



2 Corinthians - Chapter Three

I. 2 Corinthians 1:1-7:16 - Paul's Defence of His Legitimacy as an Apostle (continues)

Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter is the first part of a longer argument, which builds up step by step through to the great climax in 6:3-10, explaining to the Corinthians that the life and work of a genuine apostle of Jesus really is a glorious thing, even though it may not look like it to them.

Paul opens this chapter by indicating that he and his team did not require the standard letters of introduction or recommendation, such as was normal for itinerant preachers or travelling philosophers in that era, because their work was accredited by the Holy Spirit and could be seen in the result of their work.

Paul then turns his attention to the superiority of the new covenant over the old. He does not say there is anything wrong with the old, just that it has been surpassed by a better one. It appears that some of Paul's opponents had been proclaiming the old ways as being the right ways, using the Law of Moses not in a legalistic sense but portraying the teaching of Moses in a spiritual context.

Paul then turns his attention to a comparison between Moses and a Christian minister. Moses was a great leader of his people, a man of God and revered by the Jews. Even though Jesus was the fulfilment of the Jewish expectation, the hardest audience of all to reach with the Gospel has always been a Jewish one because of this transition away from the Mosaic Law to the new covenant.

Paul's train of thought in vv.12-18 has long been considered obscure. In part this is because he is dealing with two different but related criticisms. It appears that he was accused at some point of professional arrogance; vv.12-13 and v.18 address this matter. It also seems that his opponents were pointing out his lack of success among his own people; vv.14-17 deal with this issue. Interestingly, Paul does not deny either charge.

I.d. 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 - Ministers of the New Covenant

In 1:3-2:17, Paul defended his legitimacy as an apostle on the basis of his suffering as the means by which Christians are comforted (1:3-11), and God is made known in the world (2:14-17). Now he does so based on the reality of the life-transforming Spirit being mediated through his apostolic ministry of the new covenant.

I.d.i 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 - The reality of the Spirit in Paul's ministry

Paul begins this section by making it clear that, as an apostle, he was called to mediate the Spirit in fulfilment of the new covenant.

¹ Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we?

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Paul expects a negative answer to his two rhetorical questions since his claim to be an apostle is not an empty boast, i.e. he does not commend himself, but is supported by the Spirit and by his faithful ministry of teaching and suffering.

Paul writes of commendations on several occasions in both a positive and negative sense, including: <<*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreæ*>> (Romans 16:1), <<*We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense*>> (2 Corinthians 10:12), and: <<*I have been a fool! You forced me to it. Indeed you should have been the ones commending me, for I am not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing*>> (2 Corinthians 12:11). Refer also to Philippians 2:19-30 where Paul writes a commendation for both Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Letters of recommendation to you or from you. Such letters were written, not only as an introduction to the person, but as a way of authenticating them as representatives of the sending party, qualifying them for the role they had come to perform. Paul intended to write such letters concerning those who would take the churches' offering to Jerusalem: <<*And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem*>> (1 Corinthians 16:3). The church in Ephesus introduced Apollos to Corinth in this way: <<*And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers*>> (Acts 18:27).

Those who would discredit Paul to the Corinthians had perhaps suggested that if he wanted to return to Corinth he should perhaps get another church, such as Ephesus, to give him a letter of recommendation that would reintroduce him back into Corinth. Alternatively, they may have been suggesting that, if he wished to go elsewhere to work as an apostle, then Corinth should provide a letter. Paul will go on to clearly argue that no such letters were needed, for his work spoke clearly enough for itself as ordained by God through his Spirit.

Although Paul wrote this type of letter, since his conversion to Christ he did not actually carry any concerning his own calling. This left him open to criticism by those who opposed him or wanted to undermine his authority. While he does not condemn the use of such letters, he does point out to the church that the reason he and his co-workers had not brought any letters to Corinth was because they had come as church planters, ready to begin a new evangelistic work. So it is the church formed as a result of their labours, not a letter written with ink (v.3), that serves as their letter of reference.

