

Christ is Sufficient:

Paul's Ministerial Confidence from the New Covenant in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11

Harley J. Schwartz

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Introduction

The New Covenant minister is a front-line fighter. He faces trials, threats, and skirmishes that most Christians will never encounter. Paul complained that he and his company were “burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life” (2 Chron. 1:8)¹. How then did Paul end his course saying, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7)? Paul’s perseverance in the ministry, by honest and sincere means, unto the making of his hearers to be “living epistles”, is because of the exceedingly greater revelation of the glory of Christ, and the far greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in the New Covenant under which he ministered. The paper will prove from 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 that the hope of success in New Covenant ministry lies in Christ the Savior who by His Spirit administers the New Covenant, by explaining the passage in context of 2 Corinthians as a whole (including cultural and geographical setting of the book), its immediate context, and the passage’s context in the ministry of Paul. The paper will then establish the right reading of the text, and will provide needed exegetical detail from the original Greek. The paper will explain the New Covenant’s place in redemptive history as an administration of the Covenant of Grace; deal with objections to the Westminster view of the Covenant of Grace; the New Covenant’s comparative greatness over the Old Covenant as proven by the comparatively greater work of the Spirit, and the greater revelation of Christ; and how Christ by the New Covenant emboldened Paul, kept him in integrity unto the end, and made Paul’s hearers at Corinth to be living epistles. The work will conclude with exhortations to the minister that come from the doctrine expounded.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Background of the Letter

Kind of Letter

The genre of the letter is an occasional letter, addressed to particular people in a particular situation, and not initially intended for broad publication². Some further historical and situational analysis is therefore necessary to proper interpretation. It is then necessary to discuss Paul's relationship to the Corinthians, his travels concerning them, and matters of controversy between them.

Paul's Authorship Hardly Questioned—But Was He Alone?

There is relatively little controversy that Paul authored 2 Corinthians, although an academic discussion has circulated in the last few centuries on whether 2 Corinthians is either one unified letter, or a stitch-up of several Pauline works. Some have also speculated that certain of these parts are non-Pauline in origin³. Rather than address the Pauline originality of each supposed section, what follows will prove that 2 Corinthians was indeed originally one single work.

Controversy of Composition—One or Many?

J.S. Semler first questioned in a 1776 publication the unified integrity of 2 Corinthians, and scholars since have debated whether it is a composite of several works⁴. The theory feels

² D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 415.

³ Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 419. Carson and Moo note that some believe 6:14-7:1 to be a later interpolation by one in the "Pauline school." This is not the only questioned text, but it will not be discussed at length here.

⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 2nd ed., vol. 40. *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Lynn A. Losie (Grand Rapids, MI: 2014), 52.

plausible, because when reading straight through the letter one hits abrupt changes in tone and subject matter which are difficult to explain. For example, why does Paul suddenly exhort believers against being yoked with unbelievers in 6:14 with little apparent connection to what he said just prior? Why does Paul's tone beginning at chapter 10 suddenly switch from warm and gracious to harsh and pointed? Phenomena such as these prompt scholars to question whether 2 Corinthians is a composite of several smaller works.

Some scholars contend that chapters 1-9 are one letter, while 10-13 are a separate letter (some argue it is the "tearful letter" of 2 Cor. 2:3)⁵, and some will contend that 2:14 to 7:4—in which this paper's pericope are contained—is an interpolation⁶. The argument is that the tone of the letter changes from 2:13 to 2:14; and if one jumps from 2:13 to 7:5 they find the theme of Titus's and Paul's trips continuing⁷. The question is relevant, because even though 2:14-7:4 can stand on its own, the debate raises the question whether Paul's sufferings in the introduction, and the controversies and revelations in the last part of the letter, have bearing on Paul's excursion into the glories of the ministry that begin at 2:14. This paper argues that the velvet backdrop of Paul's suffering accentuates the radiant glory of New Covenant ministry in Christ.

Arguments that 2 Corinthians is One Original Single Letter

This section will argue why 2:13 to 7:5 is not an interpolation, and why it is not best explained as an interpolation; it will also argue why 2 Corinthians itself must be a unified whole.

⁵ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 43, 52.

⁶ Carson, *Introduction*, 436; and Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 52. Both point out that some scholars further segment out 6:14-7:1 into a distinct interpolation, but this will not be dealt with.

⁷Carson, *Introduction*, 436.

While the proposed jump from 2:13 to 7:5 as a continued reading does have the appearance of continuity, an interpolation is not the only explanation for the excursion, and not even the better explanation.

First, as stated in the last section, Semler in 1776 was the first to publish this view, so historically this is new, and one must ask why after 1,700 years this has now become an issue.

Second, as Ralph Martin states in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, “...no manuscript or patristic authority ever divides the epistle”⁸. It’d be strange for the patristics and early scribes to miss that 2 Corinthians is really several smaller works, as they would have been in a great position to catch this.

Third, 7:4—the end of the alleged interpolation—interlocks with 7:5-7 with a common vocabulary. Common words between 7:4 and 7:5-7 include παράκλησις, χάρα / χαρῆναι, and θλίψις / θλιβόμενοι. As different as the sections may feel in subject matter, the literary design shows that Paul intends them as one unified work⁹.

Fourth, as one reads from 7:4 to 7:5, the content itself naturally flows. Paul in 2 Cor. 7:4 states, “I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.” How much trouble did they face? In 2 Cor. 7:5 he says they were “troubled on every side.” The joy is supremely radiant in light of the extensive tribulations, and so 7:4 and 7:5 fit well together to make a point about the extent of Paul’s joy.

Finally, an encompassing literary argument for the unity of the whole book is that 1:1-7 and 13:11-13 are the bookends of a “striking inclusio”. Between both sections one finds all the following words: ἀδελφός, παρακαλέω, αὐτός, εἰρήνη, θεός, οἱ ἅγιοι πάντες, χάρις, and κυρίου

⁸ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 48.

⁹ Carson, *Introduction*, 437.

Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. This level of verbal parallel puts serious doubt on any idea that the ending salutation in 13:11-13 is intended for chapters 10-13 only¹⁰.

For all these reasons regarding subject matter, style, and flow, 2:14-7:4 is not an interpolation, and 2 Corinthians is one single work; also, by extension, 2 Corinthians has only one author—Paul.

Corinth Itself, and its Draw for Spiritual Predators

Corinth was a strategically ideal place. The city of Corinth lies on the isthmus linking Peloponnese and mainland Greek. This helped make Corinth a key economic city, for which it was a contested prize between competing powers in history. After being destroyed in 146 BC in a dispute between the Romans and Achaian army, it was re-established as a Roman colony under Julius Caesar. While politically Roman, the city was a blend of Greek and Roman culture—quite fitting for its place on a symbolic land bridge between the Greek east and Roman west¹¹. The location also made it an ideal port city, and its economy was fueled by traders and tourists¹².

One can see its value as a strategic city to aspiring influencers. It was a place where one could take special advantage of the Roman patronage system; and if done well, one could rise high in the ranks of wealth and popularity¹³.

¹⁰ George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 31.

¹¹ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 10-11.

¹² Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission, Vol. 2, Paul & the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1183.

¹³ Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 426-427.

This also makes Corinth the ideal place to start a church, from which the Gospel could go out to the further reaches of the world. However, this would also make it more crucial that the disputes arising in the church at Corinth be extinguished, lest the scandal spread to the further parts of the world too. One could also see why, out of many potential cities, that self-appointed leaders might try to establish a spiritual following in Corinth and lead the church astray¹⁴. Sadly, this did happen. Clement of Rome in his first letter, at 47:6, notes the damage caused abroad by a handful of ambitious persons. “It is shameful, beloved, extremely shameful... that it should be reported that the well-established and ancient church of the Corinthians, because of one or two people, is rebelling against the presbyters.” He also says at 46:8-9, “Your schism has turned many away, has plunged many into discouragement, many into doubt; all of us unto grief, yet your rebellion is continuous”¹⁵!

Although Corinth was an ideal geographical and economical church plant location, history shows that the ramifications of local church conflicts would spread easier and farther than they would from other places.

Paul’s Suitability

Paul is a man suited to a Roman-Hellenic culture like in Corinth. He was a Roman citizen and could make broad use of his privileges in his missionary endeavors, and this may have even helped him gain favor with Erastus, one of the leading men of Corinth according to Romans

¹⁴ Carson on p. 427, 444, 447, also notes that Paul’s accusers were more likely cultural Hellenists than Judaists, as they had criticized Paul in 2 Cor. 11 on the grounds of his poor speech-making and presentation, a highly-valued skill in the old world, and most especially in Corinth as a pathway to prominence; also he notes, Paul in 1 Corinthians answers questions and concerns that arise naturally not from a background in Judaism, but those that are likely to come from former pagans, idolaters, and immoral persons.

¹⁵ Clement of Rome, “The First Letter of Clement to the Corinthians,” in *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, ed. Rick Brannan (Logos Bible Software, 2012), 46:8-9 and 47:6.

