

2 COR. 2:14 – 5:5

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III. Paul's Apostolic Ministry - 2:14 - 7:4

A. Gratitude for God-glorifying Indignities of Ministry (2:14-17) - ¹⁴*But thanks be to God, who always leads us in a triumphal procession in Christ and through us manifests the odor of the knowledge of him in every place. ¹⁵For we are to God [the] aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶to the latter, an odor from death to death, to the former, an odor from life to life. And who [is] adequate for these things? ¹⁷For we are not like the many who peddle the word of God, but like [those who act] from sincerity. On the contrary, like [those] from God, we speak before God in Christ.*

1. Though Paul in the discharge of his apostolic ministry had suffered numerous indignities in the eyes of Greco-Roman culture, he gives thanks to God who always leads them in such a humiliating path, who always leads them as vanquished captives in his victory parade, and who, in so doing, uses them to spread the knowledge of Christ in every place.

a. The verb *qriambeuvw* is used only here and in Col. 2:15, and in both places it likely is a technical term that refers to the Roman triumphal procession. A triumphal procession "was a lavish parade conducted in Rome to celebrate great victories in significant military campaigns" (Hafemann, 107). They were major cultural and civic events and were widely known throughout the Roman Empire. "The highest honor any Roman Caesar or general could receive would be to lead one of these parades" (Ibid.).

b. In these parades, captives from the conquered territory were led in chains before the chariot of the one being honored for the victory, and the victorious soldiers followed behind the chariot shouting "Hail, triumphant one!" When *qriambeuvw* is followed by a noun or pronoun in the accusative case, as is done here, that noun or pronoun refers to a person or thing that has been conquered not to a person or thing that is triumphing or celebrating a victory. TNIV says God "always leads us *as captives*" to make that relationship clear.

c. As Rome's conquered captives traveled a path of humiliation, so Paul as God's conquered captive travels a path in which he suffers indignities. But he is grateful to be so used because his humiliation brings honor and glory to God through spreading the knowledge of Christ. His suffering, which is humiliation in the eyes of the world, is God's glorification because through that suffering the good news of Christ is spread everywhere.

2. In God's eyes, Paul and his companions are, through and in association with their suffering, the sweet aroma of Christ's sacrifice being spread among the people,

who include those who are being saved and those who are perishing. Those who reject the apostolic messengers and their message are in the process of perishing, are heading for damnation, whereas those who accept those messengers and their message are in the process of being saved, are heading for eternal life in the consummated kingdom. So Paul's ministry is not on trial; those to whom he ministers are!

3. Paul then asks (v. 16b) who is adequate for this awesome task of being the aroma of Christ, a task that has eternal consequences. The answer is that Paul and his companions are adequate, for unlike so many others who peddle the word of God for profit, who adulterate the message for personal gain, Paul preaches out of sincerity. He speaks as one sent by God with full awareness that he ministers in Christ in God's sight. As he will make clear in 3:5, his adequacy for the task is from God not himself.

B. Letters of Recommendation (3:1-3) – *Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some, letters of recommendation to you or from you? ²You [yourselves] are our letter, having been inscribed in our hearts, being known and read by all men, ³showing that you are a letter of Christ having been ministered by us, having been inscribed not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not in stone tablets but in tablets [that are] fleshy hearts.*

1. Paul had apparently been criticized by some for "commending himself" instead of having letters of recommendation from others, so he is sensitive to the issue. Those stirring up trouble for Paul in Corinth had come with letters and tried to use that fact to portray themselves as more credible than Paul. They perhaps brought letters from the Pharisaic wing of the Jerusalem church (see, Acts 15:24) or perhaps from other Hellenistic congregations. It seems that they also received or intended to receive letters of recommendation from the Corinthians when they left. Letters were their credentials for operating.

2. Unlike these recently arrived intruders, Paul had founded the church in Corinth, so its very existence served to accredit his apostleship. This is the same point he made in 1 Cor. 9:1-2: "Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord."

3. In other words, their existence as a group of Christians *is* Paul's letter of recommendation, a letter authored by Christ himself but brought into being through the agency of the apostle (just like one who writes what is dictated). Christ used Paul to write Paul's own letter of recommendation through the transforming work of the Spirit in the Corinthians' hearts that accompanied the presentation of the gospel in that city. They are a living letter of recommendation. To question the legitimacy of Paul's ministry is to question the legitimacy of their own origins as a body of Christians.

4. Note that in 3:2 many commentators read "written on *your* hearts" (e.g., Barrett, Bruce, Martin, Kruse). If "our" is the correct reading, which has much stronger

manuscript support, Paul is saying that the memory of their transforming response to his preaching is etched in his heart, which transformation was evident to all.

5. Paul contrasts tablets that are fleshy hearts with stone tablets rather than with papyrus or parchment because stone tablets are associated with the giving of the Mosaic law and he is beginning to compare ministries under the old and new covenants. The fact Paul's ministry resulted in the transforming work of the Spirit on the human heart means he is a bona fide minister of the new covenant that was prophesied by Ezekiel and Jeremiah (Ezek. 11:19, 36:26-27; Jer. 31:31-34; see also, Heb. 8:7-13, 10:15-18).

