

# What Does the Old Testament Veil hide?

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## Introduction

Paul's respect for the Old Testament has always been acknowledged. Although he viewed himself as a minister of the New Covenant (2Co 3:6), he strongly believed that his ministry and the gospel he preached were rooted in the Old Testament. It is absolutely clear from his defensive speech in Jerusalem: "I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, *stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place*" (Ac 26:22, emphasis mine; see also Ac 28:23). His writings, as Ellis Earle rightly observes, "reveal a person immersed in the content and teachings of the OT."<sup>1</sup>

Some of his passages regarding the Law, however, still evoke questions and require serious considerations. At times his words seem contradictory. 2Co 3:12–18 is one such passage. Linda Belleville says that, "[a]lmost every exegete who has studied 2 Cor 3:12–18 has struggled with its apparent lack of cohesion and its exegetical ambiguities."<sup>2</sup> Providing some support from other scholars she continues:

The sense in which "the same veil" (v. 14) exists in Paul's day is not immediately clear. The relationship between the veil over the face in v. 13, the veil over the old cove-



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<sup>1</sup> Ellis E. Earle, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Linda L. Belleville, "Reflections of Glory: Paul's Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3:1–18" (Sheffield: *JSOT*, 1991), 17. Regarding the current debate surrounding the letter/Spirit contrast and the context for solving it, see Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses and the History of Israel: The Letter/ Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 1ff.

nant in v. 14, and the veil over the heart of Israel in v. 15 is not readily apparent. The sequence of three contrastive clauses in vv. 13–16 is difficult. The reference to freedom in v. 17 is unexpected. And Paul’s shift of meaning in the expressions πρὸς κύριον (v. 16) → δὲ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν (v. 17a) → τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου (v. 17b) → ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος (v. 18) gives the impression of terminological inconsistency.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>6</sup> In textlinguistics the word “discourse” has a very broad meaning. A paragraph consisting of a few sentences, as well as an entire section of a book can be called a discourse. In order to escape unnecessary difficulties, the word “discourse” in this work will be replaced by the word “segment.” By “segment” we will mean the complete thought of the author, usually consisting of several paragraphs tightly connected to each other by the use of the same lexemes. Several segments either form a section of the book, or constitute the whole discourse of a book if it is short (for example, some of the Paul’s letters).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Linda L. Belleville, “Reflections of Glory”.

<sup>8</sup> See Charles Kingsley Barret, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Hendrickson, 1973), 109.

The purpose of this study is to investigate this passage once again with special attention given to Paul’s attitude toward the Old Testament. This study is done in accordance with the textlinguistics methodology suggested by David A. Black in his book *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications*.<sup>4</sup> According to Black, “Textlinguistics operates on the principle that a discourse ... must be viewed as a whole and taken as the primary object of interpretive scrutiny.”<sup>5</sup> If it is right, then exegesis of any given passage can be done only in the framework and in the context of the whole discourse (segment), the boundaries of which are clearly determined.<sup>6</sup> Therefore the first, and probably one of the most important tasks of this study, will be to determine the boundaries of the segment to which the passage in question belongs. Having done that, we will explore the structure of individual paragraphs and how they interrelate, especially how 2Co 3:12–18 relates to the whole segment. Having grasped the main thread of the author’s thought in the segment as a whole, we will make an interpretation of the passage that, it is hoped, will provide us with the right answers.

### Determining the Boundaries of the Segment

While most scholars agree that 2Co 3:12–18 is part of the 3:7–18 passage which discusses the glory of the new covenant, there is no consensus regarding the boundaries of the segment to which this paragraph belongs. Some see this segment as the whole third chapter of 2Co.<sup>7</sup> Others suggest that it is not the whole chapter, but only a part of it, starting from verse 4.<sup>8</sup> Some argue that this passage should be treated in the segment of 3:7–4:6.<sup>9</sup> Still others analyze this passage in the segment of 2:14–3:18<sup>10</sup> or 2:14–4:6.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to observe that the determination of different boundaries affects one’s exegesis of the pas-

sage and quite often can lead to a different interpretation of it.

In order to understand Paul's thought in 2Co 3:12–18 regarding the Old Covenant and the veil that to this day covers it, as well as regarding the solution the apostle offers, this paper suggests investigating the passage in the context of 2Co 2:12–4:6 which presents a single semantic unit or segment. Several features given below clearly mark this passage as a monolithic semantic unit consisting of four smaller paragraphs: 2:12–17; 3:1–6; 3:7–18; and 4:1–6.