16:23. He was from Tarsus, one of the great educational centers of the time, and a city which Strabo said exceeded both Alexandria and Egypt in philosophy and education¹⁶. We see him encounter Stoics¹⁷, and Epicureans in Acts 17:18-32. He debates the Hellenists in Jerusalem (Acts 9:29). These events showcase his capabilities in dealing with the worldviews prominent at the time. He indeed was equipped to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul is also a man learned in the Scriptures. Galatians 1:14 makes clear Paul was exceedingly zealous as a student and as a person, and in Philippians 3:5 he calls himself a “Hebrew of the Hebrews”, and regarding the Law he was a Pharisee. He was a student of Gamaliel, thus highly versed in the Scriptures. He is intellectually suited. As a person he is intensely zealous—a necessary trait for as vigorous of a ministry the Lord will give him.

Not only this, but Paul is personally commissioned by Christ for this work (Acts 9:15-16). A commission by Christ accompanied by the Holy Spirit, combined with his extraordinary education, make him suitable for the great work he was called to. However, Christ also made it clear in Acts 9:15-16 that Paul would suffer extraordinarily. From here on follows an account of the sufferings of Paul in dealing with the Corinthian church, and his sufferings in general.

Paul’s Travels and Troubles Concerning Corinth

Paul’s relationship with the church at Corinth is complicated. Both letters written to Corinth are lengthy and are filled with controversial matter. The issues are always shifting, and he shifts his manner of dealing with them accordingly. A summary of the major events will demonstrate this:

¹⁶ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 6.

¹⁷ Jay E. Adams, *More than Redemption: A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 2010), Kindle edition, Introduction.

Paul likely came to Corinth in 50 AD¹⁸, where he ministered eighteen months according to Acts 18:11 and 18¹⁹. This was on his second missionary journey. Paul probably left Corinth in the spring of 51 AD, where he then ministered in Ephesus from 52 to 55 AD. Somewhere in this time he received a letter, which prompted a first letter referenced in 1 Cor. 5:9. A second response came, and Paul replied with what is now 1 Corinthians in the canon. Paul then sends Timothy to visit Corinth, while planning to make two visits to Corinth by way of travel to and from Macedonia (2 Cor. 1:15-16). Report had come back that the situation had escalated, and Paul visits immediately. This may be the “painful visit” of 2 Cor. 2:1, and the one forewarned in 1 Cor. 4:21. Sometime in all of this, self-appointed leaders had arisen, some apparently critical of Paul. Paul leaves Corinth feeling the situation is not resolved, and instead of making another visit writes the “tearful letter.” When Titus comes to meet Paul with a report on the situation at Corinth, it brings immense joy to Paul, and he feels that the “tearful letter” had something of the intended effect, which explains the pervasive sense of joy in 2 Cor. 1-9. It is also possible that in the midst of writing 2 Corinthians that unpleasant intelligence had come to Paul, and it may explain the abrupt change of tone between 2 Cor. 9 and 10²⁰.

The church at Corinth is made of mixed company. There are true believers with remaining sin (1 Cor. 1:4 and onward), but also false believers (2 Cor. 13:5). It is no surprise when sin gets the best of a believer, nor is it a surprise when the unconverted hypocrite begins acting like he really is—as a carnally-minded enemy of God (Rom. 8:7).

¹⁸ Author notes that different commentaries will give different dates, but the dates projected among different commentaries tend to be relatively close to one another.

¹⁹ Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission Vol. 2*, 1181.

²⁰ Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 420-425. All of paragraph beginning at last reference is from this source.

However, some are worse than hypocrites—they put on the disguise of an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14-15), promote themselves as leaders, and so they lead others astray. Such a designation, “angel of light”, shows how good these persons were at deceiving even the spiritually-minded.

At the local level of Corinth, Paul suffers by the remaining sin of believers, the presence of hypocrites, self-professed angels of light, and a tumult of controversies that seem to drag out.

The Rest of Paul’s Sufferings

This all might be tolerable for a man were it the furthest extent of his suffering, but there is much more. After his commission in Acts 9, only a few verses later in v. 23 do we see him fleeing for his life by stealth. In v. 28, the Hellenists in Jerusalem attempt to kill him. In 13:46 and 49 the Jews oppose and stir up opposition. These are only a few of the events in the Book of Acts itself. When Paul does write to the Corinthians in his second letter, he enumerates a long list of trials and perils he had endured up to that time (2 Cor. 11:23-29). Not only this, but Satan had made himself to be Paul’s special adversary (2 Cor. 12:7).

Paul suffers internally from all of this too, as he openly says that all his sufferings left him feeling excessively burdened, weak, unable to bear it all, and afraid that he may actually die (2 Cor 1:8-9).

Add to this that Paul is dealing not only with a multitude of issues inside and outside this vacillating church and in his own heart, but some of these problems go on for years at a time²¹.

²¹ It took no less than four letters and two visits, and possibly a third visit (2 Cor. 13:1), to try to resolve these issues; none of which took nominal time to complete. In contrast, Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years; and when he left, convinced he would never return (Acts 20:38). The dealings in Corinth must have consumed a great deal of Paul’s time.

Any man in this situation will be straining for some means to manage the sufferings. How does Paul manage?

Paul Relies on Christ in the New Covenant to Suffer Well

It would have stood out that Paul did not resort to philosophy to cure his internal pain. Paul knew the philosophies of the day for managing suffering and difficulty; and if he received the world-class education that Tarsus had to offer, he probably knew them extraordinarily well. For example, some Stoics taught that things which “arouse in people strong desire and revulsion” are nothing more than *adiaphora*—things indifferent—or that happiness once acquired can only be terminated by madness. Perhaps Paul should cease to “attach such supreme value to anything that is outside [his] control”; perhaps he should tell himself that his passions come from a mere lack of instruction, and these passions are all unnatural movements of an uninformed soul²². Perhaps the solution is to realize that it is not the occurrence that hurts, but the view one takes of it²³. Paul not only ignores Stoic ideas, but as seen earlier he disputes with the Stoics when he comes to Athens²⁴. Such ideas have no place at all in his theology of suffering²⁵.

The solution to Paul’s suffering lies in God. As Paul says about his suffering in 2 Cor. 1:9 concerning the sentence of death within himself, it was so that he would lose all trust in himself, put all of his confidence in God, and depend upon God for deliverance (2 Cor. 1:9). Paul, a

²² Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 224-225. Citation begins at the word “Stoicism.”

²³ Epictetus, *The Enchiridion*, trans. Thomas Higginson (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1948), 19, 20, 22. Quoted by Adams, *More Than Redemption*, Introduction. Epictetus was born in 50 or 60 AD, and so was a near contemporary to Paul. Epictetus gives an idea of what ideas were prominent at the time.

²⁴ Adams, *More than Redemption*, Introduction.

²⁵ If such Stoic outlooks were plausible, this would make the Psalter a most unrighteous book.

diligent, disciplined, intelligent, rational man threw away all confidence in himself and his abilities to mentally muscle his way out of problems, and unashamedly set the whole of his hope on God for deliverance.

Paul's hope, though, is a theologically-informed hope. Paul does not merely rest on God being God, or even just on God's omnipotence, but Paul rests all his confidence on God's covenant mercies. The central glorious covenantal truth which upheld the apostle comes from 2 Corinthians 3:7-11:

“Εἰ δὲ ἡ διακονία τοῦ θανάτου ἐν γράμμασιν ἐντετυπωμένη ἐν λίθοις ἐγενήθη ἐν δόξει, ὥστε μὴ δύνασθαι ἀτενίσαι τοὺς υἰοὺς Ἰσραὴλ εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον Μωϋσέως διὰ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τὴν καταργουμένην, ⁸ πῶς οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἢ διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος ἔσται ἐν δόξει; ⁹ εἰ γὰρ ἡ διακονία τῆς κατακρίσεως δόξα, πολλῶ μᾶλλον περισσεύει ἢ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἐν δόξει. ¹⁰ καὶ γὰρ οὐ δεδόξασται τὸ δεδοξασμένον ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει ἕνεκεν τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης δόξης· ¹¹ εἰ γὰρ τὸ καταργούμενον διὰ δόξης, πολλῶ μᾶλλον τὸ μένον ἐν δόξει.”²⁶

In short, as will be proven, the glory of New Covenant ministry far exceeds the glory of Old Covenant ministry, which had a temporary yet marvelous glory, though little positive effect on its covenantees; yet in a covenant marked by a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, administered openly and visibly by Christ from heaven, there is far greater efficacy in ministry than was in the Old; and this emboldens Paul to persevere in his ministry boldly and sincerely.

The following section will explain 2 Corinthians as a whole, the more immediate context, and then the text itself with resolution of variants, lexical and grammatical analysis, and a final translation. In this way the context in which words and phrases are interpreted will be laid out first.

²⁶ Kurt Aland et al., eds., "PROS KORINTHIOS B," in *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Münster/Westfalen: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012). All Greek quotes from here on out will be from this source, and will not be referenced again per rules of quoting English translations. This quote reflects my own textual decisions, the explanation of which will shortly follow.