Excursus on the Mosaic Law

The relationship between the O.T. law and the gospel of Christ is an extremely complex topic that is very difficult to synthesize and systematize. One scholar has labeled Paul's understanding of the law "the most intricate doctrinal issue in his theology."¹ But it is important to understand something about how these pieces fit together to make sense of significant portions of the N.T.

The term "covenant" carries with it the idea of "pact" or "agreement." When made between unequals in the ancient world, the superior typically promised blessings and protection and the inferior pledged loyalty and submission.

The Abrahamic covenant was the fundamental covenant governing the relationship of God with his people. The blessings promised by God to Abraham and his seed were predicated on their trusting God, on their accepting him for who he is (Gen. 12:1-9, 13:14-17, 15:1-21, 18:17-19, 22:15-18, 24:7; Rom. 4:16-17; Gal. 3:6-9).

The Mosaic covenant was an interim, subsidiary covenant given until God's promise to Abraham began to be fulfilled. It specified the way in which the faith of God's people was to be expressed until Christ came. It was entered into by God and the people of Israel at Sinai (Ex. 20:1 - 24:8). This was after God brought them out of Egypt, hundreds of years after Abraham. Its temporary nature is evident in Gal. 3:15 - 4:7 and 2 Cor. 3:4-18; see also, Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 7:11-12.

Part of the difficulty in this area stems from the fact the N.T. writers use the term "law" in different ways. "Law" sometimes refers to the entire O.T., sometimes just to the Pentateuch, sometimes to the Mosaic covenant (as represented by the covenant law), and occasionally to a principle or rule. Most often, however, "law" refers to the set or package of commands that were part of the Mosaic covenant.

Spiritual life, salvation, under the Mosaic covenant was by faith not by keeping the commands (the "law"). It was the gracious provision of God bestowed on those of genuine faith, which faith naturally and inevitably expressed itself in obedience, and repentance at failure, including offering of the prescribed sacrifices in conjunction with which forgiveness was provided (e.g., Leviticus 4-6, 17:11, 19:22; Number 15). That is why Paul in Rom. 4:6-

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 13.

8 can cite David, who lived under the law, in support of the idea that justification is by faith. And it is why he (and the writer of Hebrews) can cite Hab. 2:4 in support of the idea that righteousness is by faith (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). The list of O.T. saints in Hebrews 11 confirms the crucial role of faith in pleasing God under the old covenant.

Of course, the sacrifices prescribed under the old covenant were only a shadow of the true atoning sacrifice on which all divine forgiveness is based (Heb. 10:1-4). God forgave sins under that covenant on credit, so to speak, because Christ, the true efficacious sacrifice to which all the shadows of the old covenant pointed, was coming into the world. And because Christ's sacrifice is the reality rather than a shadow, the forgiveness available under the new covenant surpasses that available under the old in that the blood of Christ *utterly* purifies, purifies even our *consciences* from sin that we might serve God in a greater state of intimacy (Heb. 9:8-14).

The blood of bulls and goats has no atoning efficacy (Heb. 10:4); rather, those sacrifices were the occasion on which forgiveness was granted under the old covenant on the basis of Christ's future sacrifice. The purification that accompanied those sacrifices, however, was at an external level, something that restored a formal degree of fellowship with God but which left a barrier to intimacy in the form of a lingering sense of guilt that was rooted in the intuitive awareness that animal sacrifices were inadequate to atone for sin (Heb. 9:8-14; 10:4). Because animal sacrifices are inadequate to deal finally and fully with one's conscience, their repeated offering served as a reminder of sins rather than as an ultimate cleansing (Heb. 10:3).

The commands of the Mosaic covenant (the "law") provided a *theoretical* way of salvation (Rom. 2:13, 10:5), if they were perfectly obeyed, but because of sin the only way of salvation in practice was by grace through faith. In other words, the commands were never supposed to bring spiritual life because, as Scripture declares, all are under the power of sin and thus are unable to keep the law perfectly as would be necessary for the law to be the basis of one's right standing before God (Rom. 3:9-26, 4:15; Gal. 3:10-14, 3:21-22).

The problem is not with God's law, which Paul in Rom. 7:12, 14 says is spiritual and holy, righteous, and good; rather the problem is with sin (Rom. 7:8, 11-14), this power that dominates unregenerate mankind. (Paul's statement in Phil. 3:6 that according to the righteousness that is by law he was "blameless" does not mean he was sinless but that his obedience to the law was extraordinary compared to his contemporaries.)