² You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; ³ and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

2 Corinthians 3:2-3

You yourselves are our letter. Paul, with the help of Timothy and Silas, had planted the church in Corinth. Paul had later instructed them to copy him: <<So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ>> (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1). Therefore, others should be able to see Christ in the Corinthians through their own lifestyle choices and actions! Paul is ultimately confident that this letter will tell the truth about him, because he knows that the living God has performed a powerful work among his people in Corinth.

Written on our hearts. Heart is used here in the Semitic sense of the innermost self and centre of the personality, not in the English sense of the seat of emotions and feelings. It is the locus of a person's spiritual and intellectual activity and, as such, the place where God begins his work of renewal. The perfect tense written, Greek *engegrammene*, points to a letter that has been indelibly etched on Paul's own heart.

By written on our hearts Paul means that the Gospel has an impact not only on those who hear it but also on those who preach it. Known and read by all and you show suggest an obvious and widely perceived impact. By contrast, the Corinthian intruders present pieces of paper that are seen by only a few and have a limited, temporary effect.

The changed lives of the Corinthians give a clear message from Christ, that is, they are a letter of Christ, testifying to Paul's true apostleship as the one who brought the Gospel to them, i.e. prepared by us.

In fulfilment of: <<I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh>> (Ezekiel 11:19), and: <<A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh>> (Ezekiel 36:26), Paul contrasts the old covenant, in which God wrote the Decalogue on tablets of stone: <<The Lord said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the

tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction’>> (Exodus 24:12), <<And the Lord gave me the two stone tablets written with the finger of God; on them were all the words that the Lord had spoken to you at the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly>> (Deuteronomy 9:10), with the apostolic ministry of writing on tablets of human hearts: <<Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them round your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart>> (Proverbs 3:3).

Paul writes on hearts not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God. The Spirit’s work of changing the Corinthians’ hearts as a result of Paul’s ministry confirms that the new covenant is being established through his ministry.

The phrase living God, which is a familiar one in the Greek OT, is found six times in Paul’s letters. It is normally employed to distinguish God from lifeless idols, e.g. Acts 14:15, 2 Corinthians 6:16 and 1 Thessalonians 1:9. Here it is used of what is animate, God, as opposed to what is inanimate, i.e. ink. The new element in v.3 is the Spirit of the living God. The characteristic mark of Christianity as contrasted to Judaism was, and remains, the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer and congregation. Under the old covenant, God made his will known externally through the law. Under the new covenant his presence is revealed internally through the Spirit. Therefore, it is changed lives and not sensational feats that are the true sign of a Spirit-directed ministry.

⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God.

⁵ Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God,

2 Corinthians 3:4-5

The confidence that we have through Christ towards God indicates that believers have been truly reconciled to God through the Cross: <<*This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him*>> (Ephesians 3:11-12).

To claim anything as coming from us. Paul assures his readers that he is not claiming his right of apostleship through any human ability or qualification he has gained. Indeed, he freely admits of his human weakness and failings: <<*For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God*>> (1 Corinthians 15:9), and: <<*The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost*>> (1 Timothy 1:15), going on to clearly indicate that it is God’s grace that has made him what he is.

Paul’s sufficiency or competence is from God, not from himself, just as it was for Moses. Refer to the comments made on 2:16b-17. Paul’s competence as an apostle recalls the pattern exhibited in the call of the OT prophets; the prophet is not sufficient or competent in himself but is made so by God’s grace. Refer to Judges 6:11-24, Isaiah 6:1-8, Jeremiah 1:4-10, and Ezekiel 1:1-3:11.

⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2 Corinthians 3:6

Paul was made competent to be a minister of the new covenant: <<*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more*>> (Jeremiah 31:31-34), as a result of his call on the road to Damascus, just as Moses was called to be a minister of the old covenant from within the burning bush: <<*When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am’*>> (Exodus 3:4). The word new, Greek *kainos*, denotes that which is qualitatively much better when compared with what has existed until now.