Expositing 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians as a Whole

Paul in 2 Corinthians addresses the practical outcomes of previous letters and dealings with the Corinthian church. There are two apparent sections: Chapters 1-9 are addressed toward those whom he feels he is seeing positive outcomes from his previous dealings, and chapters 10-13 deal with persons who are still antagonistic toward his message and person²⁷, or who seem to be influenced by them.

In the first part, he offers his standard salutation (1:1-2); an account of his sufferings (1:3-12); an apologetic for his change in travel plans rooted in a clear conscience (1:13-2:13); the joys, expectations, grounds of hope, hardships, privileges, and urgency of the New Covenant ministry (2:14-6:10); an exhortation to stay separated from the world and to not restrain their affections for their ministers (6:11-7:6); his joy in the repentance of Corinth (7:7-12); instructions concerning offerings (chapters 8-9).

In the second section, Paul addresses the antagonistic among them and offers a full defense of his ministry. Paul boldly answers the criticisms leveled against him for his weak bodily presence and presentation, and asserts his valid authority (10:1-17); reiterates his spiritual concern for them evidenced by his conduct (11:1-15; 12:14-21); gives an account of his sufferings and labors (11:16-33); buttresses his spiritual credentials with his account of the third heaven and subsequent humbling (12:1-13); warns them of a potential third and unsparing visit (13:1-4; 13:7-10); exhorts them to self-examination (13:5-6); then gives his closing salutation (13:11-14).

²⁷ Although there is debate whether Paul may have received a second round of intelligence concerning the same people, which may account for the change in tone, this paper will not seek to resolve this issue; because in either case, chapters 10 to 13 demonstrate the suffering which Paul endured, and for which he was strengthened by Christ through the New Covenant.

In addition to difficulties highlighted previously, additional ones show up here. For one, though Paul has labored long with the Corinthian church, he still does not have the love and affection that he is due as a faithful minister. Paul knows that he does all with a clear conscience (1:12) and his ministry is not deficient toward them. He must both encourage and exhort sincere believers who have an inconsistent track record of receiving Paul's ministrations in good will. Also, some of the people have clearly become attached to these self-proclaimed teachers, and Paul knows that in rebuking the teachers he may finally lose the affections of some, but nonetheless he puts forth a robust and sharp rebuke against the teachers, and a bold apologetic for himself. Any experienced elder or minister knows what a tenuous situation it can become to critique figures that members are attached to. In the end, Paul can only give the Word, and pray that the word of Christ will have its due effect on each person as He wills.

2 Corinthians 3:7-11 in Context

The most immediately relevant section begins at 2:14. After giving an account of his trials and troubles, and bearing open the deep pain in his heart, Paul changes tone and launches into the glories of Christian ministry. He describes the minister as one marching in a triumphal parade²⁸, dispersing the sweet fragrance of Christ in every place by the message of the Gospel, bringing life to the elect, and death to the reprobate (2:14-17). Paul claims the Corinthians as his own epistles of commendation—that is, the proof of the validity of his ministry is that they are evidently transformed by the Spirit, and not because of anything in him but because of the Holy Spirit who commissioned him, who takes bare letters and writes them in the heart with spiritual

²⁸ John Calvin, "2 Corinthians" in vol. 20, *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. Rev. John Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 157-158; and Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 166-167. This is reference to a post-war celebration parade that was held in the Roman world, and Guthrie notes that there were incense-bearers who would send out wafts of sweet aromas during the procession.

life (3:1-6). He then contrasts New Covenant ministry with Old Covenant ministry, saying that the Old Covenant ministry was a ministry of letters, lesser glory, death, condemnation, transitoriness; while the New Covenant ministry is a ministry of the Spirit, greater glory, life, righteousness, and permanency. In one Christ is veiled; in the other, He is openly revealed and glorified (3:7-18). Because of this greater glory, Paul ministers boldly, sincerely, perseveringly, and expectantly (4:1-17).

As one reads from the beginning of 2 Corinthians up until 2:13, they can feel the weight on Paul's mind as he writes; but when he pens 2:14 the bitterness vanishes, and Paul relishes in the glory of his privilege to be a New Covenant minister. It is not an insert or an interpolation. Instead, the remembrance of his commission by Christ in New Covenant ministry becomes Paul's source of comfort and strength. Against the backdrop of Paul's intense suffering, this privilege and glory radiantly shines.

Establishing the Text

The Text

The full text of 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 from the Nestle-Aland 28th edition is as follows:

⁷ “Εἰ δὲ ἡ διακονία τοῦ θανάτου ἐν γράμμασιν ἐντετυπωμένη λίθοις ἐγενήθη ἐν δόξῃ, ὥστε μὴ δύνασθαι ἀτενίσαι τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον Μωϋσέως διὰ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τὴν καταργουμένην, ⁸ πῶς οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἡ διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος ἔσται ἐν δόξῃ; ⁹ εἰ γὰρ τῇ διακονίᾳ τῆς κατακρίσεως δόξα, πολλῶ μᾶλλον περισσεύει ἡ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης δόξῃ. ¹⁰ καὶ γὰρ οὐ δεδοξασται τὸ δεδοξασμένον ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει ἕνεκεν τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης δόξης. ¹¹ εἰ γὰρ τὸ καταργούμενον διὰ δόξης, πολλῶ μᾶλλον τὸ μένον ἐν δόξῃ.”²⁹

²⁹ Let the reader note that this does not reflect the textual decisions which will follow, but as given in the main body in NA28.

There are five textual variants to consider in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, according to the Nestle-Aland 28th edition³⁰.

1. Whether, in v. 7, the text should read γράμματι instead of γράμμασιν.
2. Whether, in v. 7, there should be inserted ἐν between ἐντετυπομένη and λίθοις.
3. Whether, in v. 9, τῆ διακονία should be replaced with either ἡ διακονία or anarthous διακονία.
4. Whether, in v. 9, there should be inserted ἐν right before δόξη.

What follows is a discussion of the variants, their support internally and externally, which reading is best, and why. May the Holy Spirit lead into all truth!

Valuation of Variants

First Variant – γράμμασιν vs. γράμματι in v. 7

For the first variant, should the text read in v. 7 as γράμματι instead of γράμμασιν? There is little external support for γράμματι. The NA28 gives only four uncials that contain the reading, and it also lists the Syriac Peshitta translation. The original γράμμασιν, however, is a majority reading³¹. Internally, it seems odd to make the word to be something like “singular letter”, to which it would read “a letter in stone”, which hardly seems a fitting designation for something so comprehensive or significant as Old Testament law. For this reason, it’s better to retain γράμμασιν.

³⁰ All references in the paper to original manuscripts, codices, etc. will all come from NA28, and will not be cited again.

³¹ The NA28 gives no original sources for the γράμμασιν reading, but in absence of this listing the NA28 implies the support of the Majority Text (see introductory notes, p. 59-60).

Second Variant – The insertion of ἐν in v. 7

There is support for the insertion of ἐν between ἐντετυπωμένη and λίθοις. The reading is well-attested, with some older uncials such as κ and D being corrected to include it. It has the advantage of the whole Latin tradition as well as the Majority Text tradition, although it is excluded in several prominent uncials and several minuscules. If ἐν is left out there is a minor risk of unclarity, but there isn't much that could go wrong in interpretation, as a natural reading of the text as given in NA28 would be “imprinted in stone”, even without ἐν present. Although γράμμασιν is dative and plural, the separation of the two words by ἐντετυπωμένη may be enough to suggest that the datives are not appositives. That, and the clear reference to God writing the Decalogue in the Ten Commandments easily suggests itself. Still, ἐν makes it more clear that λίθοις is locative, meaning that what precedes comes to be set in the stone. It is also more common for scribes to eliminate rather than add words, and a scribe would probably only add words when they feel something significant is at stake if they don't³². There is therefore good reason to say that, in a statement that would be sufficiently clear in its absence, ἐν was likely dropped unintentionally, and the correct reading is ἐντετυπωμένη ἐν λίθοις.

Third Variant - τῇ διακονίᾳ vs. ἡ διακονία vs. anarthous διακονία in v. 9

Next, should τῇ διακονίᾳ be replaced with either ἡ διακονία or anarthous διακονία? The anarthous is poorly attested, with the NA28 listing only four minuscules, and one of them is corrected to include an article. Internally, if the ἡ goes missing, then one has a clause that has no article, which becomes problematic for deciding certainly what is the substantive—διακονία or

³² The author of this paper could not trace down the original source of this thought; however, it is true from experience too that small words are liable to be skipped when copying a work.

δόξα?³³ The right reading must therefore either be τῇ διακονίᾳ or ἡ διακονία, both of which have the support of several uncials, minuscules, and translations.

There are internal reasons to prefer ἡ διακονία. First, if διακονία is dative, then the clause has a subject—δόξα—with no article, while Paul throughout the pericope is careful to identify the subject with an article. Also, supposing dative τῇ διακονίᾳ and a nominative δόξα, one could get a translation such as, “For if there is glory in the ministry of condemnation...” The core meaning is right, but it lacks the prosaic power of the rest of the passage. It also disrupts the potential parallel with ἡ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης in the next clause. For these reasons ἡ διακονία is the preferred reading.