Having been given to people who, in general, were not regenerated by the Holy Spirit, the commands of the Mosaic covenant actually stimulated and provoked disobedience, which is why sin so dominates those under the law, under the old covenant (Rom. 5:20, 6:14, 7:5, 8; 1 Cor. 15:56; 2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 3:19 [possibly], 5:18). But God was able to incorporate even this "work of sin" into his plan. The stimulation of sin magnified the Israelites' failure and thereby reinforced the point that grace was the only path of righteousness. This, along with the messianic prophecies, the purity laws, and the requirement of sacrifices for sin, pointed the way to Jesus Christ, the one in whom the promises given to Abraham are fulfilled (Rom. 3:20, 7:7b, 7:13b; Gal. 3:21-25).

John 1:17 (For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ) does not mean that the Mosaic covenant had no grace any more than it means it had no truth. Grace clearly was extended under the Mosaic covenant in that God graciously forgave sins under that covenant. The point is that the grace and truth that came with Christ *replaced* the earlier, less complete display of grace and truth in the Mosaic law, which law anticipated and pointed toward his coming.

You can see this more clearly when the preposition *anti* in Jn. 1:16 is given its normal meaning "instead of" or "in place of" rather than "upon," which it never means. John 1:16 does not mean that from Christ's fullness we have all received abundant, piled up grace ("grace *upon* grace"); it means that from his fullness we have all received "grace in place of grace already given," as it is translated in the TNIV. Verse 17 then explains that statement (note "For" at the beginning of v. 17). The grace and truth that came through the incarnation replaced (and surpassed) that which previously was given through the law.

Though the Mosaic covenant was an interim, subsidiary covenant which was given until God's earlier promise to Abraham began to be fulfilled in Christ, some Jews gave it priority over the Abrahamic covenant and exalted it to the point that the works of the law, the commands that were part of that covenant, became the basis of one's relationship with God and thus the basis of one's inheritance (Lk. 18:9-14; Rom. 3:27 - 4:8, 9:30 - 10:8; Gal. 2:16, 3:2, 5, 10; Phil. 3:2-11). In other words, some turned the law into a legalistic path of salvation. Making salvation something gained by works impermissibly changed the prior Abrahamic covenant by canceling out its promissory character (Rom. 4:13-17; Gal. 3:15-18).

The Mosaic covenant included the grandest and most complete expression to that time of God's moral requirements, but moral requirements did not begin when God gave the law to Moses at Mount Sinai. Mankind was under moral requirements *from creation*, a fact to which Noah's flood bears solemn witness. Those moral requirements had not been given as "law," had not been laid down as specific, express commandments, but they were known intuitively or innately as part of the law written by God on the human heart (see Rom. 2:15), and violating them was sin. In other words, the existence of "law," specific edicts to be obeyed, is not necessary for sin to occur. That is why Paul can say in Rom. 2:12, "For as many as *sinned without the law* will also perish without the law" and say in Rom. 5:13a that sin was in the world *before (until) the law was given*.

"Transgression," however, is a different story. To *transgress* is to violate the will of God *as revealed in an express commandment*. As Douglas Moo puts it, "'Transgression' denotes a specific kind of sin, the 'passing beyond' the limits set by a definite, positive law or command. While every 'transgression' is also a 'sin,' not every 'sin' is a 'transgression.'"² So the existence of "law," in the sense of express commands, is a precondition to transgression. That's what Paul means when he says in Rom. 4:15b, "And where there is not law, neither is there transgression." As Moo notes, Paul in Rom. 4:15 "is not claiming that there is no 'sin'

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 277.

where there is no law, but, in almost a 'truism,' that there is no deliberate disobedience of positive commands where there is no positive command to disobey."

You can see this concept in the parent-child relationship. It is the difference between "you knew better than to . . ." and "I specifically told you not to . . ." Both are wrong and subject to punishment, but the latter is a more flagrant act of insubordination. The statement in Rom. 5:13b that sin is not "charged" when there is no law means it is not judged according to the greater responsibility of specific revelation.

Some of the commands in the Mosaic covenant were peculiarly covenantal, meaning they were not universal moral desires of God. They erected civil and ceremonial or ritualistic ("amoral") distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, probably (at least in part) to keep the people of God untainted by pagan practices in order to help them serve as a witness to their Gentile neighbors of the blessed life that exists under God. A distinction between the commandments of the law is evident in 1 Cor. 7:19 (TNIV): Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.

A new covenant was instituted between God and mankind through the sacrifice of Christ, the effect of which was to render the old covenant, the Mosaic covenant, obsolete or no longer operative (2 Cor. 3:4-18; Gal. 3:15 – 4:7, 4:21-31; Heb. 7:11-22, 8:6-13). And with the fulfillment in Christ of the planned obsolescence of the Mosaic covenant, the *set of commands* that were part of that covenant, the Mosaic law, ceased to be binding.

That the Mosaic law ceased to be binding is clear from texts like Rom. 10:1-4, Gal. 3:23-25, and Heb. 7:11-14 but also from the fact specific regulations that were part of the Mosaic law — such as Sabbath regulations (Col. 2:16-17; Rom. 14:5-6), food laws (Rom. 14:1 – 15:13; 1 Cor. 10:23 – 11:1), and circumcision (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 2:3-5, 5:2-6, 11-12, 6:12-13; Phil. 3:2) — are said to be no longer binding. That is why Paul, a Jew, could declare that he was not under the Mosaic law (1 Cor. 9:20).