1. The recurrences of individual words and closely related word clusters in paragraphs 1 and 4 point not only to the connection between these paragraphs, but also to the fact that these paragraphs definitely are the inclusio of the studied segment formed in a chiasmic structure.<sup>12</sup> Some of the key points of the inclusio are as follows:

**2:12–17**

εὐαγγέλιον (12)  
 θεὸς ... ὁσμήν τῆς γνώσεως  
 αὐτοῦ φανεροῦντι (14)  
 τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις (15)  
 οὐ ... καπηλεύοντες  
 τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (17)  
 ἐκ θεοῦ ... λαλοῦμεν (17)

**4:1–6**

εὐαγγέλιον (3, 4)  
 θεὸς ... ἔλαμψεν ... πρὸς φωτισμὸν τῆς  
 γνώσεως τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ (6)  
 τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις (3)  
 μηδὲ δολοῦντες  
 τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (2)  
 κηρύσσομεν (5)

The word εὐαγγέλιον, lion is not found in this letter prior to 2:12 and is not mentioned after 4:4 until 8:18. Therefore, while some disagree<sup>13</sup> verse 12, not verse 14, is definitely the beginning of the segment that ends in 4:6.

The word καπηλεύοντες (2:17) occurs only once in the whole NT. Most English versions translate it as “peddling” and the New Living Translation goes even further, rendering it as “make money.” However, taking into account that this verb corresponds to δολοῦντες in 4:2 (which, by the way, also occurs only once in the NT), it may have a slightly different meaning in this context. For now it can merely be said that both participles have something to do with the word of God and that both have a negative connotation. (By the way, the phrase ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ in this segment occurs only in these verses; other occurrences in 1:18 and 5:19 obviously do not belong to this segment.) The verbs λαλοῦμεν (2:17) and κηρύσσομεν (4:5), if taken out of context, are not synonyms. In this context, however, they

<sup>9</sup> See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 34.

<sup>10</sup> Isaac I. Friesen, “The Glory of the Ministry of Jesus Christ Illustrated by a Study of 2 Cor 2:14–3:18” (Th. D. diss., University of Basel, 1971). The boundaries of the segment are seen in the title.

<sup>11</sup> Frank E. Gabelein, General Ed. *Expositors Bible Commentary, Vol. 10* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> A close examination of the structure of inclusio will be done in the following discussion.

<sup>13</sup> See further discussion regarding the connection of vv. 12–13 to v. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. 1Co 2:4, 6; 14:3, 19; 2Co 4:13; Eph 6:20; Php 1:14; Col 4:3–4; 1 Th 2:2, 16.

may well function as synonyms, because “to speak in Christ as from God” is the same as “to preach.” In fact the verb “to speak” is often used by Paul to mean “preach.”<sup>14</sup>

Both parts of the inclusio are marked by Paul’s confession of openness and sincerity. The phrase, “as from sincerity ... we speak in Christ in the sight of God” (2:17) corresponds well to the phrase, “have renounced the things hidden because of shame ... commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (4:2).

2. In addition, some key words are repeated in other paragraphs:
  - a. The first two paragraphs are interrelated by the repetition of the words ζῶη/ζάω/ζωοποιέω (2:16[x2]; 3:3, 6).
  - b. The third and fourth paragraphs in their turn are united by the words:
    1. δόξα / δοξάζω (3:7[x2], 8, 9[x2], 10[x3], 11[x2], 18[x3]; 4:4, 6)  
and
    2. by the same root words κάλυμμα / ἀνακαλυπτόμενον / κεκαλυμμένον (3:13, 14[x2], 15, 16; 4:3[x2]).
  - c. The word πνεῦμα can be found in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 (2:13; 3:3, 6[x2], 8, 17[x2]).
  - d. The word θάνατος in 2:16 repeats again in 3:7.
3. The third feature marking the semantic unity of the segment is Paul’s mention of a third party throughout. By a “third party” is meant those who belong neither to Paul’s team nor to the church in Corinth. Paul uses them as examples to illustrate his arguments. No such group of people is mentioned prior to 2:12 or immediately after 4:6:
  - a. He speaks about being “a fragrance of Christ to God among *those* who are being saved (σωζομένοις) and among *those* who are perishing (ἀπολλυμένοις)” (2:16).
  - b. *Sons of Israel* could not look intently at the face of Moses (3:7);
  - c. Moses 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 (13);
  - d. *Their* minds were hardened (3:14);
  - e. To this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over *their* heart (15);
  - f. Whenever [*a person*] turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away (16);

- g. It is veiled to *those* who are perishing (*ἀπολλυμένοις*, 4:3);
- h. The god of this world has blinded the minds of the *unbelieving* (*τῶν ἀπίστων*) so that *they* might not see the light (4:4).

