

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

text correctly, perhaps even stressing its eschatological implications in light of the new covenant. Paul is, as Dumbrell has said, interpreting the OT “within its own literary context.” William J. Dumbrell, “Paul’s Use of Exodus 34 in 2 Corinthians 3,” in *God Who Is Rich in Mercy: Essays presented to Dr. D. B. Knox* (ed., Peter T. O’Brien and David G. Peterson; Homebush West, NSW: Lancer Books, 1986), 190.

<sup>79</sup> Critics will ask, “In hiding the brightness of his face by a veil, is not Moses dishonest to keep from Israel the transient nature of the old covenant?” The answer, however, is that the veil not only acted as a means of mercy, but as a means of judgment. Ironically, while Hafemann uses the above question to criticize the view that the veil is meant to hide the transient nature of the old covenant’s glory, Hafemann himself recognizes that the veil is “an act of judgment because of the hardness of Israel’s heart.” Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 144. Also see idem, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 330. On the veil as both an act of divine mercy and judgment, see Dumbrell, “The Newness of the New Covenant,” 76.

<sup>80</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 132. Harris adds, commenting on 2 Cor 3:13, “At stage 3 [Moses speaking to the people about the divine commandments with unveiled face] the people would have been dazzled by the brilliance of Moses’ face (3:7) and would probably have noticed some fading of the brilliance even as Moses addressed them (this seems implied by the expression ‘gaze right to the end of what was fading’).” Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 297.

<sup>81</sup> Emphasis added. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 300.

<sup>82</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 204-207.

<sup>83</sup> It’s debated as to whether Paul has in mind an objective genitive (a ministry producing death) or an adjectival genitive (ministry associated with death). The NLT, NIV, and NET represent the former while the ESV, HCSB, and NASB the latter. I tend to agree with the latter translations. See Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 206-207.

<sup>84</sup> Paul’s point is that, although the old covenant with its regulations pronounced doom on the disobedient, its inauguration and administration were marked by glorious phenomena, beginning with the awe-inspiring outward manifestations of God’s presence at Sinai (Exod 19:16-22) and continuing with the reflected glory of Yahweh on Moses’ face after his second period of communing with God on the mountain (Exod 34:28-35).” Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 282-283.

<sup>85</sup> Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 180-181.

<sup>86</sup> Translations that go with some form of fading away include the HCSB, NIV, TNIV, NASB, CEV, REB, NJB, NRSV, RSV. Also see works such as Philip E. Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 109; Linda Belleville, *2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 104; Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 293; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (trans., Roy A. Harrisville; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 85; F. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 191. Watson and Harris argue that though the exact translation is not “fade,” nevertheless, this is the sense of the text. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 284; Watson, *Paul*, 294 n. 42; Belleville, *Reflections of Glory*, 204-205.

However, others argue that “fade away” is not a satisfying translation or interpretation, and instead they prefer “to render powerless” or “make inoperative.” Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 739-46; Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 301-313; idem, *2 Corinthians*, 147-148; Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 212; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 184-185. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* 155, differs slightly, arguing for “to do away with” or “to bring to nothing” (i.e., abrogate).

Still others go with a translation that says it was being brought to an end. See Simon J. Kistemaker, *II Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 118-119; Victor P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 207; Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, 52. A contemporary translation that is similar is the ESV: “the outcome of what was being brought to an end.”

Furthermore, there is also considerable debate as to why it either fades or is made inoperative. For example, Hays, *Echoes*, 134, says “the glory turns out to have been impermanent not because it dwindled away but because it has now been eclipsed by the greater glory of the ministry of the new covenant.” I agree with Meyer, however: “There need not be an either/or equation here, however. God could bring an end to the old covenant by the greater glory of the new covenant, and the ‘fading’ character of the old covenant glory could testify of that eventual eclipse.” Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 92 n. 109. See also Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 289.

<sup>87</sup> Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 286-309; Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 739.

<sup>88</sup> Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 212. And again: “So his face was made ‘inoperative’ in the sense that the glory was snuffed out” (217).

<sup>89</sup> “That radiance [from Moses’ face], however, faded in time and at length disappeared. From the lawgiver, Paul argues to that which he represents, viz., ancient Judaism whose glory, once historically a reality, is now fading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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