Though the set of commands that constitute the Mosaic law ceased to be binding, many of the individual commands included in that law have an ongoing or renewed applicability, and indeed find their full expression, in the new covenant. For example, Paul in Eph. 6:2 commands children to "honor your father and mother," quoting from the Ten Commandments in Ex. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16. The Ten Commandments also are reflected in N.T. commands and prohibitions against murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting. Indeed, there are literally hundreds of commands in the N.T. – dos and don'ts – issued by Spirit-inspired writers.

The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Mat. 7:12, 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14), but some specific conduct is loving and other conduct is not. Love is the center, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself. As Paul indicates in Rom. 13:9, the command to love your neighbor as yourself encompasses the commands of the law not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, and not to covet (and other commands he does not specify). Thus, the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, the set of commands that are part of Mosaic covenant, upholds the transcendent

moral requirements that are included in that law (e.g., Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 10:14; Eph. 6:2). This ongoing moral law, centered in love, is the "law of Christ" (see 1 Cor. 9:21 and Gal. 6:2 with 5:14).

As regenerate, Spirit-filled people, Christians are empowered to obey these ethical norms in a new way (though "not yet" perfectly). We fulfill the law by living out its true purpose (Mat. 5:17-20). These works do not save us, but they are an inevitable accompaniment of our salvation as Spirit-empowered expressions of our faith in God (Jas. 2:14-26).

Because the commands of the Mosaic law relating to circumcision, sacrifices, the priesthood, feasts, holy days, ritual purity laws, and food laws are not part of the law of Christ (see Mat. 15:16-20; Mk. 7:18-19, indicating that the rules of ritual contamination are removed), not something Christians are required to obey (other than as an accommodation), Christ's ending of the Mosaic law ended the requirements that created the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. In this way, he created one new man out of the two, which is Paul's point in Eph. 2:14-18.

C. Apostolic Confidence (3:4-6) – *⁴And we have such confidence through Christ before God. ⁵Not that we are adequate of ourselves so as to consider anything as [coming] from ourselves; rather, our adequacy [is] from God, ⁶who indeed made us adequate [as] ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

1. Paul's confidence in his apostolic ministry comes through Christ, who commissioned him to preach, and is held in the presence of God who knows all things. It is not a false confidence based on human recommendation (see Gal. 1:11-12).

2. Paul hastens to stress that this confidence in his ministry is not self-confidence but a confidence based on the fact that the God who called him to be an apostle made him adequate for the task (see 1 Cor. 15:9-10). His adequacy might not measure up to the world's standards, but his adequacy is the one that counts, an adequacy determined and apportioned by God.

3. Paul mentions that he and his companions are ministers of a new covenant, in contrast to the old covenant (which apparently the intruders were emphasizing). The new covenant is superior to the old in that the old covenant is one of letter which kills, whereas the new covenant is one of Spirit which gives life.

a. On the one hand, I believe Paul is suggesting that Jews who seek to bind the law of the old covenant, the law of Moses, in the age of Christ are misusing it by making it an end in itself, the basis of one's righteousness before God.

b. Christ is the fulfillment of the old covenant. God has "moved on" in his program, so to speak. Those who refuse to move on with him into the new era, who

continue to require compliance with terms of an obsolete covenant, are pursuing their own agenda of righteousness, not God's.

c. When the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant (the law) are applied outside their context of salvation history, they no longer function as part of a larger covenant with provisions for forgiveness but as bare commands. The only way bare commands can offer life is if they are completely obeyed. Since they are not, bare commands bring only death. In other words, when the Mosaic covenant became inoperative all that was left of it was the "letter" (law was divorced from covenant), which because of our sinfulness can only condemn. It is complete obedience or death because the sacrifices provided under the Mosaic covenant are no longer recognized in light of Christ's true sacrifice, which underwrote those shadow sacrifices.

d. Of course, some Jews used the law improperly even during the era of the old covenant by making it a set of rules to be observed in order to establish one's own righteousness (rather than as the revealed manner in which the righteous by faith express their trust in God). This legalism no doubt played a role in the attempt to bring the Mosaic law into the new age.

e. But even in the context of the Mosaic covenant, there is a sense in which the law proper, the commands that were part of the Mosaic covenant, resulted in death. Those commands were external and had no power to transform a hardened heart into one that desires the things of God and thus had no power to transform Israel as a whole into a people who penitently sought God's mercy, which is why Israel had received the covenant curses of death and exile. They generally were hardhearted.

f. As Ezekiel and Jeremiah indicate (Ezek. 11:19, 36:26-27; Jer. 31:31-34; see also, Heb. 8:7-13, 10:15-18), instead of general rebellion and hardheartedness, the new covenant will be marked by hearts that have been circumcised by the Spirit (Rom. 2:29), people who long for God's way and reflect that longing in their lives and who thus have life with God both now and in the resurrection.

