

CHAPTER 3

The apostle makes an apology for his seeming to commend himself, and is careful not to assume too much to himself, but to ascribe all praise unto God (v. 1-5). He then draws a comparison between the Old Testament and the New, and shows the excellency of the later above the former (v. 6-11), whence he infers what is the duty of gospel ministers, and the advantage of those who live under the gospel above those who lived under the law (v. 12 to the end).

2 CORINTHIANS 3:15

LAW AND GOSPEL COMPARED

In these verses,

I. The apostle makes an apology for seeming to commend himself. He thought it convenient to protest his sincerity to them, because there were some at Corinth who endeavoured to blast his reputation; yet he was not desirous of vain-glory. And he tells them,

1. That he neither needed nor desired any verbal commendation to them, nor letters testimonial from them, as some others did, meaning the false apostles or teachers, v. 1. His ministry among them had, without controversy, been truly great and honourable, how little soever his person was in reality, or how contemptible soever some would have him thought to be.

2. The Corinthians themselves were his real commendation, and a good testimonial for him, that God was with him of a truth, that he was sent of God: *You are our epistle*, v. 2. This was the testimonial he most delighted in, and what was most dear to him they were written *in his heart*; and this he could appeal to upon occasion, for it was, or might be, *known and read of all men*. Note, There is nothing more delightful to faithful ministers, nor more to their commendation, than the success of their ministry, evidenced in the hearts and lives of those among whom they labour.

II. The apostle is careful not to assume too much to himself, but to ascribe all the praise to God. Therefore,

1. He says they were the *epistle of Christ*, v. 3. The apostle and others were but instruments, Christ was the author of all the good that was in them. The law of Christ was written in their hearts, and the love of Christ shed abroad in their hearts. This epistle was not written with *ink, but with the Spirit of the living God*; nor was it written in *tables of stone*, as the law of God given to Moses, but on the *heart*; and that heart not a stony one, but a heart of flesh, upon the *fleshy* (not *fleshly*, as fleshliness denotes sensuality) *tables of the heart*, that is, upon hearts that are softened and renewed by divine grace, according to that gracious promise, *I will take away the stony heart, and I will give you a heart of flesh*, ~~3:16~~ Ezekiel 36:26. This was the good hope the apostle had concerning these Corinthians (v. 4) that their hearts were like the ark of the covenant, containing the tables of the law and the gospel, written with the finger, that is, by the Spirit, of the living God.

2. He utterly disclaims the taking of any praise to themselves, and ascribes all the glory to God: “*We are not sufficient of ourselves*, v. 5. We could never have made such good impressions on your hearts, nor upon our own. Such are our weakness and inability that we cannot of ourselves think a good thought, much less raise any good thoughts or affections in other men. *All our sufficiency is of God*; to him therefore are owing all the praise and glory of that good which is done, and from him we must receive grace and strength to do more.” This is true concerning ministers and all Christians; the best are no more than what the grace of God makes them. Our hands are not sufficient for us, but our sufficiency is of God; and his grace is sufficient for us, to furnish us for every good word and work.

~~4:16~~ 2 CORINTHIANS 3:611

LAW AND GOSPEL COMPARED

Here the apostle makes a comparison between the Old Testament and the New, the law of Moses and the gospel of Jesus Christ, and values himself and his fellow-labourers by this, that *they were able ministers of the New Testament*, that God had made them so, v. 6. This he does in answer to the accusations of false teachers, who magnify greatly the law of Moses.

I. He distinguishes between the letter and the spirit even of the New Testament, v. 6. As able ministers of the New Testament, they were ministers not merely of the letter, to read the written word, or to preach the letter of the gospel only, but they were ministers of the Spirit also; the Spirit of God did accompany their ministrations. The *letter killeth*; this the letter of the law does, for that is the ministration of death; and if we rest only in the letter of the gospel we shall be never the better for so doing, for even that will be a *savour of death unto death*; but the Spirit of the gospel, going along with the ministry of the gospel, giveth life spiritual and life eternal.

