

**The Surpassing Effects of Paul's Ministry  
as a Servant of the New Covenant  
2 Corinthians 3:14-16  
Part 2**

The world around us for the most part is in a spiritual stupor. They see but they don't see. If you were to ask the people at your work or at your school, "Do you believe in God?" they for the most part, I believe, would say, "Yes." But even though they might say, "yes," I am quite confident, generally speaking, that they would not be able to accurately describe God. Nor would they be able to accurately explain how God might describe them. Nor would they be able to accurately tell you what God wants from them.

And why is this? It is because there is a veil over their hearts that makes it impossible for them to see clearly all that God has provided for them to see. So is this a big deal? It is a very big deal, for as long as this veil remains over their hearts they can very easily believe that everything is okay between themselves and God when the truth is that it is not.

And if there ever was a group of people that I believe illustrates this point perfectly it is the Jews.

This brings us back to our text. Paul, in defending himself against an anticipated attack by opponents, told his readers how Christ through the Spirit of God had written on their hearts in **2 Corinthians 3:1-3**. This reference to Christ writing on their hearts through the Spirit in effect made Paul and his companions ministers of the new covenant.

What was alluded to in **2 Corinthians 3:1-3** was then clearly stated by Paul in **2 Corinthians 3:4-6**. Paul then went on to contrast his ministry as a servant of the new covenant with his opponents ministry as servants of the old covenant in **2 Corinthians 3:7-11**. He did this in order to highlight for his readers and for us the surpassing glory of the new covenant over and against the old covenant.

Having done this Paul went on to drive home his point even further by focusing on the surpassing effects of the new covenant over and against the old covenant in **2 Corinthians 3:12-18**. And this is the passage of Scripture we are presently examining.

So, what was the first surpassing effect? The first surpassing effect of Paul's ministry as a servant of the new covenant was boldness (2 Corinthians 3:12-13). We saw this in **2 Corinthians 3:12-13**.

So now let me read these verses for you. **“Therefore having such a hope [or in other words, such an unshakeable confidence in the transcendent glory of the new covenant], we use great boldness in our speech, (13) and our 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.”** So, what was the first surpassing effect of Paul's ministry as a servant of the new covenant? It was boldness.

We are now ready to move on in our continuing examination of this particular text and to the second surpassing effect of Paul's ministry as a servant of the new covenant. And what was this second effect?

The second surpassing effect of Paul's ministry as a servant of the new covenant was unveiling (2 Corinthians 3:14-16). So let us now read these verses and see if this is not so.

**“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.”**

My hope for this message, as we examine these verses and this second surpassing effect, is that we might be able to better appreciate the desperate spiritual condition that people are in because of the veil that is presently covering their hearts and that we might better appreciate the position we are in as servants of the new covenant to help them to become unveiled. In fact, we are the only ones that can help people become unveiled. We are the only ones, as servants of the new covenant, who can help people come out of their spiritual stupor.

So how do these verses, **verses 14-16**, fit into the flow of the passage? Paul has just contrasted his boldness as a servant of the new covenant with its surpassing glory, to the timidity of Moses as a servant of the old covenant

with its lesser glory in **verses 12-13**. This contrast raises some troubling questions that will now be answered in **2 Corinthians 3:14-16**.

So, what are those questions? First, if Paul openly and boldly mediated the surpassing glory of new covenant by his faithful proclamation of the gospel of Christ to those to whom it was promised in **Jeremiah 31:31-33**, or in other words to the nation of Israel, then why is the nation of Israel not responding in greater numbers to that proclamation? And secondly, does Israel's overall rejection of Paul's message call into question his legitimacy as a true apostle of Christ? These are questions that Paul will now seek to address in **2 Corinthians 3:14-16** and this is how these verses fit into the flow of this passage in **2 Corinthians 3**.

So let us, first of all, look at **verse 14**. **“But [or in other words, even in spite of Paul and his companions’ bold proclamation of the gospel of Christ introduced in verse 12-13] their minds [or in other words, the minds of the sons of Israel] were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted.”** Paul's explanation of why the nation of Israel had not responded in the way that many people would have expected in light of what we just read is because their minds had been hardened.