D. Glorious Character of the Apostolic Ministry (3:7-18)

1. Surpassing Glory of the New Covenant (3:7-11) – ⁷Now if the ministry of death, that was engraved in letters in stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel [were] not able to gaze at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, though [it was] being brought to an end, ⁸how will the ministry of the Spirit not be with more glory? ⁹For if the ministry of condemnation [had] glory, how much more [does] the ministry of righteousness abound in glory! ¹⁰Indeed, the thing having been glorified has not been glorified in this respect, by reason of the surpassing glory. ¹¹For if the thing being brought to an end [came] through glory, how much more [will] the thing remaining [be] in glory!

a. Referring to Ex. 34:29-32, Paul makes the point that Moses' ministry of the old covenant was accompanied by such glory that the Israelites could not even look at his face when he descended from the mountain with the tablets of the law.

b. He then argues that if this ministry — which was designed to be temporary, which generally lacked the transforming power of the Spirit, and which in the senses I noted is a ministry of death — came with such glory, then the apostolic ministry of the new covenant, the permanent ministry of the Spirit that brings righteousness, must be even more glorious.

c. In fact, the contrast between the two covenants is so great that what once was rightly considered glorious now fades in comparison. As M. Zerwick said, "If the sun is up, the brightness of the moon is no longer bright."

2. Veiling and Unveiling (3:12-18) – ¹²Therefore, having such a hope, we act with much boldness, ¹³not as Moses [acted]; he would put a veil over his face so the sons of Israel would not gaze at the end of the thing being brought to an end. ¹⁴But their minds were hardened, for until the present day the same veil remains at the public reading of the old covenant, not being lifted, because [only] in Christ is it removed. ¹⁵Indeed, until today, whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts, ¹⁶but whenever [anyone] turns to [the] Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of [the] Lord [is], [there is] freedom. ¹⁸And 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, as from [the] Lord, [the] Spirit.

a. Since Paul and his companions have a confident expectation that they are ministers of a permanent covenant (the emphasis of v. 11) that will never be surpassed in splendor, they are very bold or frank in conducting their ministry, as those who have nothing to conceal but every reason for fearless candor.

b. Referring to Ex. 34:33-35, Paul contrasts this boldness to Moses' conduct in veiling his face to prevent the Israelites from continuing to gaze at his face until it totally lost its reflected glory. It seems Moses, for whatever reason, was not bold enough to allow the lesson of the old covenant's temporary nature to be taught through such a stark manner as the Israelites watching his face's reflected glory be extinguished. Rather, he resorted to the more indirect means of veiling his face's fading glory. In doing so, he attempted to make the same point, i.e., that the old covenant was not the appropriate object of extreme fixation (intense gazing) because it was not the final stage of salvation history, but in a more subtle manner.

c. Note that this is Paul's inspired interpretation of the O.T. text. He deduces that the glory of Moses' face faded, probably from the fact it is not mentioned again after Exodus 34 and the fact that in Ex. 40:35 Moses is hindered from entering the tent of meeting because of "the glory of the Lord that filled it." He then concludes that this was at least partly the reason for the veiling.

d. Unfortunately, the minds of the Israelites were too hardened to receive Moses' more indirect teaching. Instead, the veil became an obstacle to their seeing the truth of the temporality of the old covenant. Metaphorically speaking, the same veil was

present in Paul's day when the Scriptures were read in Jewish synagogues. Many Jews continued to be blind to the true meaning of the old covenant, failing to see it as a temporary preparatory agency making them ready to receive Christ (see Gal. 3:24) and thus failed to see the nature of the new covenant.

e. But whenever anyone (with Jews especially in mind) turns to Yahweh through conversion to Christ the veil is removed, just as it was when Moses would go in before Yahweh (Ex. 34:34). Those in Christ see the covenants from the right perspective and thereby appreciate the transcendent glory of the new, the implication being that the Judaizing intruders are not in Christ (note Paul's direct blast in Gal. 1:6-9).

f. Yahweh in Ex. 34:34, the verse cited in v. 16b, functions analogously to the Spirit in the new covenant in that, as Moses experienced the divine presence in meeting with Yahweh unveiled in the tent, Christians experience the divine presence in the person of the Spirit and have the veil of obscurity regarding the old covenant removed when they commune with him, i.e., when they become Christians and thus receive the Spirit. So the Lord in Ex. 34:34 "is the Spirit" in a representative sense. Paul is not saying that Yahweh and the Spirit are the same divine person. He routinely distinguishes them (e.g., in Rom. 8:15 Christians cry "Abba, Father" by the Spirit; in Rom. 8:27 the Spirit intercedes for Christians with the Father; in Gal. 4:6 the Father sent the Spirit), and the very next clause implies a distinction in speaking of the Spirit *of the Lord*.

g. Where the Spirit of the Lord is present, as he is in the hearts of Christians (1:22), there is freedom from the veil that traps one in a misperception of the old covenant, that causes one to under-appreciate the new covenant so as to bind within it the commandments of the old.