Thus, we have a segment consisting of four paragraphs. The opening (2:12–17) and closing (4:1–6) paragraphs of the segment form an inclusio. The inner part of this unit consists of two paragraphs (3:1–6 and 7–18), each of which starts with a rhetorical question:<sup>15</sup> “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some letters of commendation to you or from you?” (3:1). “But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory ... how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more glorious?” (3:7–8). These questions are obviously rhetorical because they are followed by affirmations that cannot be put in doubt. The whole inner section is dominated by the word “πνεῦμα” (3:3, 6[x2], 8, 17[x2], 18), which is found elsewhere in this segment only in 2:13. The last usage, however, refers to Paul’s spirit, while the usages of “πνεῦμα” in paragraphs 2 and 3 are made in reference to the Spirit of God.

<sup>15</sup> Paul’s use of rhetorical questions often marks a new paragraph or thought (cf. Ro 3:1; 4:1; 6:1; 7:1; 11:1; 1Co 6:1; 9:1).

### God Who Leads Us in Triumph in Christ (2:12–17)

The connection between Paul’s mention of his move to Macedonia (v. 13) and the discussion that he initiates in the following verses (vv. 14–17) is not immediately clear on the surface. Some suggest there is no logical connection at all, and the existing connection is merely an associative one. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, for example, reflects on this:

The mention of Macedonia triggered in Paul’s mind a memory of the Macedonian churches at Philippi and Thessalonica, which were apostolic in precisely the same sense as he conceived his own ministry... They had so integrated the message of Paul’s gospel that they became a living *kerygma*. Very naturally, then, Paul’s mind moved to a consideration of the nature of proclamation.<sup>16</sup>

While it could have been true, the text does not give clear evidence to support this idea. Unless the recipients of the letter knew something that today’s readers do not

<sup>16</sup> Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 29.

know, such an approach left them to guess the true meaning of Paul's logic.

Charles Barret approaches this passage more critically. He comments: "The story of Paul's anxious wait for Titus is abruptly dropped, and we hear no more of it until it is taken up... at 7:5. The hard transition has led to the view... that... it is a fragment of a different letter."<sup>17</sup> This conclusion, however, raises more questions than it answers.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Kingsley Barret, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 96.

It seems that a better way to deal with a problem like this is (1) to look more precisely to the *structure* of the text and (2) to pay special attention to the *key particles-words* that usually determine the natural flow of the text. Some key words to look for are ἀλλὰ, δέ, ὅτι, γάρ, διὸ, which usually emphasize a contrast in thought, the premise or conclusion the writer wants to make, or just the beginning of a new thought.

The first main thought of the paragraph is expressed by the first active verb in verse 13a "οὐκ ἔσχηκα." This is the first thing the apostle wants his readers to know: he had no rest (οὐκ ἔσχηκα ἄνεσιν) to his spirit. The way this line connects to the previous one assumes a slight contrast: he came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ; he, as it follows from the text, had a good opportunity for this because "the door was opened by the Lord," but he had no rest for his spirit. The author, however, does not make any clear indication of contrast here. Contrast is depicted later in 13c, when he says that, "but (ἀλλὰ) taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia."

**2:13–14**

I had no rest for my spirit  
οὐκ ἔσχηκα ἄνεσιν τῷ πνεύματί μου,

because I did not find... Titus  
τῷ μὴ εὐρεῖν με Τίτον

I went on to Macedonia  
ἀλλὰ... ἐξῆλθον εἰς Μακεδονίαν

But thanks be to God, who...  
leads us in triumph  
Τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις τῷ πάντοτε θριαμβεύοντι ἡμᾶς

**7:5–6**

our flesh had no rest  
οὐδὲμίαν ἔσχηκεν ἄνεσιν

by the coming of Titus  
ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ Τίτου,

we came into Macedonia  
ἐλθόντων ἡμῶν εἰς Μακεδονίαν

But God... comforted us  
ἀλλὰ... παρεκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς

The reason for his anxiety is explained in v. 13b: he did not find his brother Titus. One suggestion is that he left for Macedonia in order to find Titus. This thought finds its support later in this letter in 7:5–6, when after several chapters of exhortation Paul resumes his personal story. It says that “even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest (οὐδεμίαν ἔσχηκεν ἄνεσιν).” The structure and vocabulary of the text in 7:5–6 immediately reminds us of 2:13–14.