Then for increased clarity, how does one understand δόξα? It is either a noun, or it is an adjective. This will be discussed in the second “light to heavy” section in the linguistic analysis of the text later on.

Fourth variant – insertion of ἐν in v. 9

The last variant is whether ἐν should be inserted before the dative δόξῃ. I believe there is no risk of unclarity from its absence. However, most of the historical weight is for its inclusion across many uncials, minuscules, and the whole Latin tradition. Although the ἐν is dropped from some copies, they tend to be fewer, and a preposition which is not entirely necessary for clarity is more likely to be dropped than added. Prosaically there is an argument too, that ἐν δόξῃ in v. 9 would be meant to be parallel to ἐν δόξῃ in v. 8. It helps the force of an argument to maintain literary consistency wherever possible.

³³ Context would make it clear, but it'd still be an awkward reading.

For these reasons, v. 7 should read *γράμμασιν ἐντετυπωμένη ἐν λίθοις*, and v. 9 should read *ἡ διακονία τῆς κατακρίσεως δόξα*, as well as end with *ἐν δόξῃ*. The final text, updated for decisions between variants, is as follows, with the selected readings underlined:

⁷“Εἰ δὲ ἡ διακονία τοῦ θανάτου ἐν γράμμασιν ἐντετυπωμένη ἐν λίθοις ἐγενήθη ἐν δόξῃ, ὥστε μὴ δύνασθαι ἀπενίσαι τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον Μωϋσέως διὰ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τὴν καταργουμένην, ⁸ πῶς οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἡ διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος ἔσται ἐν δόξῃ; ⁹ εἰ γὰρ ἡ διακονία τῆς κατακρίσεως δόξα, πολλῶ μᾶλλον περισσεύει ἡ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἐν δόξῃ. ¹⁰ καὶ γὰρ οὐ δεδόξασται τὸ δεδοξασμένον ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει ἕνεκεν τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης δόξης· ¹¹ εἰ γὰρ τὸ καταργούμενον διὰ δόξης, πολλῶ μᾶλλον τὸ μένον ἐν δόξῃ.”

The author’s translation of the text, then, is as follows:

⁷But if the ministry of death, printed in letters on stone, came in glory, so that the sons of Israel could not steadfastly look upon the face of Moses, because of the glory of his face—which glory was fading—⁸how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more in glory? ⁹For if the ministry of condemnation is glorious, how much rather exceeds the ministry of righteousness in glory! ¹⁰For even that which was glorious is made un-glorious in this case, on account of the surpassing glory. ¹¹For if that which is fading is through glory, how much more that which abides is in glory!

Critical Analysis of 2 Corinthians 3:7-11

In General

The main rhetorical device Paul employs is the Rabbinical “light to heavy,” or “lesser to greater” as it is otherwise called³⁴. “If A applies in lesser case X, much more does A apply in greater case Y”. Paul then repeats this same argument, from three different angles, all saying essentially the same thing, to drive home his point.

Paul also uses terms to serve as metonyms for represented practical outcomes of the Mosaic ministry, without making the metonyms a statement about the essence of the ministry.

³⁴ Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God*, Vol. 2, *The Full Revelation of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 91-92.

For example, the ministry of Moses is called ἡ διακονία τοῦ θανάτου; though what will be argued is that the Mosaic ministry is being labeled as “of death” for its practical outcome, and not for any legalistic essence in the covenant. The case will also be made why διακονία itself is a metonym.

Since the passage is already organized into three “light to heavy” arguments (3:7-8, 3:9, and 3:10-11), the pericope will be divided accordingly, and analyzed in three sections. Each section will begin with the text, translations, definitions, grammatical and syntactical analysis, and the analysis’s bearing upon understanding the whole of 2 Cor. 3:7-11.

Note on Comparisons to Other Translations

In each section comparisons will be made as necessary to the Latin Vulgate, the King James Version, and the English Standard Version. Each represents distinct periods in church history. The Latin Vulgate was the most influential Western translation for a thousand years up until the Reformation. the King James Version is the most influential English translation of the past four hundred years. The English Standard version is widely used, and widely trusted, and so will represent a translation of the modern times.

First Light to Heavy - Verses 7 and 8

Text:

⁷Εἰ δὲ ἡ διακονία τοῦ θανάτου ἐν γράμμασιν ἐντετυπωμένη ἐν λίθοις ἐγενήθη ἐν δόξει, ὥστε μὴ δύνασθαι ἀτενίσαι τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον Μωϋσέως διὰ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τὴν καταργουμένην, ⁸πῶς οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἡ διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος ἔσται ἐν δόξει;

Translation:

⁷But if the ministry of death, printed in letters on stone, came in glory, so that the sons of Israel could not steadfastly look upon the face of Moses, because of the glory of his face—which glory was fading—⁸how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more in glory?

Linguistic Analysis

This section will take words and phrases as they appear, with some application to interpretation.

διακονία

The first important word is διακονία, which can mean service in general, a special act of service, or an office of service such as the diaconate³⁵. Guthrie points out that the passage refers to ministries, and not specific covenants; and that throughout this one man's ministry there is much death³⁶. John Calvin restricts the passage in the same way, putting this pericope in context of the ministry of one man in particular—Moses; thus, what is said here applies to that ministry and not necessarily the whole of the Old Covenant times³⁷. Lenski affirms similarly to Calvin, but adds that Moses' ministry was the chief ministry, to which all others were secondary, and so the whole of Old Testament ministry was characteristically one of death³⁸. Although the passage

³⁵ Walter Bauer et al., eds., “Diakonia,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). Here on out this will be referenced as BDAG.

³⁶ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 199, 206.

³⁷ Calvin, *2 Corinthians*, 176.

³⁸ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 102.

does indeed concern covenants, it's an accepted understanding of the passage that one particular ministry of the Old Covenant is in view.

However, the word is probably best taken as a metonym, where the administration of the Old Covenant is named for its practical effects over the whole course of its existence. Although it is true that there was a particularly severe degree of death in the ministry of Moses, death—physical and spiritual—was also present in many other ministries as well, such as in the ministry of Isaiah (see Isaiah 6:9-10) and Jeremiah.

ἐντετυπωμένη

This is from ἐντυπόω, and it is in the form of a perfect participle. As feminine singular it refers back to διακονία, and so identifies the imprinting in stone with the ministry of that time. The use of perfect is likely the consummative use; that is, the perfect form acknowledges the action as past, but draws attention to the action³⁹. It highlights the imprinting in stone, as if to say the stone represents the general efficacy of the covenant. The ministry was in stone, and for much of it stayed in stone⁴⁰.

δόξα

δόξα, commonly translated as glory, should be explored a little more closely so as to help what the proper sense of the word is. Although the word can represent brightness, brilliance, radiance, and magnificence, it also carries an idea of praise and honor⁴¹. Guthrie notes that this is

³⁹ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 577.

⁴⁰ Jon Bonker, "The New Covenant (Part 1)" (2020): 31, https://www.ruinandredemption.com/_files/ugd/be37d2_a04dc0ca94124e568595547576992d73.pdf.

⁴¹ *BDAG*, s.v. "doxa."

a connotation of δόξα or Latin gloria when applied to persons in Greco-Roman culture, and also observes that in 2 Cor. 2:8 the opposite of dishonor (ἀτιμία) is δόξα; and in a culture in which pursuit of glory was a virtue, Paul thereby magnifies his ministry by calling it glorious, while simultaneously showing the ministry of his opponents to be deficient⁴².

For purposes of 2 Cor. 3:7-11, the idea of esteem or honor better helps grasp the “why” of the New Covenant being better. It is grounded first of all in the glory of God, which by its nature draws expressions of honor and esteem from men when they are beholding it. The glory is then manifested in the person and work of Christ, and the accomplishment of so great a salvation. Not only there is there a far greater brightness of truth, but there is also much more to draw out a man’s sense of need to give honor and praise to God for His great works. This is important, because the idea of degrees in glory has less to do with emanations of light than it does with differences in degrees of understanding and knowledge available to the people of God in the two covenants. It will be shown in the analysis of καταργουμένην that understanding the glory is difference between life and death.

ἐγενήθη ἐν δόξῃ

This could be translated “came in glory”. γίνομαι is passive in form, possibly middle in sense. The verb takes the passive form even in verses where English might translate it as active (Mt. 17:16, Lk 9:40, Eph. 6:13). ἐν can refer to the manner in which something comes⁴³. δόξῃ is a noun, but in this clause functions like an adjective. The clause then means the covenant “came in a glorious manner”.

⁴² Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 208.

⁴³ Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 372.

