

## Introduction to *Galatians*: “new covenant” part 2

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All passages from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

### What is the “New covenant”?

- **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3 — new covenant vs. “old covenant”; “ministry of death/condemnation” vs. “ministry of righteousness”**

“Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? 2 You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. 10 For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. 11 For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory. 12 Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, 13 and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. 14 But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. 15 But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; 16 but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 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 from the Lord, the Spirit.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3)

- What is the point of this passage?
  - Some in Corinth, or influencing believers there, were questioning by what authority Paul and his companions were proclaiming this “gospel” (v. 1), which he called later in the letter the “ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor 5:18–19).
    - Uses of the word *ministry* come from διακονία (*diakonia*, Strong’s lexicon No. G1248):
      - Thayer: “service, ministering, especially of those who execute the commands of others”<sup>1</sup>
      - BDAG: “service rendered in an intermediary capacity, mediation, assignment”<sup>2</sup>
    - The leadership of Israel were operating under God’s command to condemn anyone who violated God’s commands, statutes and ordinances.
      - Depending on the severity of the offense in God’s eyes, penalties ranged from fines to exile to indentured servitude to death.
    - The Levitical priesthood were operating under God’s command to present offerings to Him for the people, including the leadership and priesthood themselves, as part of atonement, i.e. reconciliation, between the people and God.
      - As detailed in Hebrews 7–10, the Levitical priesthood’s reconciliation had to be performed repeatedly, first for themselves and then for the people.
  - Paul summed up chapter 3:
    - Continuing the illustration of the veil and what was behind it:

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 in whose case the god of this world [literally, age] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. 6 For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 4:3–6)
    - Clarifying that “lifting the veil” to see God’s true message of condemnation, reconciliation and righteousness required him to “have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating [literally, creating a trap with] the word of God” (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 4:2).
      - Commentator David Stern notes that defenses against accusations of deceptive tactics and Scripture interpretation are scattered throughout this letter (1:12–24; 2:17; 3:1; 7:2).<sup>3</sup>

1 Thayer, Joseph H. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

2 Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

3 Stern, David H. “2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 4:1–2.” *Jewish New Testament Commentary: a Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament*.

- Paul also made a lengthy defense of his service to the congregation in Thessalonica (1<sup>st</sup> Thess. 2:1–3:5).
- In a letter to Timothy, Paul wrote that “accurately handling [literally, cutting straight] the word of truth” (2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 2:15) was necessary to gaining God’s approval as one of His servants.
- Peter also defended Paul’s teaching of as accurately reflecting the Scriptures:
 

“Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2<sup>nd</sup> Pet. 3:14–16)

  - “found by Him in peace” — Be reconciled with God by via Yeshua’s “ministry of reconciliation.”
  - “spotless and blameless” — Be declared righteous via Yeshua’s “ministry of righteousness,” which is a continual activity of God’s Spirit under the New Covenant, as foretold by Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Moses.
  - “untaught” — Opponents to Paul’s “good news” were untaught [ἀμαθής *amathes*, G0261] concerning the Scriptures.
    - They either don’t know or can’t see the “torah” (lesson) in the Torah.
    - Lukas described Peter and the apostle Yokhanan as “uneducated [ἀγράμματος *agrammatos*, G0062] and untrained [ἰδιώτης *idiotes*, G2399]” (Acts 4:13 NASB).
  - “unstable” — The opposite of στηρίζω (*sterizo*, G4741), or “steady,” “established.”<sup>4</sup>
    - Without a proper understanding of God’s instructions, one cannot be “established” in the correct path for life, especially in knowing how to be reconciled with God.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Prov. 1:7)

  - One must know that the LORD will condemn him to learn what how to live a life that is truly complete and not just filled with one diversion after the next.
  - Some atheists say they live a grounded and complete life, because they are at peace with themselves and others.
    - However, by denying the LORD, they are denying the reality of the Creator.
    - By denying the Creator, they are denying the Creator’s order, even though they have adopted morality derived from knowledge of the Creator in eons past.

“The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.” (Isa. 11:2)

  - This prophecy points to the Messiah having the Spirit of the LORD on Him, and that Spirit will “blow” through Him to propel His disciples toward dread of the LORD’s condemnation and understanding of the Messiah’s “ministry of reconciliation.”

“So the church [literally, “assembly,” from ἐκκλησία *ekklesia*, G1577] throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.” (Acts 9:31)

  - Dread of God’s condemnation for unlawful behavior and comfort of His mercy through the Spirit’s changing our hearts to live lawfully are key drivers of the reconciliation of Israel and the world to God.
  - “Fear of the Lord” comes from knowing that the LORD will condemn sinners.
  - “Comfort of the Holy Spirit” comes from having been declared righteous before God via the “ministry of reconciliation” of Messiah and moving though life toward ever more lawful behavior by the “ministry of righteousness.”
  - The foundation for the services of condemnation, reconciliation and righteousness are in “letters engraved on stone” (3:7).
    - Now to the key questions: Is the “old covenant” (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 3:7) the body of Scripture commonly called the

Clarksville, Md: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992.