The parallel between 2:12–14 and 7:5–6 immediately makes it clear that the discussion initiated in 2:14 has its beginning in verse 12. It is not an “abruptly dropped story,” as Barret argues. For Paul the triumph in Christ is not a new theological thought that he wants to introduce to the Corinthians; it is something that comes directly out of his experience.

The readers of the immediate context do not know whether he hurried to help Titus because he knew that the latter was experiencing some trouble, or maybe vice versa—he did not receive Titus’ much needed help and therefore was upset. Whatever the reason, he could not find power in himself to stay in Troas to preach the gospel, but left for Macedonia in search of Titus.

The contrasting δὲ in the following verse (14) clearly indicates the connection between the thought that has just been expressed and the subsequent discussion: “But thanks be to God.” It is God who is contrasted here against the background of Paul’s weakness, or at least against the background of his inability to preach the gospel under particular circumstances. It is God who is the main focus of this paragraph. It is God who—whether we are strong or weak—πάντοτε “leads us in triumph in Christ.” It is God who—whether we are in Troas or Macedonia—ἐν παντί τὸ πῶς “manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him.”

The following ὅτι in verse 15 further explains this concept. “For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,” that is again to repeat—ἐν παντί τῷ πῶς. Yes, it is true that “to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?” Definitely it is not we, says Paul. We are merely fragrance. Whether you like the aroma or hate it, the

questions should be addressed to the substance that spreads it. And the substance in this case is God Himself. Our task is simply not to distort His Word and to speak with sincerity, “as from God, in Christ in the sight of God” (v. 17).

Sincerity, however, while it is an important quality of a minister, is not enough to prove that one is doing the right things. The Corinthians could ask Paul for additional proofs. Therefore, obviously foreseeing their questions, Paul moves on to give them some additional arguments.

### The Spirit of the Living God Gives Life (3:1-6)

The beginning of a new unit in 3:1 is marked by rhetorical questions regarding whether Paul and his co-workers needed to commend themselves again before the Corinthians.<sup>18</sup> The next rhetorical question, which occurs at 3:7, indicates the beginning of a new unit and, therefore, the end of the present one. The unity of this paragraph is also marked by: (1) a series of contrasts (4 times ἀλλὰ and 2 times δὲ in 4 verses); and (2) the chiasmatic structure of 3:1–6.

<sup>18</sup> See note 15.

- a. You are a letter of Christ . . . written not with ink but (ἀλλὰ) with the Spirit of the living (ζῶντος) God.
- b. not on tablets of stone but (ἀλλὰ) on tablets of human hearts.
- c. Such confidence, however (δὲ), we have through Christ before God (διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν).
- d. we are not adequate in ourselves
- c<sup>a</sup>. but (ἀλλὰ) our adequacy is from God (ἡ ικανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ).
- b<sup>a</sup> who . . . made us capable to be the servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but (ἀλλὰ) of the Spirit;
- a<sup>a</sup> for the letter kills, but (δὲ) the Spirit gives life ζωοποιεῖ).

A close look at the apostle’s argument enables one to see the structure of his defense. At the center of his argument (line *d*) is his own inadequacy to perform the ministry: “We are not adequate in ourselves.” It reflects the idea introduced earlier in 2:16b: “Who is adequate for these things?” The answer to this question is given in lines *c* and *c<sup>a</sup>*. As Paul says, both our adequacy for ministry and our confidence that our ministry is successful are from God. He made us capable to be ministers for Himself. Line *b*, “not on tablets of stone but on tablets of



human hearts,” is an apparent parallel to the Old Testament prophecy about the New Covenant: “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it” (Jer 31:33; Eze 36:26). That is exactly the idea that line *b<sup>a</sup>* conveys to its readers: We are now the servants of a New Covenant.

The vocabulary Paul uses to describe the idea of the New Covenant is obviously given against the background of Old Testament promises, particularly those in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. This passage, therefore, makes it clear that for Paul the New Covenant is a fulfillment of those OT promises. Speaking about the New Covenant, the prophets never mentioned that God would give a new Law. They emphasized that He would send His Spirit to enable people to keep the Law.