h. In the new covenant, all members (like Moses in the old covenant) behold with an unveiled face the glory of God as in a mirror, meaning we see God's glory as it is reflected perfectly in his Son Jesus Christ, who Paul says is the "image of God" (4:3) and in whose face is "the glory of God" (4:6). It is that image of God's perfectly reflected glory in Christ into which we who focus on him are progressively being transformed. As Harris states (p. 316-317), "Justified at regeneration, believers are progressively sanctified until their final glorification at the consummation (Rom. 8:29-30; 12:2; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10)." Resurrection in a body of glory that is adapted to the eternal state (Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:43-44), is "the acceleration and climax of the process of 'Christification'" (Harris, 317).

i. This process of transformation is like ("as") the glorification of Moses that came from Yahweh in Ex. 34:34, who in that text, as Paul has already indicated, functions analogously to the Spirit in the new covenant. As Moses experienced and was transformed by the divine presence in meeting with Yahweh unveiled in the tent, Christians experience and are transformed by the divine presence in the person of the Spirit and have the veil of obscurity regarding the old covenant removed when we commune with him, i.e., when we become Christians and thus receive the Spirit. As Harris remarks (p. 318), "The Spirit, his person and his work, is the hallmark of the new covenant."

E. Conduct of Paul's Ministry (4:1-6) – *Therefore, having this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. ²Rather, we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor adulterating the word of God, but by the open proclamation of the truth, commending ourselves to every conscience of men in the sight of God. ³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴in [the case of] whom, the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so that [they] do not see the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ [as] Lord, and ourselves [as] your slaves on account of Jesus. ⁶For the God who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," [is he] who shined in our hearts for [the] illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in [the] face of Christ.*

1. Because God in his mercy had given Paul such a glorious ministry, had entrusted him to be a minister of the gospel by which people enter the Spirit-related new covenant, he does not lose heart in the face of his hardships and disappointments. He does not waver in the discharge of his divine commission. The glory of the mission or cause makes all his suffering fade in comparison.

2. Paul again declares (see 2:17) that, in light of the greatness of the gospel they were called to preach, he and his companions have renounced all unworthy (shameful) ways of presenting it, such as deception or adulterating the word of God. Paul is either defending himself from false claims that he was deceitful and/or twisted the word of God or is attacking those who did in fact act that way, or possibly both. I can imagine Judaizers claiming that Paul had watered down God's word about the old covenant to make the gospel more palatable to Gentiles.

3. Far from discharging their ministry through ignoble means, Paul and his companions openly proclaimed the truth and thus did the right thing in the eyes of both men (if they would be honest) and God.

4. And even if their gospel is veiled, not recognized for the transcendently glorious thing it is, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, those whose minds have been blinded by Satan. In other words, any obscuring of the gospel that exists is not because of some flaw in Paul's message or in Paul as a messenger but because of the Satan-influenced close-mindedness of those who reject the message (the use of "veil" perhaps suggests an allusion to his Judaizing antagonists – see 3:14-15).

a. In terms of the Judaizers, Satan obscured their appreciation of the gospel by playing on Jewish pride to exalt the Mosaic covenant beyond its intended role.

b. Those who reject Paul's gospel are perishing in that they are on the road to eternal condemnation.

5. The essence of Paul's gospel is not himself but Christ, whom he proclaims *as Lord*. In 1 Cor. 1:23 Paul says "we preach Christ *crucified*." These two elements need to be held together. As Colin Kruse says, "In the gospel, the lordship of Christ is proclaimed

and people are called to give their allegiance to him, but the one to whom they are thus called to submit is also the crucified one, the one who died for them."³

6. Far from promoting themselves, Paul and his companions had become the Corinthians' servants for Jesus' sake. In other words, they serve humanity in obedience to Christ. 1 Tim. 2:4 says God wants all men to be saved, and Lk. 19:10 says that Jesus came to seek and save what was lost. Paul and his co-workers labor to that end. They do so because God had given them the knowledge of the truth in Christ, who is the glory of God.

F. Treasure in Earthen Vessels (4:7-15) – ⁷*Now we have this treasure in earthen vessels in order that the excellency of the power may be of God and not from us.* ⁸*In every way [we are] being afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing,* ⁹*persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed;* ¹⁰*always carrying around in [our] body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might also be manifested in our body.* ¹¹*For we who are living are always being delivered over to death on account of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might also be manifested in our mortal flesh.* ¹²*So then, death is at work in us, but life [is at work] in you.* ¹³*But having the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, and therefore we speak,* ¹⁴*knowing that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and will present [us] with you.* ¹⁵*For everything [is] on your account, so that grace, having extended through more and more people, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.*

1. Earthen vessels, clay pots, were commonplace, weak, and had little intrinsic value. The priceless treasure that is the gospel was entrusted to such ordinary and feeble human servants as Paul and his companions so that there be no confusion as to the source of its surpassing power.

a. In being kicked all over the Mediterranean (see 11:23-28) but still surviving and continuing to preach, they were a living lesson that God was the power behind the gospel. It is he and only he who kept their extreme hardships from breaking them.⁴ They experienced his power in the midst of their own human weakness. As the strength of the gospel's ministers to endure hardship comes solely from God, so does the gospel's transforming power.

b. Had they, on the other hand, been people in whom the world gloried, people of power, influence, and status, people who knew only praise and success, some might think that the gospel's effect was due, at least in part, to their own abilities.

³ Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 104-105.

⁴ Paul says in 4:8 that they are "perplexed but not despairing" whereas he said in 1:8 regarding the Asian affliction that they "despaired even of living." It may be that "despairing *even of living*," being certain one was going to die, is not the kind of despairing he means in 4:8. Or perhaps God's rescue from the Asian affliction taught Paul "that there was no need ever again to despair with regard to any circumstance, for 'the God who raises the dead' [1:9] was well able to deliver his servant from extreme peril, if he so chose" (Harris, 344).

2. Rather than discrediting them as apostles, Paul says that their daily exposure to danger and death for Christ's sake is a sharing in his fate, in the process of his dying, and that this suffering provides the context for the resurrection life of Jesus to be manifested in their bodies. Note that Paul does not actively seek out sufferings in order to be like Christ, unlike Ignatius; rather, the sufferings of Christ are working themselves out in his life.

a. Thus, their lives reflect the very gospel they preach, a message of life in the midst of death. Because they are subject to deadly forces, they are able to be agents for the disclosure of God's power to save, not only in their deliverance from those afflictions (see 1:8-9) but also in their living through them as those no longer subject to death (as those who have already shared in the resurrection life that will be fully experienced when Christ returns – see Phil. 1:20-21).

b. Here Paul is referring specifically to apostles, but there is a solidarity between Christ and his people such that his sufferings overflow into our lives. In other words, all Christians to some extent share in the sufferings of Christ. As Jesus told the disciples in Jn. 15:19, "If you belonged to the world it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." And as Paul told Timothy (2 Tim. 3:12), all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. This provides an opportunity for the reality of the resurrection life to shine through us.

3. In v. 12 Paul concludes by conceding that death is at work in him and his companions, in the sense of "dying a thousand deaths." He adds, however, that life is at work in the Corinthians, suggesting that part of their suffering is endured in their effort to spiritually bless the Corinthians. Richard Bauckham expresses the logic of Paul's thinking this way (from Garland, 233): "If God's definitive salvific act occurred through the weakness of the crucified Jesus, then it should be no surprise that the saving gospel of the crucified Jesus should reach the Gentiles through the weakness of his apostle."

4. In vv. 13-14 Paul speaks of the faith that drives him to preach in spite of the suffering he faces.

a. He *knows* that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise them "with Jesus." As Paul indicated in 1 Cor. 15:20-23, Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits, a sign of the full harvest to follow. God, who gathered the firstfruits, will surely bring in the full harvest.

b. That resurrection is not only for apostles but for all, such as the Corinthians, who have put their faith in Christ. They, along with Paul and his companions, will be brought into the divine presence "on that day." As he says in 5:10, all will come before the judgment seat of Christ.

5. In v. 15 Paul says that all he does and all he endures is to bless people like the Corinthians and ultimately to bring glory to God as more and more people receive his grace and come to praise him as a result.

G. Boldness Reaffirmed and Further Supported (4:16 - 5:5) – ¹⁶*Therefore, we do not lose heart, but even if our outward man is being wasted away, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For the lightness of our affliction, which is momentary, is producing for us far beyond all measure an eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸as we focus not on the things that are seen but on the things that are not seen, for the things that are seen [are] temporary, but the things that are not seen [are] eternal. 5 For we know that if our earthly house, [our] tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made by hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For indeed in this we groan, longing to be clothed over with our dwelling from heaven, ³presupposing that, having been clothed,* we will not be found naked. ⁴For indeed while being in the tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed over in order that the mortal may be swallowed up by the life. ⁵Now the one who prepared us for this very thing [is] God, who gave us the down payment of the Spirit.*

1. For the reasons he has identified ("Therefore"), they do not lose heart, are bold, in preaching the gospel despite affliction. He is referring to the greatness of the ministry entrusted to them, the fact suffering provides the context for the presentation of the resurrection life, the prospect of sharing in Christ's resurrection, and the purpose of causing thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

2. In addition, they do not lose heart in preaching because, though their body is being worn out by persecutions, their heart is regularly being invigorated, no doubt by the Spirit (as in Tit. 3:5). As Bruce comments, his spiritual resilience resulted from the inner resources which supplied him with constant sustenance and refreshment.

3. This ongoing renewal of the inner man, this spiritual strengthening, is brought about (by the Spirit) at least in part through the adoption of an eternal perspective, a perspective that contrasts the temporality of suffering in this world with the immeasurable eternal glory that is the God-ordained outcome of faithful endurance. As they focus on the big picture, on the coming eternal reality rather than on their immediate, transient hardship, they are given strength for bearing that hardship (see Rom. 8:18-25).