Diathekeh is here correctly translated as covenant and not testament, as was the case in the AV, and it should not be capitalised. There were no Old and New Testaments in Paul’s day, only ‘the Scriptures’. NT applies to the Christian writings that were given canonical status alongside the Jewish Scriptures. The process of canonisation was a long one. Clement of Alexandria (circa AD215) and Origen (circa AD250) are the earliest church fathers to distinguish between OT and NT writings. Canon 59, which was issued by the Synod of Laodicea in AD363, is the first church document to use the phrase NT as a distinct body of literature.

A covenant, simply put, is an agreement into which two parties enter. It can be a bilateral agreement between equals or a unilateral arrangement where the terms are dictated by one, superior party. God’s covenants with his people are of the latter kind.

Whereas apostle refers to Paul’s authoritative office, minister or servant, Greek *diakonos*, refers to his function of mediating God’s presence and word, a role he can share with non-apostles: <<*What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each*>> (1 Corinthians 3:5), and: <<*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation*>> (2 Corinthians 5:18). *Diakonos* and *diakonia*, i.e. ministry, occur five times in vv.6-11. Here it refers to Paul’s role of mediating the Spirit as promised in the new covenant, by which God will create a people who will keep his covenant: <<*A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances*>> (Ezekiel 36:26-27). In other words, God will write his law on their hearts and forgive their sins: <<*I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you*>> (Ezekiel 36:25). Refer again to Jeremiah 31:33-34.

The new covenant was implemented by Jesus: <<And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood'>> (Luke 22:20), and its ministry therefore consists not of letter but of Spirit, because the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life: <<It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life>> (John 6:63).

The letter kills since it announces God's will without granting the power to keep it, thereby bringing people under God's judgment as covenant breakers. The Spirit alone gives life because only the Spirit can change the heart, thereby enabling God's people to keep his commands. One is external, the other internal; it is only the latter that can give proof of a changed life.

Elsewhere, Paul also refers to the letter/Spirit contrast: <<Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart – it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God>> (Romans 2:29), and: <<But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit>> (Romans 7:6); these are the other two NT occurrences of this contrast.

I.d.ii 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 - Paul's interpretation of Exodus 32-34

To support the contrast between the ministries of the old and new covenants in v.3 and v.6, Paul points his readers back to the events of the golden calf and the second giving of the law.

Moses had been up on the mountain for nearly six weeks, receiving instructions from God about the building of the tabernacle, the place where God would come and dwell with his people. The people, however, persuaded Aaron to make them a golden idol to worship. Therefore, the first word that Moses and his law had to utter to God's people was the word of condemnation, the announcement of death.

Moses then found himself in the position as counsel for the defence, pleading with God to spare his guilty people. This deep and heartfelt prayer called forth from God a fresh revelation of himself: Moses glimpsed God's glory, and heard the message that, although wickedness must be dealt with, God was indeed a God of overflowing mercy. And when Moses returned once more from the mountain-top, his face was shining, and the Israelites were afraid of him. So he covered his face with a veil, except for when he went into the tabernacle where God made himself present, in order to speak with God face to face.

⁷ Now if the ministry of death, chiselled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, ⁸ how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? ⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory!

2 Corinthians 3:7-9

Moses' ministry is not described as a ministry of death because there was something wrong with the law, for it was perfect as it reflected the nature of the law giver; in fact, the permanent value of the law is evidenced because God himself had carved or chiselled, Greek typow 'to hammer in', the Ten Commandments in letters on stone tablets: <<*When God finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God*>> (Exodus 31:18), <<*The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets*>> (Exodus 32:16), and: <<*These words the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more. He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me*>> (Deuteronomy 5:22). But because Israel remained stubborn under the old covenant: <<*The Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are*>> (Exodus 32:9), and: <<*He said, 'If now I have found favour in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance'*>> (Exodus 34:9).

Because the commandments themselves could not give people the power to obey them, the effect of the commandments that should have been God's blessing was, in fact, condemnation: <<*For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation*>> (Romans 4:15), and: <<*What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'*>> (Romans 7:7). For Christians, however, it is a different story: <<*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*>> (Romans 8:1).