Καταργουμένην

BDAG defines καταργέω in active voice as “to make ineffective, powerless”, or to “abolish, wipe out, set aside”⁴⁴. As it is accusative singular feminine, it refers to the glory in Moses’ face. Guthrie notes that many translate this as “fade”⁴⁵. The King James Version translates it as “done away”. The Vulgate uses “evacuatur” which is “to empty, to make void, or to lay aside”⁴⁶. The ESV renders it “being brought to an end”. Guthrie notes that it raises the question of whether the glory is καταργουμένην in the sense of naturally fading, or if it is καταργουμένην by ineffectiveness in giving light due to the veil on Moses’ face. This would mean that the children of Israel could not continue to look upon his face in the sense that they could not continue behold the same glory because the veil had covered the glory⁴⁷. O. Palmer Robertson in *The Christ of the Covenants* gives some credence to this understanding, because as he notes, Moses gave portions of the Law with his face shining, and then he covered his face, though Robertson takes the view that the veil was meant to shield the fading character of the Old Covenant glory. He also notes that Moses spoke with the Israelites several times with a shining face, and after speaking to them he covered his face⁴⁸. Which then is it? Is it an ineffectual glory by virtue of being covered by the veil? Did the glory progressively fade from Moses’ face?

⁴⁴ BDAG, s.v. “katargeō.”

⁴⁵ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 212.

⁴⁶ Andrew Curtis and Isaiah Hoogendyk, eds., “Epistola B. Paul Apostoli Ad Corinthios Secunda,” in *The Lexham Latin-English Interlinear Vulgate* (Lexham Press, 2016). Accessed via Logos Bible Software.

⁴⁷ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 212.

⁴⁸ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 195-196.

Contextually there is an argument that the glory itself did fade from Moses' face. In 2 Cor. 3:11 καταργουμένον is in contrast with μένει. The idea of v. 7-11 is the contrast of the two covenants, and so a gradually-diminishing glory naturally contrasts with one that abides forever. Also, if the light in his face was not itself fading, isn't there an implication that there is still the same glory in the practice of the Mosaic system today? Additionally, Exodus 34:34-35 says that each time after Moses went into speak with the Lord and came out again to speak with the people, that "whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again..." There is a connection between Moses going in to speak with the Lord, and his face shining, and the people taking notice, and then Moses putting on the veil. It could be in the sense of, "Look, his face is shining again!"

How then does this bear on the interpretation of the passage? Robertson asserts that it is because the transitory nature of the ministry was hidden from them, they were prevented from recognizing their Messiah⁴⁹. The Jews thought the glory was permanent, and for this reason they accused Stephen in Acts 6:14 of altering the Law of Moses, but they did not take the hint when they saw the face of Stephen shining in v. 15, at which they gazed closely (ἀτενίσαντες, the same word used in 2 Cor. 3:7 for fixed gazing). Stephen's reply was to point out that God had changed His worship many times in history. However, instead of the glory fading from Stephen's face, the Israelites prove Robertson's point when they put out the glory themselves by stoning him.

The putting back on of Moses' veil is symbolic, as though Moses is saying that understanding has stopped when the recitation did, and the glory of the Law is hidden from the people. In this way, it is guaranteed they would miss their Messiah.

⁴⁹ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 194-196.

ἔσται, and comparison to ἐγενήθη

ἔσται is the future singular third person form of εἰμί. The reason for the future tense may be because it is in future from the standpoint of Moses⁵⁰. There is a tendency in indirect discourse in Greek to put tenses to verbs that reflect time from the standpoint of the referent, and not the one presently speaking⁵¹. There may also be something to the word choice. γίνομαι is suitable for transitory things, or things that become. For example, it's the word for begetting in Matthew 1. It refers to the temporal creation by the Father and Son in John 1:3. It refers to the earthly existence of Abraham in John 8:58. However, εἰμί has no such connotations and can be better suited for timeless or eternal things. It is the verb choice in John 1:1 for the eternal existence of Christ (contrasted with creation indicated by γίνομαι in John 1:3), the verb in the Christ's honorary name (Rev. 1:8); and in John 8:58, when it says, "before Abraham was (γινέσθαι), I am (ἐγὼ εἰμί)." So, εἰμί may be more suitable for the surpassing greatness and permanency of the New Covenant.

Sum of Analysis on First Light to Heavy

The sum of all the findings is as follows: The failure of the Israelites lies in failing to respond intelligently to the glory which they saw in the ministry of Moses. Glory is something which by itself demands honor from those beholding it, and it requires an informed honoring as well. However, the law which was written in stone did not efficaciously show forth this glory, and it did not touch the heart. This is shown in that the spiritually blind people mistook the

⁵⁰ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 212.

⁵¹ Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 552.

covenant as an abiding covenant, and the veil over Moses' face was a sign that they did not understand.

Second Light to Heavy – Verse 9

The Text

⁹ εἰ γὰρ ἡ διακονία τῆς κατακρίσεως δόξα, πολλῶ μᾶλλον περισσεύει ἡ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἐν δόξῃ.

Translation

For if the ministry of condemnation is glorious, how much rather exceeds the ministry of righteousness in glory!

Linguistic Analysis

The statement in verse 9 is straightforward and so there is little to say, except to give a proper categorization of one minor grammatical issue, which admittedly has little bearing on interpretation.

ἡ διακονία τῆς κατακρίσεως δόξα and the implied εἰμί

It was decided earlier that διακονία should take the article, but δόξα is also nominative feminine singular. It is clear from a simple reading that δόξα is descriptive of διακονία, though there remains a minor question of whether it is an adjective or an anarthous predicate nominative, just like θεός in θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος (John 1:1). While there is an argument to be made that it is an adjective, the rest of the passage uses δόξα as a noun (with the exceptions of the verb form δοξάζω). It is likely then that this too is a noun in its intended form.

How then does it work adjectivally? In a predicate nominative statement an anarthous article usually (not exclusively) functions as either indefinite or as qualitative⁵². It cannot be definite because the translation would be “the ministry... was the glory”, and it makes no sense. However, if indefinite it would read, “The ministry... was a glory”, and this is no better. If it is qualitative, it reads “the ministry... was glorious.”

Third Light to Heavy – verses 10 and 11

The Text

¹⁰καὶ γὰρ οὐ δεδοξασται τὸ δεδοξασμένον ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει ἕνεκεν τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης δόξης· ¹¹εἰ γὰρ τὸ καταργούμενον διὰ δόξης, πολλῶ μᾶλλον τὸ μένον ἐν δόξει.

Translation

¹⁰For even that which was glorious is made un-glorious in this case, on account of the surpassing glory. ¹¹For if that which is fading is through glory, how much more that which abides is in glory!

Linguistic Analysis

δεδόξασται and τὸ δεδοξασμένον

These words are directly from the Septuagint. In Exodus 34:29 the exact same form, δεδόξασται, is used to describe the glory in Moses' face. In verse 30 the same form is used as δεδοξασμένον, except that it is feminine δεδοξασμένη⁵³. The Corinthian believers would have read the Septuagint for their Old Testament, and they would have seen these two words concerning the glory in Moses' face. The practical effect is that the use of these forms of δοξάζω evoke the sense that they get in reading the original passage in the Septuagint. One can compare

⁵² Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 244-245.

⁵³ Brenton, Sir Lancelot C.L., ed. *The Septuagint Version: Greek* (London, Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1851), ΕΞΟΔΟΣ 34:29-30.

it to the sense that a lifelong KJV reader gets when they hear quoted a beloved passage they've known all their life. It may be an older style of English, but that's what makes it beautiful to them, and in part what helps drive home the passage's point.

In this case, why would the authors of the Septuagint—and why would Paul retain the use of—the perfect form of these verbs? The shining is past from the standpoint of Paul, but possibly of Moses as well. Wallace notes that the perfect is the rarest instance of verb tenses, and so the choice to use it is usually deliberate. It may be that this is in part a consummative perfect, where a past action is highlighted by the use of the perfect, or it may be a rare instance of an aoristic perfect, where perfect heightens the dramatic effect⁵⁴. In any case, the perfect catches the attention and causes the reader to gaze upon the glory as well.

Still, the sentence is hard to untangle. How is each word functioning? δεδόξασται is a perfect indicative middle/passive, making it function as the main verb, and δεδοξασμένον is a perfect participle neuter accompanied with an article, and so it functions as the substantive of the sentence. The sentence may be clearer for an English reader if the wording is rearranged as follows: τὸ δεδοξασμένον οὐ δεδόξασται ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει. “That which was glorious was not glorified in this particular matter...”

However, why is the subject of verse 10 the neuter τὸ δεδοξασμένον when previously the subject has been feminine ἡ διακονία? This form of δοξάζω is probably not then referring to the ministry, but subject matter of that ministry. This may evidence that διακονία may be intended as a metonym for the Old Covenant administration, of which Moses' ministry was chief, and which substance endured up until New Covenant times.

⁵⁴ Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 577-579. He notes too that 2 Corinthians has more instances of the potential historical perfect, and lists 2 Cor. 11:25 as one such perfective use.

ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει

BDAG translates μέρος as “in this case” when used in 2 Cor. 3:10, and it gives a similar instance in the same book with an equivalent translation in 2 Cor. 9:3; ἐν τῷ μέρει τούτῳ⁵⁵, or “in this case”. The Vulgate renders it “in hac parte”, or literally translated “against this part”⁵⁶; the KJV renders it “in this behalf”, and the ESV “in this matter.” There’s little doubt or question as to what it means.

