

2 Corinthians Chapter 3

1. Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you?

A. Do we begin again to commend ourselves?

1. begin again

a. When Paul first came to Corinth, he had to introduce himself and give all his background information. Now it seems that some questioned his credentials and that he had to validate his right to minister to them.

2. commend- introduce

a. The Greek word for "commend" means "to introduce." Thus Paul was asking the Corinthians if he needed to reintroduce himself, as if they had never met, and prove himself once more. The form of the question demanded a negative answer. - MacArthur

b. Instead of having to receive recommendation of Paul, they should have been the ones readily giving him recommendation for their past experience with him and his ministry. [2Co 12:11](#)

B. Or do we need,

1. need- Gr. chrezo

C. as some others,

1. The "**some others**" to whom Paul is here referring to are the false teachers of [2Co 2:17](#). They came to Corinth with **epistles of commendation**, perhaps from Jerusalem. And possibly when they left Corinth, they carried with them **letters of commendation from the assembly there**. -Believer's Bible Commentary

D. epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?

1. epistles- Gr. epistole- letters

a. Apollos received letters of recommendation from the brethren in Ephesus to the church in Corinth so he could freely minister there to them. [Act 18:27](#)

2. commendation- Gr. sustatikos- commendatory, introductory

a. A solid reputation can stand a thorough checking of past

history and track record. If someone bristles against being asked for letters of recommendation or references, then that is a big red flag for an employer looking to hire someone or a pastor looking to put someone into leadership.

2. You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;

A. You are our epistle written in our hearts,

1. **epistle**- Gr. **epistole**

2. **written**- Gr. **iggrapho**- *to write in, to inscribe*

3. **hearts**- Gr. **kardia**

a. Some manuscripts read- "your hearts" - which would imply that the changed lives of the Corinthians were Paul's letter of recommendation.

b. However, most manuscripts say- "our hearts"- which shows that the love he had for the Corinthians, authenticated his ministry to them better than anything else.

c. This verse shows that hearts can be written upon.

B. known and read by all men

1. **known**- Gr. **ginosko**- *to know by experience or by relationship*

2. **read**- Gr. **anaginosko**

3. **men**- Gr. **anthropos**

a. This reveals that what is in our heart eventually will come out in our words and actions and it was be seen by all around us.

b. Everywhere Paul went he spoke of his love for the Corinthians.

3. clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart.

A. clearly you are an epistle of Christ,

1. **clearly**- Gr. **phaneroo**- *to make manifest or plain*

a. There is a problem today because many Christians are not a clear epistle of Christ. They are more of an obscure riddle!

2. **epistle**- Gr. **epistole**

3. **of Christ**

a. *At first glance, verse 3 seems to contradict verse 2. Paul had said that the Corinthians were his epistle; here he says that they are **an epistle of Christ**. In verse 2, he says that the epistle is written in his heart; in the latter part of verse 3, it seems clear that Christ has written the epistle on the hearts of the Corinthians themselves. How can these differences be reconciled? The answer is that in verse 2, Paul is stating that the Corinthians were his letter of recommendation. Verse 3 gives the explanation. Perhaps we might get the connection by joining the two verses as follows: "You are our epistle ... because **you are clearly** declared to be **an epistle of Christ**." In other words, the Corinthians were Paul's letter of recommendation because it was clear to all that the Lord had done a work of grace in their lives. They were obviously Christians. Since Paul had been the human instrument in bringing them to the Lord, they were his credentials. This is the thought in the expression **ministered by us**. The Lord Jesus is the One who had done the work in their lives, but He did it through the ministry of Paul. -Believer's Bible Commentary*

B. ministered by us,

1. **ministered**- Gr. **diakoneo**- *to serve, minister*

a. In this verse we see the partnership between a minister and the Spirit of God. We minister the Word and the Spirit inscribes it upon the heart.

b. We speak, but the Spirit teaches...[1 Cor. 2:13](#)

C. written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God,

1. **written**- Gr. **eggrapho**- *to write in, to inscribe*

2. **ink**- Gr. **melan**

a. Such as the letter Paul was presently writing to the Corinthians.