The Greek word for condemnation *katakrisis* is a rare one, occurring in the Greek Bible only here and in: <<*I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together*>> (2 Corinthians 7:3). It refers to a verdict of guilty or to the passing of sentence against someone.

God had further highlighted the importance of the law: <<*The Lord was pleased, for the sake of his righteousness, to magnify his teaching and make it glorious*>> (Isaiah 42:21), yet Israel still strayed from him. This was despite the many warnings concerning the consequences for not keeping the law: <<*'Cursed be anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by observing them.' All the people shall say, 'Amen!'*>> (Deuteronomy 27:26).

There were 613 commandments that regulated the Jew's life, including rabbinic interpretations of the law, the Tannaim of the Mishnah, which were also considered binding. To speak of the Mosaic covenant as a ministry that dispenses death would have sounded blasphemous to Jewish ears. It was the uniform opinion of the rabbis that what Moses gave the people of Israel were words of life, not words of death, and that they were eternal.

The giving of the law was accompanied by so much glory that the people of Israel could not gaze, i.e. look intently or directly, at Moses' face because of the glory

of his face. The light of God's glory shone so brightly from Moses' face, see Exodus 34:29-35, that the people were afraid to look at Moses; possibly the glory also shined so brightly that it was painful to their eyes, although the fear of it is more likely. Paul's argument seems to be that even this old covenant, which was temporary and ineffective in changing hearts, still had much glory, and therefore the new covenant ministry of the Spirit has even more glory.

Indeed, the new covenant must far exceed the old covenant in glory, that is, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory, for the new covenant ministry brings righteousness, not so much a right standing with God, but a declaration of innocence rather than condemnation, as well as the glorious presence of God's power, which transforms believers: <<*from one degree of glory to another*>> (v.18).

¹⁰ Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; ¹¹ for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

2 Corinthians 3:10-11

The old covenant was the focus and realm of God's self-displayed presence, his glory, in the past. But now that the new covenant has come, the old covenant has lost its glory, since God is no longer revealing himself through it. Thus God has even set aside or brought to an end, Greek *katargeō*, the glory of the old covenant. The glory of the new covenant also surpasses that of the old, in that the new covenant is a permanent, everlasting covenant, stretching into the age to come. Paul's point is that, although the brilliance of Moses' face was overpowering, it was a brilliance that immediately began to fade, symptomatic of the transient character of the ministry that it represented.

I.d.iii 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 - Paul's application of Exodus 32-34 to his own situation

If Paul's ministry of the Spirit under the new covenant is bringing forth life, not death, then why were the majority of the Jews of Paul's day still rejecting it? Does Israel's rejection of Paul's message call the Gospel itself into question? Paul answers these questions in these next passages.

Paul does not try to argue that he is better than Moses, or that he has more glory than Moses. As Paul would later argue in Romans Chapter 7, the problem did not lie with Moses or the law. The problem was with the raw material that the law had to work with; the hardened hearts and dulled minds of God's people, such as Paul himself had once been. Moses' face had been veiled because of the reflection of God's glory; the hearts and minds of those who would not come to understand the new covenant established through Jesus would remain veiled, unable to perceive God's true glory, as it is now revealed in his Son.

¹² Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness,

2 Corinthians 3:12

Paul's confident expectation, i.e. his hope, is that in this more glorious new covenant ministry God is pouring out the Spirit to change people's hearts. For this reason, he can act with great boldness, since he is ministering a much better covenant, in contrast to Moses, who as a minister of the old covenant had veiled his face. The church in Jerusalem had prayed to act in the same way as Paul did during a time of persecution by the Jewish authorities: *<<And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness>>* (Acts 4:29).

The language that Paul uses here would have hit home to the Corinthians who lived in a society that valued freedom of speech and action. They too were used to speaking out on issues they felt were important. The freedom that Paul will later raise would have been part of their accepted culture as a free city in the Roman Empire.

This hope is foundational to the Christian faith: *<<For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience>>* (Romans 8:24-25).

Seneca called hope 'the definition of an uncertain good'. For the Christian, however, hope carries an unconditional certainty within itself that God's promises will be realised. For this reason, Paul never loses his enthusiasm for the Gospel, even when some labelled his ardour as professional arrogance.