4 Thomas, Robert L., ed. *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*. La Habra: Lockman Foundation, 1981.

- “Old Testament,” a veil to the glory of God that needed to be “removed” or “abolished” in Christ (v. 14)?
- This is the only reference to “old covenant” in the Bible. The next known use of the term is by Melito of Sardis in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>
  - Paul said that he and his companions were “servants/ministers of a new covenant” (v. 6).
    - Apostolic references to “new covenant” quote from Jer. 31:31–34, which along with Ezek. 36:25–27 point to God’s Spirit writing His laws, which are detailed in the “Old Testament” on the hearts of believers.
  - The “ministry of death” (3:7), also called the “ministry of condemnation” (v. 9), was “in letters carved in stone” (v. 7).
    - The Ten Commandments in the Sinai covenant (Exodus 20) were engraved on stone tablets, so they seem to be at the heart of the “ministry of condemnation.”
      - Violation of these commands often brought death.
        - Coveting — literally, “intensely desiring” — wasn’t actionable by civil authority until it led to violation of the other commandments.
        - Testifying falsely would garner the perjurer whatever punishment was coming to the accused, which would be death for a capital crime.
      - Paul wrote that the “ministry of condemnation” “came in glory” (v. 7).
        - Moshe’s face was shining with the glory of God when he came down from Sinai with the tablets of the testimony, so much so that high priest Aharon and the people couldn’t take it (Ex. 34:29–35).
          - “Shine” in the passage is translated from קָרַן (*qaran*, H7160), the verb form of a noun commonly used in Scripture for “horn.” It seems to convey that being in God’s Presence dwelling in another person is as uncomfortable as being gored by an animal with horns.
          - Moshe could remove the veil in the presence of God, so is the promise of our eventual dwelling in the presence of God (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13).
        - Most of the references to “fading” in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3 come from καταργέω (*katargeo*, G2673), which can also mean “abolish” and “come to an end.”
          - Paul wrote in his letter to the congregation in Rome that of faith in Messiah didn’t *katargeo* the Law, rather it upheld it (Rom. 3:11).
          - Later in that letter, he wrote that the Law was “holy,” “righteous,” “good” and “spiritual” (Rom. 7:12–14).<sup>6</sup>
    - Under the Sinai covenant, including the “pattern” for the tabernacle shown on the mountain, sinners came back to *shalom* with God — atonement — via a ministry in the tabernacle/temple that included offerings.
      - Offerings would be “sent up” for sin regularly, culminating on Yom haKippurim (Day of Atonement).
      - The human priesthood would lapse in following God’s instructions at best and rebel against them at worst.
        - Pious priests would have to seek atonement for their own shortcomings before seeking reconciliation for the people.
        - Wicked priests could prompt God to reject their ministry, potentially creating further division between God and His people.
  - So the “new covenant” truly is new and not a “restored” or “renewed” Sinai covenant.
    - There is linguistic support for translating the phrase from Jer. 31:31 as “renewed covenant.”
      - חָדַשׁ *khadash* in בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה *b’rit khadashah* can mean “to renew” or “to restore” as well as “to make fresh.”
      - God’s laws are part of the Sinai and *kadashah* covenants, so in the latter, the God’s Spirit would take the “heart” of the Sinai covenant and put it into the hearts of the people of God.
    - However, the *b’rit khadash* removes the “veil” between God and the one who trusts in Yeshua as Salvation from condemnation before God.

<sup>5</sup> McKee, p. 30

<sup>6</sup> The *New International Version Study Bible* underscores the glory of the Sinai covenant in a footnote for 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 3:7. However, on the “fading though it was” reference to the glory of the Sinai covenant, the commentators said, “The purposed of the veil was to prevent the Israelites from seeing the fading of the glory.” On v. 8, the commentators add that the “veil,” “prevent[ed] them [modern Jews] from recognizing the temporary and inadequate character of the old covenant.”

- Thus, the “ministry of condemnation” of the first covenant ended with Yeshua’s death and resurrection.<sup>7</sup>
- The “ministry of righteousness” began with and was sealed by His blood.
  - It was foreshadowed by Moshe’s reflecting the glory of God after periods of unveiled communication with Him and needing to cover his face to protect the people from the condemnation of being in the presence of God’s glory without a veil.
  - However, we don’t want to “renew” the “ministry of condemnation,” which had its temporary relief through God’s system of offerings via a sinful human priesthood.

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<sup>7</sup> McKee, p. 35