II. He shows the difference between the Old Testament and the New, and the excellency of the gospel above the law. For,

- 1.** The Old-Testament dispensation was the *ministration of death* (v. 7), whereas that of the New Testament is the *ministration of life*. The law discovered sin, and the wrath and curse of God. This showed us a God above us and a God against us; but the gospel discovers grace, and *Emmanuel*, God with us. Upon this account the gospel is more glorious than the law; and yet that had a glory in it, witness the shining of Moses's face (an indication thereof) when he came down from the mount with the tables in his hand, that reflected rays of brightness upon his countenance.
- 2.** The law was the *ministration of condemnation*, for that condemned and cursed every one who *continued not in all things written therein to do them*; but the gospel is the *ministration of righteousness*: therein the righteousness of God by faith is revealed. This shows us that the just shall live by his faith. This reveals the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ, for obtaining the remission of sins and eternal life. The gospel therefore so much exceeds in glory that in a manner it eclipses the glory of the legal dispensation, v. 10. As the shining of a burning lamp is lost, or not regarded, when the sun arises and goes forth in his strength; so there was no glory in the Old Testament, in comparison with that of the New.
- 3.** The law is done away, but the gospel does and shall *remain*, v. 11. Not only did the glory of Moses's face go away, but the glory of Moses's law is done away also; yea, the law of Moses itself is now abolished. That dispensation was only to continue for a time, and then to vanish away; whereas the gospel shall remain to the end of the world, and is always fresh and flourishing and remains glorious.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-18

SUPERIORITY OF THE GOSPEL

In these verses the apostle draws two inferences from what he had said about the Old and New Testament:

I. Concerning the duty of the ministers of the gospel to use great plainness or clearness of speech. They ought not, like Moses, to put a veil upon their faces, or obscure and darken those things which they should make plain. The gospel is a more clear dispensation than the law; the things of God are revealed in the New Testament, not in types and shadows, and ministers are much to blame if they do not set spiritual things, and gospel-truth and grace, in the clearest light that is possible. Though the Israelites could not look *stedfastly to the end* of what was commanded, but is now abolished, yet we may. We may see the meaning of those types and shadows by the accomplishment, seeing the veil is done away in, Christ and he is come, who was the end of the law for righteousness to all those who believe, and whom Moses and all the prophets pointed to, and wrote of.

II. Concerning the privilege and advantage of those who enjoy the gospel, above those who lived under the law. For,

1. Those who lived under the legal dispensation had their minds blinded (v. 14), and there was a *veil upon their hearts*, v. 15. Thus it was formerly, and so it was especially as to those who remained in Judaism after the coming of the Messiah and the publication of his gospel. Nevertheless, the apostle tells us, there is a time coming when this *veil also shall be taken away*, and *when it* (the body of that people) *shall turn to the Lord*, v. 16. Or, when any particular person is converted to God, then the veil of ignorance is taken away; the blindness of the mind, and the hardness of the heart, are cured.

2. The condition of those who enjoy and believe the gospel is much more happy. For,

(1.) They have liberty: *Where the Spirit of the Lord is*, and where he worketh, as he does under the gospel-dispensation, *there is liberty* (v. 17), freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and from the servitude of corruption; liberty of access to God, and freedom of speech in prayer. The

heart is set at liberty, and enlarged, to run the ways of God's commandments.

(2.) They have *light*; for with *open face we behold the glory of the Lord*, v. 18. The Israelites saw the glory of God in a cloud, which was dark and dreadful; but Christians see the glory of the Lord as in a glass, more clearly and comfortably. It was the peculiar privilege of Moses for God to converse with him face to face, in a friendly manner; but now all true Christians see him more clearly with open face. He showeth them his glory.

(3.) This light and liberty *are transforming*; we are changed into the *same image, from glory to glory* (v. 18), from one degree of glorious grace unto another, till grace here be consummated in glory for ever. How much therefore should Christians prize and improve these privileges! We should not rest contented without an experimental knowledge of the transforming power of the gospel, by the operation of the Spirit, bringing us into a conformity to the temper and tendency of the glorious gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.