¹³ not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside.

2 Corinthians 3:13

Veil is the key concept in vv.13-18, which Paul now develops as an elaborate and complex image. Regarding gaze, refer to the comments made on vv.7-9.

To keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. This gives the reason why Moses veiled his face: *<<When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him>>* (Exodus 34:33-35). Although commentators differ as to what this means, the most likely interpretation is that Moses put a veil over his face so that the Israelites would not see that the glory was gradually fading, signifying the temporary nature of the old covenant, the outcome was that it was being brought to an end or fading away.

¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. ¹⁵ Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds;

2 Corinthians 3:14-15

Despite Paul's boldness, Israel's minds, which were hardened in Moses' day: <<*The Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are'*>> (Exodus 32:9), <<*Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.'*>> When the people heard these harsh words, they mourned, and no one put on ornaments. For the Lord had said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites, "You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, and I will decide what to do to you"'>> (Exodus 33:3-5), <<*He said, 'If now I have found favour in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance'*>> (Exodus 34:9), and they remain so to this very day, that is to the time of writing this letter at least. Paul's description agrees with: <<*But to this day the Lord has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear'*>> (Deuteronomy 29:4), and: <<*For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep; he has closed your eyes, you prophets, and covered your heads, you seers'*>> (Isaiah 29:10), which explained why the majority of Israel continued to reject the law and the prophets throughout their history. Refer to Nehemiah 9:16-31, Psalm 106:6-39, Ezekiel 20:8-36, and Romans 11:7-8.

They hear the reading of the old covenant refers to public readings of the law or the accounts of God making the covenant with his people. Covenant must not be translated as testament for that might imply the OT Scriptures in general, which Paul does not have in view here. By old Paul means that the Mosaic covenant has outlived its ministerial usefulness (vv.7-9). But Israel cannot see this because a veil exists each time the Law is read.

Only in Christ is it set aside. Once again Paul makes it clear that he has nothing against the law. It is just that the greater glory of Jesus has cast a shadow over the old covenant, making it fade into comparative insignificance. Yet many Jews could not comprehend this for a veil lies over their minds, blinding them to the truth: <<*Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.'*>> Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains'>> (John 9:39-41). It is not just the Jews who are blinded by the truth; there are still billions of people not turning to Jesus.

This is evidenced by the fact that same veil is still there in Paul's day whenever Moses is read. Here Paul uses Moses' veil as a symbol for the people's hardened condition that prompted its use under the old covenant and that now keeps most of Israel from recognising that the Law of Moses itself points to Jesus as the Messiah.

¹⁶ but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

2 Corinthians 3:16

When one turns to the Lord. Paul turns from the plural 'their minds' in v.15 that referred to national Israel to the singular here, determining that it is individual

choice and not ethnic background that is required in turning to Jesus: <<*Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*>> (Acts 2:21), and: <<*Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*>> (Acts 2:38).

Just as Moses was able to enter into God's presence without a veil: <<*but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded*>> (Exodus 34:34), so too when one turns to the Lord in faith, the veil of separation from God and incomprehension of him brought about by a hardened heart is removed. Those who do not accept Jesus will remain in darkness because of their failure to do so: <<*And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations*>> (Isaiah 25:7).

Paul's reference to Exodus 34:34 has four significant modifications that should be noted:

1. He shifts to an indefinite subject, thereby moving the reader beyond the historical setting of the Exodus narrative.
2. The action shifts from past to present. This shows that Paul is interested in this narrative primarily for his own situation.
3. In the Exodus narrative Moses removes his own veil. In Paul's account, it is either God or the individual or perhaps both parties that can remove the veil. Quite often divine sovereignty and human responsibility work together in Paul's thinking, especially where individual salvation is in view.
4. Instead of 'to enter', Paul uses 'to turn'. This term marks the characteristic attitude of the Jew within the covenant relationship. To turn to the Lord in the OT is to turn away from foreign gods and to listen to God's voice, obeying his commands with all of the heart and soul. It is also the appropriate response to the Gospel under the new covenant, regardless of whether one is a Jew or a Gentile.