It should be noted that in mentioning the New Covenant, Paul does not emphasize that God *gave us* a New Covenant as a new economy for living. It would make a contrast to the Old Covenant that he mentions later in v. 14. Rather, he emphasizes that God *made us* the servants of a New Covenant, not of the letter (οὐ γράμματος), but of the Spirit (πνεύματος), which again finds its parallel in the corresponding line *b*. In other words, the New Covenant is not a new economy offered by God, but a new “we.”

The genitive case that governs the “servant” in line *b<sup>a</sup>* opens two possibilities: to be in the service of the letter or of the Spirit. According to Paul’s logic, to be in the service of the letter means to serve stones on which letters were engraved. That is what the adjective λιθίνας indicates in the corresponding line *b* describing the tablets. To be a minister of the Spirit, on the other hand, is not just to serve the Spirit, but to be served by the Spirit, who makes a difference in human hearts (καρδίας σαρκίνας).

The letter, however, can also serve its ministers; it also has διακονία, but it is η διακονία τοῦ θανάτου (v. 7). Thus, the letter is not only as dead as the stones on which it is written, but it also kills those who serve it. The Spirit, on the other hand, gives life (ζωοποιεῖ, line *a<sup>a</sup>*). That is why in the corresponding line (line *a*) the Spirit is described not just as the Spirit of God, but as the Spirit of the living (ζῶντος) God, as if there could be a spirit of a dead God.

Thus, one should be careful not to miss the two main points Paul wants to make. First, in the same way as in

the preceding paragraph, God, or as Paul puts it, “the Spirit of the living God” is the main acting agent here:

- v. 3 written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God;
- v. 4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God (or with God);
- v. 5 our adequacy is from God;
- v. 6 [God] made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant;
- v. 6 Spirit gives life;

The second point is his contrast between the letter and the Spirit. Although he mentions the New Covenant in verse 6, he does not contrast the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. Rather, as the structure of the unit clearly indicates, he compares and contrasts two ways of serving God. He contrasts letter/ink with the Spirit, or, as one may say, something dead with something living. Barret, commenting on this, sees the contrast, “between human opinion and performance, and the work of God by His Spirit.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Barret, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 112.

not with ink but (ἀλλὰ) with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but (ἀλλὰ) on tablets of human hearts.

Not that we are adequate in ourselves, but (ἀλλὰ) our adequacy is from God

not of the letter but (ἀλλὰ) of the Spirit;

for the letter kills, but (ὅτι) the Spirit gives life.

It should not be forgotten that “the letter”, so negatively depicted here, was God’s word; it was an expression of God’s will. However, as Paul makes his point, even things given by God are dead without God Himself. Therefore, He made His people to be ministers not of “the letter,” but of His Spirit; not of His gift, whatever it might be, but of Himself.<sup>20</sup> This letter, by the way, need not necessarily be on stone, but may be on paper as well, which does not make it any better. It also may kill, unless the Spirit is there to give life.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ro 1:25: “They served the creature rather than the Creator.”

It is also interesting to note that the adequacy coming from ourselves (in contrast with the adequacy coming from God) lies in a heap with the rest of the dead objects mentioned in this unit. It underlines again Paul’s emphasis on different ways of ministry to God. To minister in the old way is to minister with one’s own strength to dead subjects. To minister in the new way is to minis-

ter to the living God and to be enabled by God for this ministry. The main thought of the apostle is clear: God “always leads us in triumph in Christ”; He “manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place”; He changed our hearts, and His Spirit, as he concludes this paragraph, “gives life.”

### The Lord Can Take the Veil Away 3:7-18

This unit is a development of the theme introduced in the preceding unit. In addition to the rhetorical question that marks a new paragraph, a new lexical unit, δόξα, also indicates a new beginning. It dominates the rest of the studied segment, but mainly this paragraph (12 times). The paragraph, in its turn, naturally falls into two smaller units, 3:7–11 and 3:12–18, which are marked by three features: (1) verse 12 starts with the word “therefore” (οὖν), usually indicating a shift of thought; (2) the word δόξα while being mentioned in every verse in 7–11, is not encountered in the second half of the paragraph until its conclusion in v. 18; and (3) a new lexeme, “veil,” is introduced and recurs four times in this semantic sub-unit.

The first sub-unit can be presented as a comparison between the ministry of the letter and the ministry of the Spirit, and can be summarized as follows:

<b>vv. Ministry of the letter</b>	<b>Ministry of the Spirit</b>
7–8 Ministry of the letter came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face	Ministry of the Spirit even more glorious (μᾶλλον ἐν δόξῃ)
9 The ministry of condemnation has glory.	Much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory (πολλῶ μᾶλλον περισσεύει).
10 what had glory, in this case has no glory	in comparison with the surpassing glory (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει εἶνεκεν τῆς υπερβαλλούσης δόξης).
11 That which was fading away came with glory	Much greater is the glory of that which lasts (πολλῶ μᾶλλον τὸ μένον).