3. **living**- Gr. **zao**

D. not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh,

1. **tablets**- Gr. **plax**

a. This is referring to the two stone tablets of the Law wherein were written the Ten Commandments by the Lord. [Exo 24:12](#)

2. stone- Gr. **lithos**

a. As the Lord wrote with his finger upon the two tables of stone and gave to Moses. In the OT God wrote upon two cold pieces of stone. In the NT God writes upon warmed hearts.

3. flesh- Gr. **sarx**

E. that is of the heart

1. heart- Gr. **kardia**

a. The Word of God can be written upon the heart. We see this fact in the book of Hebrews. [Heb. 8:10](#), [Heb. 10:16](#), [Jer 31:33](#)

b. Our tongue is the instrument that does the writing. Our tongue should be as a ready writer! [Ps. 45:1](#)

4. And we have such trust through Christ toward God.

A. trust- Gr. **pepoithesis-** *to have a settled persuasion*

1. Sometimes people are a mess in the natural, so you have to make a faith statement over them in Christ!

2. The Corinthians were a mess in the natural, but Paul was speaking in faith over them.

B. through Christ

1. We are only what God would have us to be in Christ and through Christ. In ourselves we are lost and undone before a holy God.

C. toward God

1. Christ is the mediator between God and man. Through Christ we are reconciled to the thrice holy God.

5. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God,

A. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves,

1. sufficient- Gr. **hikanos-** *adequate, competent, qualified*

a. This word is akin to the Greek word **heko** which means "arrived". None of us have arrived in any area of our Christian

life. Therefore, we are not adequate, competent, or qualified in ourselves. We are however in and through Christ in whom we have been perfected. [Heb. 10:14](#)

2. **think**- Gr. **logizomai**- *to count, estimate, reckon, take into account*

3. **from ourselves**

a. We are mere branches that do not have any life innately in ourselves.

B. but our sufficiency is from God

1. **sufficiency**- Gr. **hikanotes**

a. This comes by grace, not by merit or works.

b. Every called minister of God has a grace and anointing that comes with the call. This is our sufficiency to minister out of.

2. **from God**

a. God is who we receive from through the Vine of Christ.

6. who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

A. who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant,

1. **sufficient**- Gr. **hikanoo**- *to make adequate, competent, qualified*

a. We are made sufficient through God's gift of enabling grace. [Eph 3:7](#), [1Ti 1:12](#)

2. **ministers**- Gr. **diakonos**- *servant, minister*

3. **new**- Gr. **kainos**- *new in quality*

a. The new covenant is totally new in quality to the old covenant of law. The law was focused on achieving, but the new covenant of grace is about receiving.

4. **covenant**- Gr. **diatheke**

a. This is the new covenant of grace. It is the good news. If we are not ministering good news, we are not ministering the gospel and won't have the enabling help of the Spirit of grace in ministering.

b. *A covenant, of course, is a promise, an agreement, or a testament. The Old Covenant was the legal system delivered by God to Moses. Under it, blessing was conditioned upon*

*obedience. It was a covenant of works. It was an agreement between God and man, that if man did his part, God would do His also. But because it depended on man, it could not produce righteousness. **The new covenant** is the gospel. Under it, God covenants to bless man freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Everything under the New Covenant depends on God and not on man. Therefore, the New Covenant is able to accomplish what the Old could never do. - Believer's Bible Commentary*

B. not of the letter but of the Spirit,

1. letter- Gr. **gramma**

a. Speaking of the written Law.

2. Spirit- Gr. **pneuma**

a. The Spirit is the Spirit of grace. When grace is preached in the person and work of Jesus, the Holy Spirit will confirm and work that grace in an individual who believes.