4. In 5:1 Paul elaborates on the contrast between this present temporary reality, what is seen, and the coming eternal reality, what is not seen. He knows that if his temporary house (tent), meaning his mortal body (see 4:10-11), ceases to be capable of being animated by his spirit – in other words, if he dies – death will not be the last word. There is waiting for him, kept secure *in heaven*, a permanent house (building), an immortal body, which he will receive *from God* at the resurrection.

a. Remember that Paul had not long ago said to them in 1 Cor. 15:42-43, 50-54 (ESV): ⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in

weakness; it is raised in power. . . .⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

b. As N. T. Wright notes, the statement that the building from God, the house not made with hands, is *in the heavens* means it is in

the place where the divinely intended future for the world is kept safely in store, against the day when, like props being brought out from the wings onto stage, it will come to birth in the renewed world, 'on earth as in heaven.' If I assure my guests that there is champagne for them in the fridge I am not suggesting that we all need to get into the fridge if we are to have the party. The future body, the non-corruptible (and hence 'eternal') 'house', is at present 'in the heavens' as opposed to 'on earth' (*epigeios*) (5:1); but it will not stay there.⁵

5. Paul says in 5:2 that, having this knowledge of our eternal destiny, we in our present state sigh or groan in desire and anticipation, longing in the face of the struggles of mortal existence to clothe ourselves over with our dwelling from heaven.

a. The "groaning" is not an expression of doubt or agony but an expression of hope and anticipation. It is the sighing of a pain charged with hope (see Rom. 8:23-25). This is supported by the fact the verb "we groan" is qualified by the participial phrase "longing to clothe ourselves over with our dwelling from heaven." As Kruse comments (p. 114):

What is being described is essentially a positive longing to put on a heavenly dwelling. While afflictions experienced by the apostle may have caused him to groan and sharpened his longing, this all resulted in a strong desire for what God had promised rather than with a preoccupation with the afflictions themselves -- something which would have been quite uncharacteristic of the apostle as we see him in his letters.

b. The verb "be clothed over" (*ἐπενδύω*) means to put an item of clothing *over what is already on*, like an overcoat. (The verb is an aorist middle infinitive, but it is here often translated as a passive, e.g., KJV, ASV, NAU, NRS, NIV, TNIV.) It is used again in v. 4, but the verb in v. 3 (*ἐνδύω*) is different.⁶ Some believe these verbs are here used as synonyms, the variation being merely stylistic, but I am with those who think

⁵ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 368.

⁶ With most English translations, I take *ἐνδύω* as the original text in v. 3 rather than *ἐκδύω*.

"the double compound is significant and not merely a synonym for the uncompounded word" (Barnett, 261, fn. 30). The verb ἐπενδύω appears only in these two verses in the New Testament and does not appear at all in the LXX.

6. I think Paul is saying in v. 3 that the resurrection hope, the hope to be *clothed over* with an immortal body from heaven, presupposes that those who have been *clothed* with Christ, who have put on Christ in baptism (Gal. 3:27), will not be found naked by God at the judgment, meaning they will not stand before God on their own merit, in the nakedness of the first Adam, but will stand before God clothed in the righteousness of the last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. The hope of being raised "with Jesus" (4:14) is predicated on that identification. In other words, the resurrection hope is for those who have clothed themselves with Christ and not been alienated from him, as Paul warned would happen to the Galatians who accepted the Judaizers' false gospel (Gal. 5:4).

b. The reference in v. 2 to being "clothed over with our dwelling from heaven" is an extension of our having initially clothed ourselves with Christ.

(1) Victor Furnish says, "to 'clothe oneself' with Christ at baptism is to receive the Spirit as a *down payment* on the fullness of salvation (v.5; 1:22; cf. Rom. 8:23), and to long to 'clothe oneself over' with a heavenly dwelling is to long for the fulfillment of what has already been inaugurated."⁷

(2) Scott Hafemann likewise remarks (p. 213), "[B]eing clothed with Christ is the theological foundation to being clothed with our eternal dwelling from God. The believer's union with the resurrected Christ inaugurated in baptism is consummated in the resurrection from the dead."

7. Verse 4 reiterates the point of v. 2. We sigh longingly in the midst of afflictions because we do not want to be unclothed, meaning we do not want to abandon Christ and be left to stand before God in the nakedness of our own merit, but rather want to be *clothed over* with our immortal resurrection body as a result of our being clothed with Christ. Our hearts are set on faithfulness and its eternal reward, so we particularly long for that reward when the hardships of this temporal reality inflict us.

8. Verse 5 declares that God is the one who prepared us for resurrection life, the one who gave us the Spirit as a down payment on that life. The aorist participles (prepared, gave) correspond to the aorist participle in v. 3 (having been clothed) and point to a decisive moment in the past, no doubt the time of baptism.

⁷ Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 297-298.