This discussion of the advantages of the ministry of the Spirit provides the foundation for Paul’s further argumentation, which is indicated by his “therefore” in v.

<sup>21</sup> Contrary to the widely-held opinion of the Old Testament as secondary or even unnecessary. Murphy-O'Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 36, for example, argues: "By using 'Moses' alone (3:15) instead of 'the book of Moses' (2 Chr 35:12) or the 'book of the covenant' (2 Chr 34:30), he [Paul] clearly attaches to the figure of Moses the pejorative connotation of 'old.' . . . Paul pursues his tactic of making the Law as unattractive as possible."

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note the use of the verb *καταργέω*, which occurs 4 times in this paragraph. In fact it is the only occurrence of this verb in the whole letter. It looks as though Paul intentionally plays on this word. Three times he repeats it to emphasize that the glory that was covered with a veil was fading away (3:7, 11, 13). The fourth time in v. 14 the word is used in an unusual way. One probably would not apply this word to the removing of a veil. The right word for that, perhaps, would be *περὶ αἰρεῖται*, which he uses in verse 16. However Paul's application of this word here looks intentional. He wants the reader to note that if in the first case the veil was covering the fading glory, in the second case the veil itself is fading away, allowing "with unveiled face" to see "as in a mirror the glory

12: "Therefore ... we are very bold and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face." Verse 14 starts with the contrasting *ἀλλὰ*. It is not contrasted, however, with the previous verse, but rather with the preceding sub-unit describing the advantages of the Spirit. The depicted advantages are great, but the Israelites were not able to see them because a veil covered their heart.

It should be noted that Paul does not say they read the wrong Scripture, or the wrong piece of the Scripture, which for some reason became old and therefore could not bring any benefit for the readers.<sup>21</sup> The *δὲ* in verse 16 makes Paul's argument unambiguously clear. He makes the contrast not between Moses and Christ, or between the Law and the Gospel, but between people's actions—that of reading Moses or turning to the Lord. When they read the Old Covenant or Moses, which, as the structure of the passage clearly shows, are synonymous in this case, "the veil remains unlifted"; but when they turn to the Lord, "the veil is taken away."

The structure of these verses can be depicted in a form of parallelism.

- a) Until this very day
  - b) at the reading of the old covenant
  - c) the same veil remains unlifted,
  - d) because it is removed in Christ.
- a<sup>a</sup>) But to this day
  - b<sup>a</sup>) whenever (*ηνίκα*) Moses is read,
  - c<sup>a</sup>) a veil lies over their heart;
  - d<sup>a</sup>) but whenever (*ηνίκα*) a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.<sup>22</sup>

The second part of this parallelism not only repeats the first, but extends its meaning. First, Paul substitutes the phrase "old covenant" with the word "Moses." It is not done merely to avoid repetition of the same term. His point is that they treated Scripture—and continue to treat it to this day—as if it were only of Moses, not of the Lord. They read "Moses" and failed to see the One who was behind it.<sup>23</sup> Second, he makes it extremely clear that the veil is not on the Scripture—everything is fine with the Scripture!—but rather on their hearts. Thus in no way does the apostle nullify the Scripture of the Old Testament (cf. Ro 3:31). He rather says that they cannot benefit from its reading in

full measure because the veil on their hearts conceals something from them that this Scripture contains. And finally, in case they do not understand what it means for the veil to be removed in Christ, he explains that it means to turn to the Lord, the One who can take the veil away.

Turning for a moment back to vv. 7 and 8, where the ministry of death is contrasted with the ministry of the Spirit, one can see that it reflects and clarifies the idea introduced in 2:15–16. Those who emphasize the ministry of the Old Covenant as a “ministry of death” (3:7) miss Paul’s point that his ministry also was a ministry of death to some people (2:16). The same fragrance, that is, the same ministry of the Word, becomes for some an aroma leading to death, while for others it is an aroma leading to life. What makes the difference? Paul’s point is extremely clear: “the ministry of death is *in letters*” (ἡ διακονία τοῦ θανάτου ἐν γράμμασιν), while the ministry of life is brought *only by the Spirit*, who gives life (ζωοποιεῖ, 3:6). This once again underlines that the contrast that the apostle wants to make in this passage is not between the Law and the Gospel as between two ontological realities, but between two different ways of ministry, and in this particular case between two different approaches to Scripture.<sup>24</sup> As will be shown in the analysis of the next paragraph, the Old Testament from the beginning contained the gospel. But to see the gospel one needs the accompanying power of the Spirit, who is able not only to point to the letters engraved on stone but also to write them on human hearts.