C. for the letter kills,

1. kills- Gr. **apokteino**

a. The law was a ministration of death and condemnation. [2 Cor. 3:7, 9](#) It could not impart life. Only the Spirit through faith in Christ could impart new life. This is by grace through faith.

b. See [Rom 7:5](#); [Rom 7:9-11](#)

D. but the Spirit gives life

1. life- Gr. **zoe**

a. The words of Christ are spirit and life.

7. But if the ministry of death, written *and* engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which *glory* was passing away,

A. But if the ministry of death,

1. ministry- Gr. **diakonia-** *service, ministry*

2. death- Gr. **thanatos**

a. The letter kills. Broken law and sin demand death. [Rom. 6:23](#)

b. The Law is a ministry of death, but the gospel is a ministry of

life. At Mt. Sinai 3000 people died at the commencement of the law. On the day of Pentecost 3000 people were saved and given new life at the commencement of the church age of grace.

B. written and engraved on stones,

1. **written**- Gr. **en gramma**- *in letter*

2. **engraved**- Gr. **entupoo**- *to impress a figure, instamp, engrave*

a. The finger of God can engrave into stone like our finger can write in mud.

3. **stones**- Gr. **lithos**

a. This refers to the two tables of stone in which the Ten Commandments were written. It is important to note that only the Ten Commandments were engraved on stone. Many today say we can do away with all of the ceremonial law but need to keep the Ten Commandments. Here we see that the Ten Commandments are here spoken of specifically and are called the ministry of death! In a few verses they will be called the ministry of condemnation as well.

b. The Ten Commandment are for unbelievers to be convinced of their sin and need for a Savior. Once we are born again, we don't need the Ten Commandments to rule our lives. We have the higher laws of grace in our heart- love, faith, and the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. These laws will empower us to holy living much more than trying to keep the Ten Commandments in our own natural strength.

C. was glorious,

1. **glorious**- Gr. **en doxa**

a. *The old covenant was **glorious**. Not only did Moses' face shine, but thunder, lightning, earthquakes, dense clouds, blazing fire, and a deafening trumpet blast accompanied its inauguration at Mount Sinai ([Exo 19:16-20](#)). -Life Application Commentary*

D. so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because the glory of his countenance,

1. **children**- Gr. **huios**- *mature sons with family rights*

a. Paul uses this Greek word *do* to denote the covenant people of God with covenant rights if the covenant is kept.

2. Israel

3. look steadily- Gr. **atenzio-** *to fix one's eyes upon, look steadily, gaze intently, look straight; stare.*

a. Under the law people could not look at God's glory. Under the New Testament we can look at the glory of the Lord with unveiled face and be transformed by it! [2 Cor. 3:18](#)

4. face- Gr. **prosopon**

a. Under the law people looked at the face of Moses, which at times was veiled. Under the New Covenant we are to look at the face of Jesus. [Col. 3:1](#) Jesus never veils His face.

5. Moses- means "*drawing out*"

6. glory- Gr. **doxa**

7. countenance- Gr. **prosopon**

a. Moses countenance shined with glory because he looked steadily at the Lord at Mt. Sinai. This will happen to us when we also look steadily at the face of Jesus through the looking glass of the Word.

E. which glory was passing away.

1. passing away- Gr. **katargeo-** *to cease, to pass away, be done away*

a. The glory of Jesus will never pass away. Praise God!

b. Here it appears that Moses put a veil over His face not because it was shining with glory, but because it was starting to fade.

c. Religion is about wearing masks of glory to hide the lack of it behind!

8. how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?

A. ministry- Gr. **diakonia**

B. Spirit- Gr. **pneuma**

1. The ministry of the Spirit is the ministry of grace. Grace is the enablement of God. The Spirit is the agent that imparts the enabling.

2. When faith is placed in Jesus and His finished work, grace is

released by the power of the Spirit of God.