What is the significance to interpretation? Lenski’s idea suits it well: In this one matter, the Old Covenant ministry was not glorified—it was fading away⁵⁷. This then sets up the word ἔνεκεν to lead the reader into the explanation of why: On account of τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης δόξης, or “the surpassing glory.”

διὰ δόξης

There are varied opinions about the interpretation of this statement. Guthrie translates it “through glory”, and sees glory as instrumental; or, the face of Moses shined by the instrument of glory⁵⁸. The Vulgate has “per gloriam”. The KJV says “was glorious”. The ESV says “with glory”. Lenski’s interpretation is most interesting: “despite glory”. That is, it faded despite its glory. He points out that Rom. 2:27 and 4:11 as instances where διὰ + genitive have a negative

⁵⁵ *BDAG*, s.v. “meros.”

⁵⁶ Curtis and Hoogendyk, *Latin-English Interlinear*, Epistola B 9:3.

⁵⁷ Lenski, *2 Corinthians*, 931.

⁵⁸ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 217.

connotation. Martin thinks the difference between διὰ δόξης and ἐν δόξει is too fine of a difference to matter⁵⁹.

Guthrie's interpretation makes most sense, though it may be better to take it as the glory of the New Covenant as being the glorious instrument through which the Old Covenant glory is made καταργούμενον. The reason is that in v. 10 Paul already told us on account of what the Old Covenant ministry is rendered non-glorious—the surpassing glory. Through that glory, then, the Old Covenant fades in glory.

Summary of Linguistic Analysis

The Old Covenant ministry was glorious, and it was glorious as to hold the gaze of these of those who witnessed and understood it. If the children of Israel gazed so intently upon the face of Moses, then—light to heavy—the New Covenant believer must gaze more fixedly and intently upon Christ, whose surpassing glory has effectively made the glory of Moses to be altogether unglorious.

Theological Analysis

The Pericope in Redemptive History

Covenant Promises Fulfilled

One must ask, just what is the New Covenant? The New Covenant is the covenant in Christ's blood (Luke 22:20) sealing by His purchase the deliverance of the promises made to Abraham, who was told that in him all the families and nations of the earth would be blessed

⁵⁹ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 207.

(Gen. 12:3, 22:18). This includes the promise of justification by faith alone, and the outpouring of the Spirit.

First, it seals and ensures justification by faith alone. This promise has been present since the inauguration of the Covenant of Grace, in which God promised to crush the serpent by the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). God demanded no works of Adam or Eve as a condition to slay the serpent and restore them to Himself, and instead gave them clothes from slain animals and a sacrificial system in pledge of this promise to cover their sins. Adam believed, and so named his wife Eve, the Mother of all Living. This author holds that Adam and Eve were the first to believe in an alien righteousness apart from their own works. On account of Genesis 3:15 Abraham believed, and it was counted to him as righteousness as well (Gen. 15:6, Rom. 4:3). Up until this point salvation was “on credit”, but not yet “paid down”. The New Covenant is a new stage in the very same Covenant of Grace; and there must be a new stage, because Christ has paid for the sins of the elect, and has broken the power of death, and so what was given on “promise to pay” in the Old Covenant times is now available as “paid in full.” As Phillip Ryken says regarding this righteousness, it is “perfect and permanent”⁶⁰. Now the blessing of Abraham in justifying righteousness is paid for; the blessing of Abraham in the giving of the Spirit is more liberally applied than before (Ps. 22:28-29).

Second, there is the pouring out of the Spirit. Paul called this too the blessing of Abraham in Gal. 3:8, as the fullness of the coming of this time was signaled by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit bringing many Gentiles to faith (Gal. 4:4-6). Jer. 31:31-34 prophesies this coming covenant in which the Law would go from “written in stone” to “written on the heart”⁶¹, and the

⁶⁰ Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 1076.

⁶¹ Bonker, “The New Covenant (Part 1),” 28.

special knowledge of God would characterize the entire covenant community in a way that had not characterized Israel up until that time. When Christ said at the institution of the Lord's Supper that the cup was the New Covenant in His blood (Lk. 22:20), He was saying that in virtue of His death the prophecy of Jeremiah would come to pass. The first striking instance was at the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles, and 3,000 were converted in a single day—and that was only the beginning of the Gospel yeast leavening the Mediterranean world. Now who doesn't look at the incredible number of conversions of Gentiles in Acts, the sudden spread of the church around the world, and the excelling greatness of the knowledge of God in these times and say, "There has never been anything like it"? The very fact that there is a letter to a church in Corinth is one proof among many that the promise of the Holy Spirit came to pass.

Why is it though, that the New Covenant is so exceedingly glorious compared to the Old? In the words of the Westminster Confession, VII.6, "Christ the substance [is] exhibited..."⁶² All of the Old Covenant ordinances were types and shadows that were all "fore-signifying Christ to come"⁶³; but with the revelation of the Son of God, there must necessarily be a knowledge of God available that exceeded all before. It is, as Ryken says, the difference between the stars and the sun. The stars have some brightness, but when the sun comes it out its radiance fills the sky⁶⁴.

⁶² William S. Young, ed., *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Edinburgh Edition (Philadelphia, 1851), Accessed via Logos Bible Software. WCF VII:6.

⁶³ Young, *Confession*, WCF VII.5.

⁶⁴ Ryken, *Exodus*, 1076.

Objections

It's not possible to make such statements without explanation today, because many Christian groups differ on details concerning the relationships of the covenants. While Reformed theology holds to essential continuity with some elements of discontinuity, other groups see a more essential discontinuity than do the Reformed. For example, the Roman Catholic church (whom this author does not hold as Christian) per Herman Bavinck does not believe there was a Gospel in the Old Testament times. He also notes that the early church tended to not only (thought rightly) separate law and grace, but they wrongly tended to equate this with the differences between the two covenants⁶⁵. The result is a different overall historical-redemptive scheme, and an altered understanding of how 2 Cor. 3:7-11 fits in history.

In Reformed circles the most lively discussions happen between Credobaptists and Paedobaptists, though the focus is usually on application to baptism. That actually makes 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 a pivotal text in the discussion, as will be shown later. Therefore it is important to understand the Baptist view in particular.

Granted, Baptist theology is not uniform. There are Baptists who hold a view similar to Paedobaptists in regards to the Mosaic Covenant, or at least are willing to use identical language. John Gill, a pastoral predecessor to Charles Spurgeon and one of the sharpest minds in the last few centuries, does refer to the Old Covenant as an administration of the Covenant of Grace⁶⁶. Greg Nichols, one of the sharpest living theological minds to come from the Reformed Baptist camp says, "Positively, even though [the Mosaic Covenant] was conditional, this divine

⁶⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 4, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 452-3.

⁶⁶ John Gill, D.D., *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Vol. 4, *Of the Acts of the Grace of God Towards and Upon His Elect in Time* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), Accessed February 16, 2023. <https://ccel.org/ccel/gill/doctrinal/doctrinal.v.v.html>.

covenant was evangelical and beneficial. Negatively, because it was conditional, this divine covenant was weak and limited, and as such, was provisional and inferior to the New Covenant”. He does reiterate that while the Mosaic Covenant can condemn sin, it cannot forgive it⁶⁷; still, it’s a pattern of speaking more familiar and friendly to the Paedobaptist scheme of covenant theology.

However, others hold an openly sharp dichotomy between the Old Covenant and New Covenant⁶⁸. Jeffrey Johnson, a Reformed Baptist pastor in his work *The Fatal Flaw of Infant Baptism* argues a contemporary prominent view. He says, “Rather than the Mosaic Covenant lining up with the gracious promise of the protevangel, it lines up better with the conditional promise God made with Adam before the fall”, and then says “In contrast, we find no works related conditions attached to the new covenant. The new covenant conditions are fulfilled in Christ”⁶⁹. He quotes John Owen to his point as writing on Hebrews 8:6 later in life, “The old covenant... renewed the commands of the covenant of works, and that on their original terms... and gave the promise of life to perfect, sinless obedience only”, and “[The Mosaic Covenant] revived the sanction of the first covenant, in the curse or sentence of death which is denounced against all transgression”; after which Owen ties the curse upon the one “that confirms not all the words of this law to do them” with the curse threatened against Adam⁷⁰. Johnson also appeals to

⁶⁷ Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptist Perspective on God’s Covenants* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Grounds Christian Books, 2011), 228-229.

⁶⁸ Speaking from experience as a former Reformed Baptist, the author knows there are generally two types of Reformed Baptists. There are those who hold that the Old Covenant and New Covenant are administrations of the Covenant of Grace. However, there are those who deny that the Old Covenant is such an administration. This latter group tends to hold the sharper kind of dichotomy between the two covenants.

⁶⁹ Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Fatal Flaw of Infant Baptism* (Free Grace Press: Conway, AR, 2017), Introduction. Accessed via Kindle.

