

One of the problems Paul addresses in 2 Corinthians is the teaching of false apostles that some of the Corinthians had started following. These false apostles taught such things as the necessity of keeping the Mosaic Law, but in chapter 3, Paul discusses the superiority of faith in Christ over the Mosaic Law. Only faith in Christ can give us the righteousness that the law demands.

Verses 1-6: Paul makes the argument that he and his ministry partners didn't need letters of commendation to validate their ministry because the Corinthians themselves knew the qualifications of Paul and his ministry partners. The fact that the Corinthians had experienced salvation through Paul's ministry testified that he and his partners were preaching the genuine gospel of Christ. Paul is also quick to point out that there was nothing special or sufficient in him or his partners that brought salvation to those who believed the gospel they were preaching. The reason the gospel of the new covenant saves is because it is from God. Paul and his partners were simply ministers of this new covenant, which does not operate through the letter of the law but through the Spirit of God.

7 But if the ministration of death, written *and* engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which *glory* was to be done away: 8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

“But if the ministration of death, written *and* engraven in stones, was glorious” – The “ministration of death” refers to the Mosaic Law, which could not bring salvation. The law could not enable us to obey God's righteousness; it could only condemn us to death when we didn't. Despite the law being a “ministration of death,” however, it did have glory associated with it.

“so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance” – Paul uses the fact that Moses' face glowed after spending 40 days exposed to the glory of the LORD (Ex. 34:29-35) to illustrate the glory associated with the Mosaic Law, which was not given by man. It was given by God and its glory came from the fact that the righteous standard it enforced reflected God's nature, will and character.

“which *glory* was to be done away” – God never intended for the law to be the way of salvation for His people. During his discussion of the role of the law in Gal. 3, Paul states that it was given to keep sin in check until the time when Christ would enter the world (**Gal. 3:19** “*Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator*”). A few verses later, Paul states that the law was incapable of giving us salvation but was given to instruct us as a schoolmaster to show us our need of a Savior (**Gal. 3:21-24** “*Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*”). Just as the glory of Moses' glowing face eventually faded, the glory associated with the law faded when God's plan to give salvation through faith in Christ was revealed.

“How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?” – If the temporary solution to sin (the law) had glory, how much more does God's actual plan for salvation (through Christ), administered through the Spirit, be glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation *be* glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

“For if the ministration of condemnation *be* glory” – Paul states the same fact again in a different way to drive his point home. The law was “the ministration of condemnation” because, even though it enforced the righteousness of God, it could only condemn us. Human beings are unable to keep the law because we are unable to meet God's requirements of sinless perfection (**Rom. 8:3-4** “*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*”). So if the law had a certain measure of glory despite it being a source of condemnation to us...

“much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory” – How much more glory does the “ministration of righteousness” that comes through Jesus Christ have? The law could not give us righteousness but faith in Jesus Christ does (**Phil. 3:8-9** “*Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*”). We had to have righteousness to satisfy the law but faith in Christ makes us righteous in the eyes of God (Rom. 8:4, quoted above).

10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excellesh.

Even though there was a certain amount of glory associated with the law, it paled in comparison to the glory of Christ. The glory of the gospel of Christ excels far beyond the law because faith in Christ reveals and solves the shortcomings of the law. The weakness of the law is us, who are incapable of keeping it (**Rom. 7:14** “*For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin*”). However, faith in Christ gives us the righteousness that we desperately need but are sorely lacking (Rom. 8:3-4; **Rom. 1:17** “*For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith*”; **Rom. 4:5** “*But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness*”). Therefore, in comparison to the gospel of Christ, the law had no glory to speak of.

11 For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

Paul again states that the glory of the gospel of Christ is superior to the glory of the law: the law was temporary but the gospel of the new covenant in Christ is permanent. It is not a temporary solution to our sin problem (like the law was) that God has put into place until He implements a final solution. Christ is the final solution to sin that gives us eternal life (**1 Jn. 5:11-13** “*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God*”).

12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

“Seeing then that we have such hope [expectation]” – If your dependence is on your own ability to keep the law, then how could you ever be confident in eternal life? You could make a mistake at any time and condemn yourself to God’s judgment. However, Paul says we can have great confidence and “hope” (expectation) when we put our faith in our unfailing Savior, Jesus Christ.

“we use great plainness of speech [freely; openly; clearly; with boldness]” – Under the Mosaic Law, there was a separation between the LORD and His people. As sinners, God’s people could only worship at a distance because of His holiness. Even the high priest could only enter once a year into the holiest place in the tabernacle where the Ark of the Covenant stood and even then he had to burn incense so that his view of the mercy seat on top of the ark was obscured by the smoke. In contrast, the new covenant based on faith in Christ opens our access to God, as illustrated when the veil of the temple was ripped in two at Christ’s death on the cross. As a result, Paul could speak clearly and boldly about the things of God.

13 And not as Moses, *which* put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

The children of Israel were afraid to talk to Moses because his face shone from being exposed to God’s glory. To ease their fears, he put a veil over his face whenever he talked with them (Ex. 34:32-35). “The end of that which is abolished” refers to the fact that the law has now been replaced by Jesus Christ. The “end” refers to the consummation or the end result. The children of Israel could not see Christ’s coming as being the termination and fulfillment of the law.

14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *vail* is done away in Christ.

“But their minds were blinded” – The veil of Moses illustrates the mental and spiritual blindness that the people of his day were experiencing which caused them to not understand what God was doing or the purpose that the law served. They believed that obeying the Mosaic Law would always be the only way to please God and deal with their sin. They did not understand that the OT sacrifices were “a shadow of good things to come” (Heb. 10:1) and that they merely pointed forward to the One (Jesus Christ) that would ultimately take away their sins (**Rom. 10:4** “*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*”).

“for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament” – The Jews of Paul’s day had the same blindness of the true purpose and value of the law. Whenever they read the OT scriptures concerning the covenant of the Mosaic Law, they incorrectly believed that it was the means of salvation. That blindness continues into our day for most Jews.

“which vail is done away [to make ineffective; bring to an end] in Christ” – When someone comes to Christ, the blindness dissipates as the Holy Spirit enables them to comprehend the truth.

15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. 16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

“But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart” – The first five books of the Bible were referred to as the writings of Moses, or just “Moses.” When the Jews in Paul’s day read these OT scriptures, they believed that they were reading the instructions for obtaining righteousness because the “veil” that restricted their spiritual understanding was upon their heart.

Rom. 9:31-32 “*But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.*

Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;”

Rom. 11:25 “*For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.*”

“Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away” – While this verse may refer to when an individual turns to the Lord and their spiritual blindness (“the veil”) is taken away, many commentators believe that Paul may have been thinking of Moses in Ex. 34:34 as representing the nation of Israel. In Ex. 34:34, Moses wore the veil when he talked with the people but when he entered into the LORD’s presence, he took the veil off. Paul may be saying in this verse that the same thing will happen to Israel when they turn to the Lord. Their spiritual blindness that has veiled their hearts will finally be removed. Notice that it does not say “the veil shall be taken away and then it will turn to the Lord.” Faith always comes before understanding. Heb. 11:3 does not say “Through understanding we have faith...” but “Through faith we understand...”

Verses 17-18: Paul seems to refer back to v. 3 where he declared that the Corinthians themselves were his letters of commendation that were written by the Spirit of God. He says that the Lord (Jesus Christ) is that Spirit and that He is a giver of freedom. Like Moses, whose face shone after being unveiled in God’s presence, we also are “unveiled” in God’s presence and receive some of that glory in ourselves.