C. glorious- Gr. **en doxa-** *in glory*

1. The ministry of the gospel is more glorious in scope and length than that of the Law. The ministry of the Law was just confined to Israel. The ministry of the gospel is for the whole world. The glory of the Law has been diminished now with the Law being put away with the coming of the New Covenant. However, the glory of the gospel will last throughout eternity.

2. The glory of the Law was physical and natural in nature. The glory of the gospel is spiritual in nature which is often displayed in natural glory- miracles, signs, and wonders.

9. For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.

A. For if the ministry of condemnation had glory,

1. ministry- Gr. **diakonia**

a. In this age of grace this ministry is no longer valid, however, many are still engaged in it. They preach the law to the saints week in and week out, which leads to condemnation.

2. condemnation- Gr. **katakrisis-** *a judgment against*

a. The law ministers condemnation.

3. glory- Gr. **doxa**

a. This was a natural outward glory displayed at Mt. Sinai.

B. the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.

1. righteousness- Gr. **dikaiosune**

a. The gospel ministers righteousness. [Rom 1:17](#)

b. New Testament ministry will reveal the righteousness that belongs to the saints by faith in Jesus.

c. In the New Testament we are to exhort people to break from sin, not in order to be righteous, but because they are righteous!

2. much more

a. This “much more” glory is much more in scope and in length. It contains spiritual and natural glory.

10. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels.

A. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect,

1. glorious- Gr. **doxazo**

2. respect- Gr. **meros- part**

a. Compared to grace the law is beggarly. [Gal. 4:9](#)

B. because of the glory that excels

1. excels- Gr. **huperballo-** *to throw beyond, excel*

a. The stars and moon shine at night but when the brilliance of the sun emerges then the moon and stars completely disappear. This is the same with the law and grace. Grace eclipses the law by its brilliance.

11. For if what is passing away *was* glorious, what remains *is* much more glorious.

A. For if what is passing away was glorious,

1. passing away- Gr. **katargeo-** *to cease, to pass away, be done away*

a. Paul uses the words "passing away" instead of passed away. This is because the Temple in Jerusalem was still functioning. It would not be destroyed until 70 A. D. This letter was written somewhere around 55 A.D.

b. The Temple in Jerusalem was central to the law. Many sacrifices prescribed in the law had to be offered in the Temple. Without the Temple the law was destroyed as a system of adherence. The law was a composite of 613 individual commands in which if one was violated or not kept then the whole was broken. [James 2:10](#)

2. glorious- Gr. **dia doxa-** *through glory*

B. what remains is much more glorious

1. remains- Gr. **meno**

a. After 70 A.D. and the destruction of the temple the gospel and grace remained.

2. glorious- **en doxa-** *in glory*

a. It is more glorious in scope and endurance. It also brings more glory to God in that the law justified no one. God's grace will save many unto His glory.

12. Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—

A. Therefore,

B. since we have such hope,

1. **hope-** Gr. **elpis-** *confident expectation of good*

a. The gospel gives us hope through grace. The law does not minister hope, but only the fear of condemnation and death.

C. we use great boldness of speech

1. **great-** Gr. **polus-** *much*

2. **boldness of speech-** Gr. **parrhesia-** *all out-spokenness, freedom of speech*

a. People who have hope are bold. People who don't have hope shrink back into the shadows.

b. People of hope are proclaimers of hope.

c. In an environment of despair there is silence. In the presence of hope there is occasion to shout!

13. unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.

A. unlike Moses,

1. **unlike**

a. Paul in the last verse said they were bold to proclaim the gospel, but that is unlike what Moses did. He hid his face which also covered his mouth. There is no hope under the law. There is no boldness under the law.

b. The law was given to silence people so they have nothing to say! [Rom. 3:19](#)

2. **Moses-** means *drawn out*

a. Moses is the representative of the law.

B. *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away

1. **put**- Gr. **tithemi**- *to place*

2. **veil**- Gr. **kaluma**

a. This veil represents the law itself. This is the same word as the veil that separates the glory of God in the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place.

b. The law always puts your eyes on yourself. When a veil is over your face your view is constrained every direction but down upon yourself.