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

2 Corinthians 3:17

The Lord is the Spirit. Different explanations have been offered for this difficult and compressed statement: Paul may be saying that Christ and the Spirit function together in the Christian's experience, i.e. that the Lord Jesus Christ comes to us through the ministry of the Spirit, although they remain two distinct persons. Another view, based on the reference in v.16 to Exodus 34:34, <<*Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him*>>, is that the Lord here refers to Yahweh, the Lord in the OT; that is, God in his whole being without specifying Father, Son or Spirit. In this case, Paul is saying that Yahweh in the OT is not just Father and Son, he is also Spirit. In either case, Paul's primary point seems to be that the Christian's experience of the ministry of the Spirit under the new covenant (vv.3-8) is parallel to Moses' experience of the Lord under the old covenant, i.e. that

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the Spirit under the new covenant sets one free from the veil of hard-heartedness (vv.12-15).

Paul regularly distinguishes Christ from the Holy Spirit in his writings, and that is surely the case here, since later in this verse he speaks of the Spirit of the Lord. Moreover, it should not be supposed that Paul is teaching that any of the members of the Trinity, the Father, the Son or the Spirit, are the same person, which would be the heresy of modalism; instead Paul is stressing the gracious unity of purpose among the three persons of the Trinity.

The prophet had also spoken of the Spirit of the Lord: <<*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn*>> (Isaiah 61:1-2). Elsewhere, Paul links this same Spirit to freedom: <<*And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God*>> (Galatians 4:6-7).

There is freedom, although unspecified in the context, most likely refers to the many kinds of freedom that come with salvation in Christ and with the presence of the Holy Spirit; that is, freedom from condemnation, guilt, sin, death, the old covenant, and blindness to the Gospel, as well as freedom from barriers that would impede spiritual understanding, and freedom that gives access to the loving presence of God. Ultimately, it is accepting the truth of the Gospel that will set the believer free: <<*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*>> (John 8:32 NIV).

¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18

Verse 18 is the capstone of Paul's reflections in this chapter. It picks up the two major ideas of vv.12-17: namely, the open conduct of the Gospel minister and the Spirit as the prime mover of the new covenant, and weaves them together into a clinching argument against those who would depend on the way things were under the Mosaic covenant. To start with, Paul introduces a final point of contrast between Moses and the new covenant minister.

Paul continues his comparison of all Christians, all of us, with Moses by using Moses' experience in Exodus 34:34 as the key to understanding the experience of the Christian. What Paul says here is so revealing for he states that what believers in Jesus see when they look at each other with unveiled faces is the life-giving Spirit that indwells those who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

With unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord. The word translated seeing, Greek *katoptrizō*, can mean behold, reflect, or look at in a mirror, and commentators support all three views. In this context, however, the connection

with a mirror does not seem to be necessary to the word, unless used in the context where a mirror reflects light in the form of an image - the image of God's glory in the face of a believer; and the meaning seeing seems more consistent with the idea of having the veil removed and therefore being able to see God's glory, in contrast to the unbelieving Jews who still have a veil blocking their vision.

God's glory was given to the Son and then passed on to those who have placed their hope in him: *<<The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world>>* (John 17:22-24).

As a result of beholding the Lord through the ministry of the Spirit, the believer is being transformed, a process of sanctification over time, not an instantaneous change, into the same image of God that was distorted at the fall: *<<Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'>>* (Genesis 1:26-28), *<<In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God>>* (2 Corinthians 4:4), *<<So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!>>* (2 Corinthians 5:17), and: *<<Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is>>* (1 John 3:2).

The image of God includes every way in which humans are like God, such as their moral character, their true knowledge, their many God-given abilities, and their dominion over creation, as seen in Genesis 1:26-28, to be exercised with dependence on God as the Creator and giver of all things: *<<For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?>>* (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Paul also wrote to the church in Rome with regard to being transformed into the image of the Son: *<<For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family>>* (Romans 8:29).