⁷⁰ Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen. “Hebrews 8:6” in *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ*. Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, and Francisco Orozco, eds. (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press), as quoted by Jeffrey Johnson, *Fatal Flaw*, Introduction. Nehemiah Coxe was a Puritan-era Baptist theologian who

2 Corinthians 3 and points out that Paul calls the Old Covenant a “ministration of death”, consistent with terms of a covenant works. He then connects this with Gal. 3:10 where a curse is pronounced on whoever does not perform the words of the law⁷¹. 2 Corinthians 3 could seem like the final “nail in the coffin” against Reformed covenant theology.

How does one answer these things?

First, the order of covenants in Galatians 3:17-18 must be noted. Abraham’s gracious covenant is first⁷², and Moses’ covenant is second. Paul makes it plain that the Abrahamic Covenant stands as gracious as originally delivered, and the Mosaic Covenant did not change this. The Mosaic Covenant supplements the Abrahamic Covenant, and not the other way around.

As for the law-centeredness of the Old Covenant, Bavinck says this does not put out the promises made to Abraham⁷³. J. van Genderen and W.H. Velema in *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* note that the Father’s motive for the establishment of this covenant was faithfulness to the patriarchs⁷⁴; thus the nature of this second covenant cannot be contrary to the nature of the first. The point of the Law is to teach the children and prepare them for Christ and enjoyment of the inheritance, Gal. 3:24-25, 4:1-5. The presence of rules and blessings and curses do not nullify sonship—the ensure that a son will enjoy sonship.

wrote a renowned standard work on covenant theology appreciated today in Reformed Baptist circles. One segment of Reformed Baptists believe John Owen’s views of the covenants to very closely resemble their own. For this reason, Johnson quotes Owen several times in *Fatal Flaw*.

⁷¹ Johnson, *Fatal Flaw*, loc 1261.

⁷² Some argue that the Abrahamic Covenant is also conditional and temporary. This used to be the author’s own view based on God’s command that Abraham be blameless in order to establishment of the Covenant (Gen. 17:1-2). Refutation of this view is outside of the scope of this paper, and the matter will be confined to the gracious aspects of the Mosaic Covenant, and its subserviency to the Covenant of Grace.

⁷³ Bavinck, *Dogmatics Vol. 4*, 452.

⁷⁴ J. van Genderen and W.H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. M. van der Maas, trans. Gerritt Bilkes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 548.

Also, the Old Covenant is multifaceted. It is best described in the words of John Colquhoun in *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel* as a “mixed dispensation. In it, the covenant of grace was repeated and published; the covenant of works was awfully displayed in subservience thereto; and a national covenant... was also made as an appendage to the covenant of grace”⁷⁵. While Paul is clear that law is part of the curriculum, it is not the only lesson to be learned. Colquhoun notes several gracious elements in the Covenant of Grace. For example, the Decalogue begins with “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”; God first claims them by redemption, and therefore He renews His covenant with them. He adds that the book of the Law itself was sprinkled with blood⁷⁶. Also, one should note the sacrifices themselves. The myriads upon myriads of sacrifices in the place of sinners, are they not themselves recurring sermons on substitutionary atonement? If this is not grace, what is?

One will further object and say, “But these are only types and shadows, and not the realities themselves. However, Christ is the substance of them.” This is true. However, did Abraham receive only a type of the righteousness by faith, or did he receive Christ’s true righteousness by faith? Did he receive a type of the Holy Spirit, or did he receive the true Holy Spirit? If he was really justified, and if he really did receive the Holy Spirit, it proves that the Abrahamic Covenant was meant to deliver, signify, and seal these things to the Old Covenant saints. It is therefore a covenant spiritual in nature, and the Mosaic Covenant was meant to enhance and magnify the same lessons. The difference is that in the New Covenant the lessons are fuller, clearer, brighter, and more liberally applied.

⁷⁵ John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, ed. Don Kistler (Grand Rapids, MI: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2009), 46-7.

⁷⁶ Colquhoun, *Law and the Gospel*, 48-9, 52.

As for the last argument from 2 Corinthian 3:7 itself, one must note how Paul labels the ministry of Christ through his apostle in 2 Corinthians 2:16. Paul calls his own ministry “the aroma of death leading to death”. Does Paul mean that the New Covenant ministry is a ministry of condemnation? No. It’s the effect that the ministry of the Word has on the reprobate; not for any fault in the New Covenant⁷⁷, but in the unbeliever. Therefore, Paul’s statement has nothing to do with a condemning essence in the New Covenant. If it does not mean so here, then it does not mean this either when the ministry of the Old Covenant is called a ministry of death.

For these reasons, the New Covenant is a continuation of the gracious ministry began in the prior covenants, as being one further stage in God’s delivering on the Covenant of Grace. It is not a brand new and gracious covenant, in contrast to a mere restatement of the Covenant of Works.

Its Place in Paul’s Ministry

How does all of this impact the interpretation of 2 Cor. 3:7-11? It explains why the New Covenant ministry is more glorious. For Paul, it means that he may minister from a standpoint of Christ revealed rather than Christ foreshadowed; an Apostle of promises fulfilled, not a prophet of promises made. Paul was privileged to see things and hear things which the Prophets longed to see and hear and did not (Mt. 13:16-17). He lived in a consummation of a time concerning which the Prophets made close inquiry but could not satisfactorily discern—things which hold the gaze of angels (1 Pt. 1:10-12). While the time of the Old Covenant was a time of veiling and obscure darkness, the New Covenant times are a time of the unveiled glory of Christ (2 Cor.

⁷⁷ Paul says in relationship to the Law in Romans 7:13, “Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.” The law would not have been a condemning, death-granting power were it only applied to one who was righteous and perfect. So it is in this case.

3:13, 14, 18). It is not a time that is foretelling of the coming of the Spirit, but the very age of the coming of the Spirit.

It must be highlighted that the Old Covenant was glorious. The promise of the Gospel was still all throughout the Old Testament rites, from circumcision to Passover to sacrifices⁷⁸. Although there were many who were ignorant of what these things meant, the ministers who believed were still enabled to do mighty deeds; such as Moses persevering in ministry forty years over a stiff-necked people; the judges delivering a continuously-backsliding people; prophets such as Elijah⁷⁹, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah prophesying to peoples who would not listen. If one looks at Hebrews 11, they will see that all the named heroes of the faith are Old Testament figures, operating from less light and revelation than is available now. Yet they persevered.

The revelation of the New Covenant age far exceeds theirs, and this is basis for greater encouragement. As stated by Dr. Stivason, the spiritual experience of any saint caps out at their level of revelation, and the prophets were those whom the Lord did nothing without speaking to them; however, in New Testament times, the prophetic experience is for every believer, and so should know a deeper spirituality in everyday life that exceeds even the prophets⁸⁰. If that is so, then in an age when the least of believers exceeds John the Baptist, who was the greatest of all born of women up until that time (Lk. 7:28), the hopes and expectations and encouragements for

⁷⁸ Young, *Confession*, WCF VII.5.

⁷⁹ Elijah is worth noting, because he did begin to lose heart in his ministry (1 Kg. 19:4, 10, 14). The Lord met Elijah at Mount Horeb and strengthened his heart, in the very place where the Old Covenant was inaugurated, and Elijah was enabled to do even more ministry. This was an encouragement to Elijah under a dark and ineffective time. How much more New Covenant times to the true minister!

⁸⁰ Stivason, Jeff. LECTURED DELIVERED AT THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY ON JANUARY 27, 2023.

the average believer exceed what any of the Prophets had to work with. If that is for the believer, how much more the New Covenant minister; and if the minister, how much more the apostle!

The Outcome – Paul’s Practice of Ministry

The outlook has many practical impacts on Paul.

First, Paul gives up on self. When Paul considers the eternal ramifications of his work on his hearers, he exclaims in 2 Cor. 2:16, “And who is sufficient for these things?” Paul knows that no man—not even himself—has the wisdom and power to effectively carry out such a work, and that was by the Lord’s design. The Lord supplemented Paul’s successes with crushing burdens, so that his trust would be in the God who raises the dead (2 Cor. 1:9). God supplemented the heavenly revelations with an agonizing thorn, so that Paul may be weak while God may be strong (2 Cor. 12:1-10). If Christ was going to be glorified, then Paul must not be sufficient.

Second, Paul rejoices in the task he is given. The misery which Paul complained about ending at 2 Cor. 2:13 shifts to joy in 2:14, when he remembers that he is a man in the triumphal procession given the sweet task of perfuming the march with the precious fragrance of Christ (2 Cor. 2:14-15)⁸¹.

Third, Paul maintains sincerity, blamelessness, and honesty (2 Cor. 1:12, 2:17, 4:2). If Christ is so glorious, and His Spirit so powerful, and His Covenant so efficacious, there should be no need whatsoever for dishonesty, duplicity, or trickery. All such things say that the Spirit is not powerful enough, nor the glory brilliant enough, without tricks of the flesh. Paul’s goal is only to have the consciences of his hearers (4:2), and knows this in itself will be part of the radiance of the glory of New Covenant ministry.