Isn't that exactly what the verse says? It says, **“But their minds were hardened.”** Whose minds were hardened? The minds of the sons of Israel that Paul had just spoken about in **verse 13** had been hardened.

So how did this happen? How did their minds get hardened? God hardened their minds in response to their ongoing stubbornness and rejection of God's truth (Exodus 10:1). In the same way that God had hardened the heart of Pharaoh according to **Exodus 10:1** after Pharaoh had repeatedly hardened his heart toward the words of God spoken through His servant Moses.

We cannot continually say, “No,” to God without a price being paid. What did Paul say to the Galatians in **Galatians 6:7**? **“Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”** This is the truth. And unfortunately for the nation of Israel they learned this truth the hard way.

They repeatedly rebelled against God and persisted in their unbelief and so God, in response to their self-hardening, judicially confirmed their hard-hearted state which explains why God ceased to send prophets to the nation of Israel over a period of 400 years until He sent John the Baptist the forerunner of Christ who ratified the new covenant through the blood of His cross.

So now let me ask you a question. If God has in fact chosen to harden the minds of Israel in response to their ongoing and persistent rebellion and rejection of His words, can this same thing happen to people today whether they or Jew or Gentile? Absolutely! The result of an ongoing and persistent rebellion and rejection of God's truth will always result in a hardening whether we are Jew or Gentile (Romans 1:18-21).

Let me read for you Paul's words to the Roman Church in **Romans 1:18-21**. **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (19) because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. (20) For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (21) For even though they knew God [or in other words through creation], they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was [what?] darkened.”**

The result of an ongoing and persistent rebellion and rejection of God's truth will always result in a darkening of our hearts and consequently to a hardening of our minds whether we are Jew or Gentile leading to spiritual confusion.

And I am quite confident that there are very likely people here this morning that are spiritually confused because of their ongoing rebellion and rejection of God's truths believing that everything is okay between themselves and God when it is not.

And if there is any doubt about the truth of this concept all we have to do is to look at the spiritual confusion that has characterized the nation Israel from the time that they first received the Law until this present day, a confusion

that is a product of their ongoing rebellion against God and rejection of His truths. Paul will now highlight for us that confusion, which is the product of their rebellion, in the latter half of **verse 14**.

So let us once again go back to **verse 14**. “**But** [even in spite of Paul and his companions bold proclamation of the gospel of Christ] **their minds** [the minds of the Sons of Israel] **were hardened** [Hardened by whom? Hardened by God. And how do we know that God had in fact hardened their minds? Let us continue to read]; **for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted.**” In the last few words of **verse 14** we see the ongoing spiritual confusion of the nation Israel, which is a product of their rebellion against God and their rejection of His truths.

So let us look at these last few words more carefully. Let us begin by trying to understand what Paul meant by his reference to “**the same veil**” that even to this very day remains unlifted.

The “same veil” is referring to the veil that Paul had referenced in 2 Corinthians 3:13 that Moses used to cover his face so that the glory radiating from it would not result in the people of Israel being destroyed (Exodus 34:29-35).

However, though this is the veil that Paul is referencing in **2 Corinthians 3:14** that covered Moses’ face as recorded for us in **Exodus 34:29-35**, Paul certainly did not mean for his readers to understand his reference to this veil in a literal sense but rather he meant for them to understand his reference in a figurative sense.

Paul is using Moses’ veil as a metonymy, which is a figure of speech in which one thing is called by another thing associated with it. For example the word “bottle” can be used to refer to “drunkenness” as in “He is off the bottle.” So in understanding Paul’s use of Moses’ “veil” in this way, what is Paul seeking to communicate?

Paul’s figurative reference to Moses’ veil was meant to be a picture of how their hard heartedness had resulted in them not being able to see clearly the glory of God in the reading of the old covenant. Their inability to see clearly the glory of God in the reading of the old covenant is the evidence or the proof that their minds have been hardened. And what was the consequence

of this hardening that made it impossible for them to see the glory of God in the reading of the old covenant?

The consequence was this: Their inability to see the glory of God in the reading of the old covenant, or in other words being unable to see the holiness and justice of God as clearly as they should have, led them to conclude that they through keeping the Law could be saved or perhaps better said that they through their manipulation of the Law to conform to their own self-imposed external and superficial traditions could be saved. What a joke. But to them it was not a joke. It made perfect sense to them in light of their spiritual confusion, which had been brought on by the hardening of their minds.

