

**The Surpassing Effects of Paul’s Ministry
as a Servant of the New Covenant
2 Corinthians 3:17
Part 3**

Everyone in this world finds pleasure in something. And it is what we find pleasure in that basically dictates how we live.

Before we met Christ the source of our pleasure was limited to the stuff of this of world. To what we could touch, what we could feel, what we could see, what we could hear, or what we could taste. The pursuit of those pleasures ruled our lives.

But when we come to Christ we have the opportunity to enjoy another pleasure that hopefully over time will far exceed every other pleasure that this world has to offer. And what is this pleasure? It is the pleasure of living in the presence of God and basking in His glory.

And when we understand this pleasure and when this pleasure transcends all other pleasures we will find ourselves traveling down a path of freedom that this world in their darkened state will never be able to comprehend nor enjoy.

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 companion’s ministers of the new covenant based on **Jeremiah 31:31-33**.

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 lesser glory of the old covenant.

Paul then 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). This was spelled out for us in **2 Corinthians 3:12-13.**

And what was the second surpassing effect? The second surpassing effect of Paul's ministry as a servant of the new covenant was an unveiling (2 Corinthians 3:14-16). This was spelled out for in **2 Corinthians 3:14-16.**

We are now ready to move on in our study of **2 Corinthians 3:12-18** and to the third surpassing effect of Paul's ministry as a servant of the new covenant. And what is this third surpassing effect?

The third surpassing effect of Paul's ministry as a servant of the new covenant is liberty (2 Corinthians 3:17). This third surpassing effect is detailed for us in **2 Corinthians 3:17.**

Let me now read this verse for you. **“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”** Now this is a very interesting verse. And not only is it interesting but it is also a very important verse.

So now let us try and understand it. We will begin by seeking to understand the identity of the person that Paul refers to as **“the Lord.”**

So let me begin by saying that we should not assume that Paul's reference to **“the Lord”** in **2 Corinthians 3:17** is a reference to Christ per se. In fact, I believe that Paul's reference to the “Lord” (KYRIOS) in 2 Corinthians 3:17 is not a reference to Christ at all but rather to Jehovah. Not to Jehovah God as manifested in the third person of the trinity or to Jehovah God as manifested in the second person of the trinity, but to Jehovah God as manifested in first person of the trinity, or in other words to Jehovah God as manifested by God the Father.

So whom do I believe the term “Lord” is referring to in the passage we are considering this morning? I believe it is referring to Jehovah God and more precisely to God the Father.

I believe that this was true in **2 Corinthians 3:16** when Paul said, “**but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.**” And I believe it is also true in **2 Corinthians 3:17** when Paul said, “**Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.**” So why do I believe this?

Understanding Paul’s reference to the “Lord” as being a reference to God the Father is consistent with his commentary on Exodus 34:29-35 as contained in 2 Corinthians 3:12-18.

So how is it consistent? Let me ask you this question. When Moses went into the tent of meeting in **Exodus 34:29-35**, which is the passage that Paul is commenting on in **2 Corinthians 3:12-18**, whose glory would Moses have seen? Moses would have seen Jehovah God’s glory or more precisely God the Father’s glory. So let me ask you another question. If Moses hadn’t put on a veil in order to cover the glory radiating from his face after he left the tent of meeting, whose glory would the sons of Israel have seen? They would have seen Jehovah God’s glory or more precisely God’s the Father’s glory.

Now I know that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit share the same glory. This is clear from **John 17** but in terms of the Old Testament and Jehovah’s dealings with the nation of Israel, it is God the Father, the first person of the trinity who is primarily dealing with the sons of Israel.

But of course we know that even though this is what they would have seen, they were prevented from viewing that glory because Moses, knowing their stiff-necked and rebellious ways, chose to cover that glory, the glory radiating from his face, with a veil. And why did he do this? He did this in order to protect the sons of Israel from destruction, a destruction from which the old covenant could not protect them.

It is this “**same veil,**” not the literal veil of Moses but the figurative veil of Moses, that still remains unlifted even to this very day according to **2 Corinthians 3:14-15**. And it is this veil, this unlifted veil, the veil of hard-heartedness that continues to make it impossible for either Jew or Gentile to see the glory of Jehovah God as manifested in the person of God the Father even though His glory continues to be made evident to them in various ways.

So how is this veil lifted according to **2 Corinthians 3:16**? It is lifted when people, seeing their sin and their desperate spiritual condition, turn to the Lord, or in other words to God the Father. This is what Paul communicated in **2 Corinthians 3:16** when he said, “**but whenever a person** [whether Jew or Gentile] **turns to the Lord** [or in other words to God the Father], **the veil is taken away.**”

I know that it is quite tempting to quickly assume that when Paul refers to “**the Lord**” in this verse that he is referring to Christ, but we must resist this initial impulse recognizing the fact that Paul’s words in **2 Corinthians 3:16** must be interpreted in light of **Exodus 34:29-35**, the very passage that Paul is commenting on in **2 Corinthians 3:12-18**.

Therefore in light of this it is best to understand Paul’s reference to “**the Lord**” in **2 Corinthians 3:16-17** and even in **2 Corinthians 3:18** to be a reference to “Jehovah God” or more precisely to God the Father rather than to Jesus, or in other words God the Son.

Understanding Paul’s reference to “the Lord” to be a reference to God the Father is confirmed by Paul’s similar use of the term “Lord” (KYRIOS) in ten other New Testament texts in which Paul is either quoting or commenting on the Old Testament such as he is doing here in **2 Corinthians 3:12-18**. So, what are those other texts?