3. **face**- Gr. **prosopon**

4. **children**- Gr. **huios**- *mature son with family rights*

a. They were the covenant children of God with covenant rights as long as they kept the covenant.

5. **Israel**

a. The covenant of the law was only given to Israel and not any of the gentiles.

6. **look steadily**- Gr. **atenzio**- *to fix one's eyes upon, look steadily, gaze intently, look straight; stare*

7. **passing away**- Gr. **katargeo**- *to cease, to pass away, be done away*

a. Moses did not want the people to see the glory fading, not because he did not want them to look at the glory.

b. Legalism always uses masks to hide the lack of glory.

14. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ.

A. But their minds were blinded

1. **minds**- Gr. **noema**- *thinking, thoughts*

a. The mind is the doorway to the heart. The heart can only be changed but what the mind is aware of and focused on.

b. Satan's main goal is to blind people's minds to the truth.

[2Co 4:4](#)

2. **blinded**- Gr. **poroo**- *harden, make dull*

a. Unbelief will harden your heart.

b. You will be hardened to what you focus on and soften to

what you do focus on. Under the law the focus is on yourself and not the Lord. When you give up on yourself and turn to the Lord the veil is removed and you can see clearly and your heart becomes soft. [See Paul's testimony in [Rom. 7](#)]

B. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament,

1. day- Gr. **hemera**

a. The present day when Paul was writing. This is why God will repeatedly warn Paul not to go to Jerusalem because of this very thing.

2. veil- Gr. **kaluma**

3. remains- Gr. **meno**

a. This veil still remains over all adherents to the law. They are self-focused down upon themselves.

4. unlifted- Gr. **anakalupto me**

a. Someone can't remove the veil themselves. Only the Spirit of God can remove it when someone turns to Christ.

5. reading- Gr. **anagnosis**

a. Reading the scriptures is important, but we need to do it to see the glory of the Lord, not to see the glory of us!

6. Old Testament- Gr. **palios diatheke-** *antiquated covenant*

a. Namely the reading of the law.

C. because the veil is taken away in Christ

1. taken away- Gr. **katargeo-** *to cease, to pass away, be done away*

a. This has to be done for us by the Spirit. We can't remove it ourselves.

2. Christ- Gr. **christos-** *The Anointed One*

a. One can't perceive spiritual truth until they are born again in Christ.

b. It is possible to be born again and return to the law and this veil somewhat will cover your mind again. When someone first is saved, they will experience the grace and love of God and see God, but then they go to church and are often put back under the law. Their focus gets off of Jesus to themselves.

When a Christian trying to live under the law turns to Christ for His grace this veil will once again be removed.

15. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.

A. But even to this day,

1. day- Gr. *hemera*

a. The day in which Paul is writing this letter.

B. when Moses is read,

1. Moses- means *drawn out*

a. In the New Covenant church we should read Christ every Sunday! Even if we are reading out of the law, we should look for Christ, teaching and preaching Him.

2. read- Gr. *anaginosko-* *to know accurately, to read*

a. Those who have not learned to read are ignorant, as are those who choose not to read!

b. Moses [the law] was read in every Jewish synagogue every Sabbath [Saturday]. [Act 13:27](#)

C. a veil lies on their heart

1. veil- Gr. *kaluma*

a. This is legalism.

2. lies- Gr. *keimai*

3. heart- Gr. *kardia*

a. The heart is the place of beliefs. Legalistic beliefs can only be removed by the Spirit when someone beholds Jesus and His finished work for us.

b. Many churches only preach what you must do to be right with God. Churches need to preach Christ and His finished work. It is only by beholding the glory of the Lord will be changed from the inside out by the Spirit of God. [vs. 18](#)

16. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

A. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord,

1. turns- Gr. *epistrepho-* *to turn upon, toward*

a. The Lord is reaching out to every man, woman, and child on the planet. He is calling them. However, they must choose to turn to Him.

b. God got Saul's attention on the road to Damascus. He turned to the Lord and asked, "Who are you Lord?" The response was, "I am Jesus". Scales came on his eyes which closed his natural eyes but the eyes of his heart were opened. The scales on his natural eyes were removed when he was baptized as a disciple of Christ. Then he received great revelations for him to impart to the church.