With this idea Paul began his argumentation with the Corinthians (3:3), introducing the term “the Spirit of God” for the first time in this segment. With the same idea he now concludes his arguments, mentioning this term for the last time. “You are a letter of Christ written with the Spirit of God on human hearts” (3:3); “We are being transformed into the same image just as from the Spirit of the Lord” (3:18). In the first instance the Corinthians were the object of the ministry of the Spirit. In the second instance all of them (πάντες), including the Corinthians, Paul, and his team, are being served by the Spirit. To escape ambiguity v. 17 clarifies: the Lord is the Spirit. Therefore, the talk is not about *power* coming from God, or about so-called “spiritual ministry,” which has advantag-

of the Lord” (v. 18), the glory that lasts (v. 11), and is eternal (4:17).

<sup>23</sup> The incident in the desert when the Israelites asked Aaron to make a golden calf for them can serve as an example: “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him” (Ex 32:1). Cf. also sayings of the teachers of the Law in Jesus’ time regarding the Scripture. In most cases instead of “it is written,” or “the Scriptures say,” they say, “Moses commanded” (Mt 19:7; Jn 8:5); “Moses said” (Mt 22:24; Mk 7:10); “Moses permitted” (Mk 10:4); “Moses wrote” (Mk 12:19; Lk 20:28). Although such phrases were common in first century Judea—the reference to the Scriptures was implied—somewhere on the subconscious level they exerted a negative influence. At some point Jesus even had to explain to them that “it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven” (Jn 6:32). Cf. also their discussion about divorce (Mt 19:3–8). It seems that they did not even think about what God wanted them to do. To the teaching of Jesus that God created a man and a woman to become one flesh, they contrast Moses who allowed them to give a letter of divorce.

<sup>24</sup> See a discussion on this topic in Scott J. Haf-

mann, *Paul, Moses and the History of Israel*, 10.

es over the “ministry of the letter.” Paul is speaking about God Himself. The Israelites failed to serve the living God, but instead served “the letter.” The ministers of the New Covenant serve in a new way, that is, they serve a Person, the living God, and are being served by God through His Spirit.

#### God Made his Light Shine in our Hearts (4:1–6)

The words, “Therefore ... we do not lose heart” in 4:1 mark the opening of a new paragraph, in the same way as they do later in 4:16. The similarity of this paragraph to the opening one is so striking that the inclusio, which these two units form, can be easily depicted in a chiasmic structure:

- a* Thanks be to God, who ... manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him
  - b* For we are a fragrance of Christ to God
    - c* to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.
      - d* For we are not like many, peddling the word of God,
        - e* but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.
          - f* Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?
            - f*<sup>a</sup> We are commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.
              - e*<sup>a</sup> have renounced the things hidden because of shame,
                - d*<sup>a</sup> not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God,
                  - c*<sup>a</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,
                    - b*<sup>a</sup> For we ... preach ... Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.
                      - a*<sup>a</sup> For God ... shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God

Several concluding thoughts in this paragraph make Paul’s picture in this segment complete. First, he assures the Corinthians that their ministry is open and sincere; they are ready to “commend themselves to every man’s conscience” (πρὸς πάντων συνείδησιν ἀνθρώπων 4:2). The proof of this is the Corinthians themselves, who “are the letter

read by every man” (ὕπὸ πάντων ἀνθρώπων, 3:2). Then, having repeated that they do not distort the word of God, but on the contrary set forth the truth, he comes back again to the issue of the veil: “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing” (v. 3). Suddenly all the pieces of his argument come together in one monolithic unit. Using a verb that has the same root as the word “veil,” Paul shows that the veil hid something and keeps on hiding it. What is it that is hidden behind the veil? *The gospel*.