If they had been able to see the glory of God clearly in the reading of the old covenant this is something that they would never concluded.

The Law, or in other words the old covenant, was not given to Israel in order to save them but rather to prepare them for the coming of their Messiah by exposing their sin and pronouncing the judgment of death upon it. And if they had been able to see that purpose more clearly they, rather than seeking to be saved through the old covenant, would have prostrated themselves before God in true repentance crying out for His mercy. But they did not do this. And why did they not do this?

What did the latter part of **2 Corinthians 3:14** tell us? They did not do this because **“for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted.”** And again, what was that **“same veil?”** The same veil was a reference to Moses’ veil, not to his literal veil, but to figurative veil that like the literal veil of Moses had kept the sons of Israel from viewing the glory of God on the face of Moses. This is what the veil is referring to in **2 Corinthians 3:14**.

Initially the literal veil of Moses made it impossible for the nation of Israel to see the glory radiating from the face of Moses, but here in this context the figurative veil of Moses is making it impossible for them to see the glory of God in the reading of the old covenant.

This inability to see the glory of God in the reading of the old covenant on the part of Israel began shortly after it had been first given to them while encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai and had continued right up until the

day Paul wrote this epistle. Isn't this exactly what Paul said at the end of **2 Corinthians 3:14** when he said, “ **For until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil** [not the literal veil but the figurative veil that makes it impossible for the nation of Israel to see the glory of God in the reading of the old covenant] **remains unlifted.**”

And just in case his readers might miss the point of what he is saying Paul in essence makes the same point in **2 Corinthians 3:15** when he said, “**But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart.**”

So why weren't the sons of Israel responding in greater numbers according to Paul in the first part of **2 Corinthians 3:14**? The minds of the sons of Israel had been hardened because of their stubbornness and ongoing rejection of God's truth. And what evidence did Paul put forth in order to support this belief in the latter half of **2 Corinthians 3:14** through **verse 15**?

The evidence that Paul presented to his readers, that God had in fact hardened the minds of the nation of Israel, was their ongoing inability to see the glory of God in the reading of the old covenant as pictured by Moses' veil. This ongoing inability made it impossible for them to see the true purpose of the old covenant. They believed that by keeping it they could be saved but this was not true. The true purpose of the old covenant was to prepare them for their Messiah whom they rejected which meant that the veil that covered their hearts and made it impossible for them to see the glory of God in the reading of the old covenant remained unlifted. This is made clear to us at the end of **2 Corinthians 3:14**.

Is there any hope for the nation of Israel that this veil ever be lifted? Absolutely! Though the minds and the hearts of the nation of Israel remains hardened and the veil unlifted, there is a future day coming when this will all change (Romans 11:25-26).

Let me read for you **Romans 11:25-26**. “**For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; (26) and so all Israel will be saved.**”

But until that time when the **“fullness of the Gentiles has come in,”** or in other words until the Church is complete, we as the servants of the new covenant, believing in its surpassing glory, must continue to proclaim the gospel of Christ, the message of the new covenant with boldness.

And why is this? Though the veil that is presently covering the hearts of the nation of Israel will not be lifted until a future time, the veil covering the hearts of individual Jews and Gentiles can be lifted through the gospel of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:16).

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 3:16. “But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”**

The world around us for the most part is in a spiritual stupor. They see but they don't see. If you were to ask the people at your work or at your school, “Do you believe in God?” they for the most part, I believe, would say, “Yes.” But even though they might say, “Yes,” I am quite confident, generally speaking, that they would not be able to accurately describe God. Nor would they be able to accurately explain how God might describe them. Nor would they be able to accurately tell you what God wants from them.

And why is this? It is because there is a veil over their hearts that makes it impossible for them to see clearly all that God has provided for them to see. So is this a big deal? It is a very big deal, for as long as this veil remains over their hearts they can very easily believe that everything is okay between themselves and God when the truth is that it is not.

May God give us the grace to boldly proclaim the gospel of Christ knowing it can take away the veil that now covers of hearts of men.