2. Lord- Gr. kurios

a. The Lord Jesus

B. the veil is taken away

1. veil- Gr. kaluma

2. taken away- Gr. periaireo- *to take away that which surrounds or envelopes a thing*

a. Again, this must done for us. We can't remove it ourselves. It is taken away by God's grace.

17. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.

A. Now the Lord is the Spirit;

1. Lord- Gr. kurios

a. All three members of the Godhead are called Lord. [Matt. 11:25](#)- The Father, [Matt. 7:22](#)- Jesus, [2 Cor. 3:17](#)- The Spirit

2. Spirit- Gr. pneuma

a. Some commentators say this a small "s" and say that the Lord [Jesus] is the "spirit" [essence] of the law. I don't take that view. I believe this verse is revealing the deity of the Holy Spirit. He is equally Lord with God the Father, and God the Son. He is God the Holy Spirit.

B. and where the Spirit of the Lord is,

1. Lord- Gr. kurios

a. The Holy Spirit is both the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord-

God the Father.

C. there is liberty

1. liberty- Gr. **eleutheria**

a. The Spirit sets people free when they turn to Jesus. Jesus and the truth of His finished work are the basis for their freedom. [Joh 8:32](#) However, the Spirit is the means by which they are set free.

18. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

A. But we all,

1. we

a. This is speaking of believers who have turned to the Lord, however, even a believer can have the veil put back on their heart if they turn back to the law to be justified or sanctified.

B. with unveiled face,

1. unveiled- Gr. **anakalupto-** *uncover*

a. Legalistic mentality has been removed.

2. face- Gr. **prosopon**

C. beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord,

1. beholding as in a mirror- Gr. **katoptrizomai-** *mid. to have presented in a mirror, to have a clear image presented, or, to reflect*

a. This brings out a spiritual truth, that what we continually behold we become outwardly. [1Jn 3:2](#)

b. Ex. Sheep giving birth to spotted and streaked lambs by beholding streaked rods in the watering troughs. [Gen. 30:39](#)

c. Just beholding the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ through the Word will bring a transformation from the inside out by the Spirit of God. This is transformation by grace. How simple is it to behold Jesus!

2. glory- Gr. **doxa**

a. God's glory is His goodness, grace, and mercy. See [Ex. 33:18-34:6](#)

3. Lord- Gr. kurios

- a. The Word of God is a mirror in which we can see the glory of the Lord Jesus. This is an actual reflection of what we look like in our born-again Spirit. We share the same DNA!
- b. Notice we are to look into the Word of God to behold the glory of the Lord, but many look in the Word and only behold the glory of themselves in the flesh!

D. are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory,

1. **transformed-** Gr. **metamorphoo-** *the changing of outward expression from that which one has to a different one, an expression which comes from and is representative of one's inner being.* Wuest Word Studies

- a. Under the New Covenant of grace we are not called to mere outward change, but to transformation. Transformation means you outwardly take on an expression that is indicative of one's inner essence.
- b. When we are born again our spirit takes on the same nature of Jesus. When we renew our mind by beholding the glory of the Lord- His Person and His finished work, then we are transformed outwardly into the same image of what is true in our born-again spirit. Our outward life will match who we are in the spirit. Likewise, our outward life will look more and more like Jesus' outward life.

2. **image-**Gr. **eikon-** *an image, figure, likeness*

E. just as by the Spirit of the Lord

1. **Spirit-** Gr. **pneuma**

- a. Under the law change is accomplished by will-power. Under grace transformation [from the inside out] is accomplished by Spirit power!