Those other texts are **Romans 4:8; 9:28-29; 10:13; 11:34; 14:11; 15:11; 1 Corinthians 2:16; 3:20; 10:26**.

So now let me ask you this question. If this is in fact the correct interpretation, then how does someone turn to God the Father so that the veil that is presently covering their heart might be lifted as **2 Corinthians 3:16** indicates that it will?

People, whether Jew or Gentile, turn to God the Father through faith in Christ. What did Jesus say in **John 14:6**? “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father** [or in other words to Jehovah God] **but through Me.**” There is only one mediator between God the Father and man. And who is that mediator? The mediator is the infinite God-man Jesus Christ.

If we want to enter into the presence of God the Father boldly and stand in the midst of His glory without fear of destruction, unlike the nation of Israel, we must go through whom? We must go through Christ.

Do we believe this? Hopefully we do because this is what the Scriptures teach. The sons of Israel were prevented from viewing the glory of God the Father by the veil of Moses when they were encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai. And today people are still being prevented, both Jew and Gentile, from viewing the glory of God the Father by that “same veil,” not the literal veil of Moses but the figurative veil, or in other words the veil of hard-heartedness, but if they, in recognizing their need of salvation, would turn from their self-centered and self-serving ways to God the Father through faith in Christ, that veil, the veil that is presently covering their minds and their hearts, would be lifted thus making it possible for them, with an unveiled mind and with an unveiled heart, to see His glory.

So let me now ask you another question. In the mind of Paul, what would be the means that God the Father would use to manifest His glory to those who turn to Him through faith in Christ in this present day and age? Paul gives us the answer to this question in **2 Corinthians 3:17**.

So now, seeking to discover that answer, let me read for you once again that verse. **“Now the Lord [or in other words Jehovah God] is the Spirit.”** So based on this verse, what means has Jehovah God chosen to manifest His glory to those who turn to Him through faith in Christ in this day and age?

The means by which God the Father has chosen to manifest His glory to those who turn to Him through faith in Christ is the Spirit, or in other words the Holy Spirit.

God the Father sent God the Son, His spotless lamb, into this world to pay the debt of our sin. And once that debt was paid it made it possible for us to turn to God, or in other words to God the Father, through faith in Christ, God the Father’s only begotten Son. And once we turn to God the Father through God the Son, what do we receive? We receive the Holy Spirit, or in other words we receive God the Spirit, who becomes to us the means by which the glory of Jehovah God can now be manifested to us.

And how can this be done without us being destroyed? It can be done without us being destroyed because the veil of our hard-heartedness has been removed when we turned to Jehovah God through faith in Christ making it possible for us to stand before God the Father in the righteousness of Christ made possible through the ministry God the Spirit.

So now let me ask you a question. As those living under the new covenant, or in other words as those who have turned to God the Father through faith in Christ and have had this veil of hard-heartedness lifted, who would Paul want us to identify ourselves with in the story that is recorded for us in **Exodus 34:29-35** based on **2 Corinthians 3:12-18**?

Would he want us to identify ourselves with the sons of Israel or with Moses? He would want us to identify ourselves with Moses, who was able to enter into the tent of meeting and into the presence of Jehovah God without his veil and without the fear of destruction rather than the sons of Israel who needed to be shielded from the glory of God the Father for their own protection.

Therefore if we are here this morning and have received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and have become a servant of the new covenant, then we like Moses can, with an unveiled face and with an unveiled heart, view the glory of God the Father based on the finished work of God the Son through the means and ministry of God the Spirit.

So, what is the benefit to us in being able to view the glory of God the Father on the basis of the finished work of God the Son by the means of God the Spirit? Let us continue to read **2 Corinthians 3:17**? **“Now the Lord** [or in other words God the Father] **is the Spirit** [or in other words God the Spirit through whom we are now able, as servants of the new covenant, to view the glory of God the Father with an unveiled face very much in the same way as Moses did in the tent of meeting. And then what does it say?], **and where the Spirit of the Lord is** [or in other words the Holy Spirit or God the Spirit], **there is liberty.”**

So, what does this mean? What does Paul mean when he says that, **“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty?”**

When Paul uses the concept of “liberty,” he is primarily referring to the positive result of having the veil of hard-heartedness lifted, or in other words having been set free from sin. This is what he is speaking about in a very general sense.

Even more specifically, according to Scot Hafemann, **“This is the reversal of the state of affairs illustrated in Exodus 32-34.”** Or in other words, just as Israel’s persistent hardening to the demands of the old covenant provided evidence of her ongoing and continuing separation from God (2 Corinthians 3:14-15), so too does our freedom from sin, as it is expressed in obedience to the law, provide evidence that we are in fact living in the presence of Jehovah God and His glory through the means of His Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17).

This freedom from sin, as expressed in obedience to the law, is the product of living in the presence of Jehovah through the means of His Spirit made possible to us when we recognizing our sin and desperate spiritual condition turned to Jehovah God through faith in Christ.

Before we met Christ the source of our pleasure was limited to the stuff of this of world. To what we could touch, what we could feel, what we could see, what we could hear, or what we could taste. The pursuit of those pleasures ruled our lives.

But when we come to Christ we have the opportunity to enjoy another pleasure that hopefully over time will far exceed every other pleasure that this world has to offer. And what is this pleasure? It is the pleasure of living in the presence of God and basking in His glory as expressed in obedience to His law.

And when we understand this pleasure and when this pleasure transcends all other pleasures we will find ourselves traveling down a path of freedom that this world in their darkened state will never be able to comprehend nor enjoy.

May God give us the grace to understand the opportunity that we have, as servants of the new Covenant, to live in the presence of God and to bask in His glory.