory of the New Covenant excels the Old just as forgiveness excels condemnation. The glory of the Old could not equal the surpassing glory of the New. Even the glory on Moses' face faded away, a symbol of the fact that the Old Covenant was to be replaced by the New which is permanent. As a minister of the New Covenant, Paul spoke with great boldness.

Moses put a veil on his face to keep the people from seeing the end of the glory with which it shone. Moses wanted them to remember the glory as a symbol of the fact that God had spoken to them through Him. This kept them from seeing that the Old Covenant had been done away. Even in Paul's time, a mental picture of that veil remained in the minds of readers of the Law because they were not aware that the veil had been done away by the New Covenant of Christ. It was done away whenever the veiled heart turned to the Lord through whom God spoke with finality, completeness, and authority. See Heb. 1:1-2. The Lord is the Lord of the spirit-covenant. The message of the New Covenant is forever fresh just as if one were speaking to God "face to face." Where the spirit-covenant of the Lord is, there is liberty. With unveiled faces because we are talking to the Lord, we look as into a mirror when we read the New Covenant and see the glory of the Lord.

As we behold this glorious image of the Lord, we are transformed into the glorious likeness of the Lord of the spirit-covenant.

CHAPTER THREE

Questions

1. What is the connection between the content of this chapter and that of the preceding one?
2. Why did Paul anticipate charges of self-commendation?
3. What is the purpose of letters of commendation? How had Paul made use of them?
4. Why didn't he need such a letter to the Corinthians or from them.
5. How had signs and wonders served to commend him to them?
6. How did their lives as Christians commend him to others?
7. In what sense was this letter written on his heart?
8. How could all men know and read it?
9. Why does Paul also call it an epistle of Christ?
10. What did Paul have to do with writing it?
11. Why did he say that it was not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God?
12. What message had been written on tablets of stone?
13. Why did Paul suggest that the gospel message which he preached had been written on hearts of flesh?
14. Why did Paul speak with such confidence about this letter?
15. What was the source of his adequacy for his ministry?
16. What are some of the contrasts between the Old and New covenants?
17. To whom was the New Covenant first given as a promise?
18. How did Paul show that there was no conflict between the Old and New Covenants?
19. What does "letter and spirit" mean in its various contexts?
20. To what does "letter" refer in this chapter?
21. To what does "spirit" refer in this chapter?
22. What indicates that "letter" is not contrasted with "Holy Spirit" in this context?
23. What is meant by the statement that "the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life"?
24. What popular notion cannot possibly be supported by these words?
25. What did James say about actually doing what the Word says?
26. Why, then, was the Old Covenant spoken as the ministration of death?
27. In what way was the Old Covenant glorious?
28. What is the difference between its glory and that of the New?

II CORINTHIANS

29. When and why did Moses put the veil on his face?
30. What is the ministration of the spirit?
31. Why was the Old Covenant spoken of as a ministration of condemnation?
32. Why was the New Covenant called the ministration of righteousness?
33. What does righteousness mean in this context?
34. In what way does the glory of the New Covenant outshine that of the Old?
35. How does the allegory of Abraham's two wives explain the relation between the Old and New Covenants?
36. Why is the New Covenant spoken of as the one that remains?
37. On what was Paul's hope based?
38. Why could he speak with such boldness about the hope of the New Covenant?
39. Why did Moses put a veil on his face? When did he remove it?
40. What is meant by "the end of that which was passing away"?
41. What caused the minds of the Jews to become hardened?
42. What was their attitude toward the reading of the Old Covenant in Paul's day?
43. What happens when the veiled heart turns to the Lord?
44. With what covenant is the Lord associated in this context?
45. Where is liberty to be found?
46. Why is the Christian's face spoken of as unveiled?
47. What is the mirror in which we behold the glory of the Lord?
48. What happens when we do?
49. What did Paul mean by the expression "from glory to glory"?
50. What did he mean by "even as from the Lord the Spirit"?

For Discussion

1. What can be done through Christian living to promote the work of Christ?
2. What can be done to help church people speak with conviction about the Word of God?