Fourth, Paul speaks boldly. In such a tense situation as he had with the Corinthian believers, and with as many trials as he has endured at the hands and tongues of cruel men, one might entertain ideas of “wising up” and “toning down” under pretense of not wanting to give needless offense. However, Paul knows the commission Christ gave him, refuses to be a man-pleaser (Gal. 1:10), and speaks to the people of Corinth as the occasion called for. He did so in 1 Corinthians, in the “tearful letter”, during the “painful visit”, he did so in 1 Corinthians, and he does it again in 2 Corinthians 10-13.

Fifth, Paul does not faint (2 Cor. 4:1, 8-16). In the first part, he does not faint because he has real tangible encouragements. Paul has these great and precious promises, and he has seen them play out in the people he has ministered to. The hearers to whom he writes, Paul calls them living epistles; that is, letters of recommendation, and the proof that his ministry is an authentic one (2 Cor. 3:1); thus, his success so far is reason to keep going. However, Paul is also realistic about the realities of dealing with fallen sinners. Paul saw by experience how wayward even true believers could be, but he was also real about dealing with unbelievers. How does one not faint when even true believers prove unpredictable and inconsistent? In the case of believers, Paul knew the fragrance of Christ will ultimately be a fragrance to life, even if the remaining sin is greater in some believers than others. Paul also accepted that the fragrance of Christ would be a stench of death to some (2 Cor. 2:15), and that the blinds would stay on some eyes (2 Cor. 3:14-15, 4:4-5); but he also knows that there will be fruits. Paul can persevere, because he knows that these effects come not by preaching oneself, but Christ (2 Cor. 4:4-5). Paul is responsible only for releasing the fragrance, and it will have whatsoever effect the Lord Christ wills it to have.

Sixth, Paul looks toward the unseen (2 Cor. 4:17-18). He knows the reward of what he is suffering will be unnoticeably light compared to the glory that is awaiting him, and so eyes the

invisible things. In this way Paul walks in the footsteps of the heroes of Hebrews 11, who were not looking for an earthly dwelling or city, but one of which God is Lord and builder (Heb. 11:13, 14, 16).

Last of all, Paul conquers. As he says in 2 Tim. 4:7-8, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing”. Now Paul, absent from the body yet present with the Lord, is at rest, leaving behind a Gentile church which by the power of Christ 2,000 years later endures to this day, and steadily grows in light, holiness, and greatness; and not only until now, but will continue to grow and expand until the Last Day.

Exhortations to the Minister

What then does this mean for the minister today? Many things make crushing burdens for a minister. It may be lack of conversions or lack of congregational growth. He looks at the world and sees barrenness. Perhaps his church or denomination is riddled with strife and division. There are unexpected, surprising, and grievous cases of discipline. A whisper campaign begins in the church and breaks the love and peace that the congregation had enjoyed. A member apostatizes, or he becomes a heretic. Children do not profess. One day a dear and trusted friend, or even a fellow elder, turns out to be a Judas. Sometimes burdens come all at once. Sometimes burdens drag on for years. How is a minister going to persevere?

When a minister finds himself discouraged and ready to faint, he must do as Paul did—gaze intently upon Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, until his heart and hands are strengthened. Elijah recovered from his near fainting by beholding the glory of the Lord at

Mount Horeb, and so the minister will find recovery in going and being with Christ. Beholding this glory alone, apart from all other considerations, will restore the soul.

A minister should ask himself if things are truly as bad as he perceives. Paul faced many problems in Corinth, yet he could still call many of his hearers “living epistles”, and they were the validation of the legitimacy of his ministry. Although Christians are a sanctified alloy, being regenerated yet still having remaining corruptions, grace is still grace, and is still a work of the Holy Spirit. That is a mighty reason to rejoice, that by his ministry there has been fruit, because that fruit will last forever. The fruit is an infinite gain.

The minister should also remember what a glorious privilege he has been given. He marches in a triumphal procession, dispensing the sweet fragrance of Christ in every place. Even when times are dark, the minister is fulfilling a charge that was personally given to him by Christ. As a minister, he has more opportunity to gaze on New Covenant glories than others do, and he enjoys refreshments that others do not. The called, qualified, faithful minister is a very rich man.

Let the minister remember the men of Hebrews 11, who lived in a time with less light and less glory, yet what they saw and heard was so compelling that they performed mighty deeds in the name of the Lord. If the Old Covenant glory made mighty men of the Prophets, why will not New Covenant glory make mighty men of New Covenant ministers? And if the ministries of these men were efficacious and powerful, why not will the New Covenant ministry be more efficacious?

The New Covenant minister should not be surprised when some grow hard under his ministry. The fragrance of Christ is a stench of death to the reprobate. The Gospel will give new life to some, but it will harden others and confirm them in their condemnation. The minister

should not be surprised that the truths which nearly bring him to ecstasy also stir up the vile filth in men's hearts. It is as God has willed it.

The New Covenant minister should expect opposition from other ministers. True ministers will be opposed by other ministers, and sometimes vitriolically. At times a minister will be stunned that a man called to so great an office could speak of other ministers with a tongue set on fire by hell. However, this will be the case. Let the New Covenant minister be clear in his own conscience so that no accusation may stick.

A minister should expect that even true believers will be deceived by false shepherds. False ministers disguise themselves as angels of light, and it will truly look like light to God's people. Let the minister be well-prayed, in close communion with the Triune God, so that whatever the true pastor does not have in fleshly charisma he makes up in power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit; so that whatever else a false minister may say, a true one can say about his membership, "Your lives are my commendation."

A minister should beware of backing out for discouragement. It is natural to feel pain from sorrow and heartbreak, and no man can stoicize his way out of them, or pretend they do not sting. However, it is sinful to give up the work. However deep the sorrow, however intense the anguish, the minister must not despair. There are many more encouragements now than Elijah had, but that makes the sin of giving up all the worse.

The minister must be a weak man dependent upon a strong Christ. Let him accept that he is weak, so that Christ may be strong. Let him accept the messenger from Satan. Let the lion from hell come forward, so that the greater Samson may tear him to pieces, and bring sweetness to the minister.

Let the minister therefore avoid all underhanded means of advancing the Kingdom. Falsehood, insincerity, duplicity, selfish ambition, and every trick of the flesh will spoil the glory, and it may pull down the veil over the minister's eyes, and over the eyes of the people.

Finally, let him press on. The minister should not ever stand in place. Let him march forward in the triumphal procession, and delight in spreading the sweet fragrance of Christ wherever he goes.

Conclusion

It is only Christ by the power of the Spirit who can cause the New Covenant minister to persevere in his sufferings, and cause his ministry to be effective to Christ's people. Paul is an example of this minister; he suffered many tribulations which included murder attempts, severe criticism, bodily danger, false teachers, and disaffection from the people whom he ministered to. Still, Paul ministered boldly and sincerely despite all these trials. Paul could do this because of his vision of the surpassing greatness of the glory of Christ in the New Covenant.

This Westminster view of the covenant increases Paul's encouragement, because there was true efficaciousness in the Old Covenant. In that covenant were men of whom the world was not worthy. The New Covenant far exceeds the glory of the Old Covenant in that in one Christ is in types and shadows; but in the other, He is revealed. In one, justification and the Spirit are on credit; in the other, the benefits are paid in full. In the Old, God grants benefits sparingly; in the other, God gives profusely. In one, the revelation is like candle; in the other, it is like the blazing sun. The Old lasted only a short time; the New lasts forever.

The New Covenant glory is a greater degree of the gracious Old Covenant glory, because both covenants administer the Covenant of Grace. While in one there was more law and more death, still God gave many lessons through the types and shadows concerning forgiveness of sins

and righteousness by faith. By these the Lord not only signaled the benefits of the Covenant of Grace, but actually administered them. The Old Covenant was only a covenant of death, and Paul's a stench of death, because of the unbelieving reaction of the unconverted. When the New Covenant comes, it brings the lessons of the Old into a greater and glorious light, with marvelously expanded liberty.

Paul made use of the encouragements himself. Paul gives up on himself, and allows himself to be a weak man that Christ may be strong. Paul changes his sorrow for joy when considering His great privileges. Fearing to spoil the glory he avoids any hint of blame. He speaks without fear to the self-proclaimed shepherds and to those deceived by them. Rather than faint, Paul perseveres, because He is dependent upon a strong Christ.

The minister facing trials and tribulations must first turn his eyes to Christ and contemplate His glory until Christ feeds him with strength and courage. The minister must minister lovingly, patiently, and continuously, even if he doesn't see the desired fruits; but he must expect greater efficacy than did the ministers of the Old Covenant. A minister must rejoice in his privilege to minister, because it is a great privilege. When he becomes discouraged, he should remember the heroes of the Old Testament who did mighty deeds with much less light, and he must therefore forbid himself to faint. He must also accept that his ministry will be a stench of death to some—even to self-proclaimed ministers! When this happens, he must not back out for discouragement or fear, nor resort to insincere, duplicitous, or dishonest tactics, but must seek the power of the Holy Spirit. He must accept that he is weak, that he is not sufficient in himself, but when he is weak then Christ will be strong. After this, let Christ take the lead in the triumphal procession, and let the minister in expectation of great reward march behind in his place in the rank given by the Lord, dispersing the sweet savor of Christ in every place he goes.

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