Thus, the concluding paragraph not only has many things in common with the opening one (as has been shown above), but it also, as it is very important to note, sheds light on the previous paragraph, including the following key points:

| <b>3:14–17</b>  | <b>4:3–6</b>  |
|---|---|
| a. Their minds were hardened (ἐπωρώθη τὰ νοήματα)   | → It is because “the god of this world has blinded the minds” (ἐτύφλωσεν τὰ νοήματα)  |
| b. Whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil, which “lies over their heart” (τὴν καρδίαν αὐτῶν) is taken away.  | → That is exactly what happened, when “God has shone in our hearts (ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν).                                    |
| c. The veil removed in Christ ... whenever a person turns to the Lord (ἐν Χριστῷ ... πρὸς κύριον). Is Christ the Lord?                                      | = Yes, we preach Christ Jesus as Lord (Χριστὸν κύριον). It is the same person, and turning to the Lord means turn to Christ |
| d. At the reading of the old covenant the veil (κάλυμμα) remains unlifted (ἀνακαλυπτόμενον); whenever Moses is read, a veil (κάλυμμα) lies over their heart | = The gospel is veiled (κεκαλυμμένον τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον) ... of the glory of Christ.   |

The parallelism of these paragraphs and the use of words of the same root (κάλυμμα / ἀνακαλυπτόμενον / κεκαλυμμένον), which are not found elsewhere in Paul’s writings, are evidence of Paul’s intention to show that the gospel is what the veil hides from those whose hearts it covers. It is the gospel in the Old Testament that they do not see, and which became visible to Paul at a particular point. According to Paul, the main task of “the god of this world” is not to keep a person from *reading* the Scrip-

ture, but to keep him from *seeing* what is there, namely from seeing the gospel. There is no hope that a person will see the gospel unless God Himself, who said, «Light shall shine out of darkness,” enlightens the person’s heart (v. 6). To see the gospel, to understand it and to be enlightened with “the knowledge of the glory of God” (v. 6) one needs to experience nothing less than the power of God, who created the universe out of nothing and brought order into the chaos of τῆς ἠδου (Ge 1:2). This ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως (2Co 4:7) belongs exclusively to God. Only He can destroy the power of “the god of this world” that keeps people in blindness. It once again confirms the idea stated earlier: only when “a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (3:16).

Here, however, a question arises: How can one “turn to the Lord” if his mind is blinded? Foreseeing this question, Paul explains that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the *unbelieving* so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (v. 4, emphasis mine). Paul’s point is that people’s unbelief is not the result of the actions of “the god of this world,” as one might think. Rather, “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the *unbelieving* (ἐτύφλωσεν τὰ νοήματα τῶν ἀπίστων).” They did not believe and therefore their minds were blinded.

Understanding that such a chain of reasoning may well evoke some additional questions, it is necessary to clarify that the Scriptures do teach that those who have not been exposed to the good news of the gospel live in darkness. It is to such people that Paul was sent “to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God” (Ac 26:18). In the context of this segment, however, the apostle speaks about those who had a chance to breathe “the fragrance of the knowledge” of God. But this fragrance became for them “the smell of death.” Why? Because they did not believe, and therefore their minds were blinded. It is very likely that Paul speaks here about unbelieving Jews, though it can be equally attributed to all who have been exposed to the preaching of the Word. This idea finds support in Heb 3:19 where the author of the letter explains the reason for the Israelites’ failure to enter “God’s rest”: “They were not able to enter because of unbelief (δι’ ἀπιστίας).” Furthermore, he warns: “There-



fore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard” (4:1–2).

The passage highlights two things. First, the gospel was preached to the Israelites (εὐηγγελισμένοι) in the same way as it is preached to us (cf. καθάπερ κἀκεῖνοι). Second, it “did not profit them, because it was not united with faith” (τῇ πίστει); and the same danger is real for people hearing the gospel today. This is what Paul underlines in the segment from 2 Corinthians.

### Conclusion

Reading 2Co 3:12–18 in the context of the whole segment makes it easier to understand and to interpret. It reminds us that the proper interpretation of any given passage can be done only in the context of the segment to which it belongs. The context of the segment, and especially the revealed parallel between 3:12–18 and 4:1–6, suggest treating the terms “old covenant” and “Moses” in 3:14–15 in connection to the term “ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ,” which Paul uses twice in this segment (2:17; 4:2). Elsewhere in Paul’s writings this phrase is used either in reference to the Old Testament<sup>25</sup> or generally to the preaching of the Word, which for Paul and other New Testament writers was rooted in the Old Testament.<sup>26</sup> Both, according to Paul, contain the gospel. Both, however, can bring death. But the reason is not Paul’s preaching—“we do not distort the Word of God”—or the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but people’s approach to it, their reaction to it, their acceptance or non-acceptance of the good news. And what does Paul mean by “the letter that kills”? It is not the Old Testament, as some may believe. It is *any part of the Scripture*, including the New Testament, that is read without the Spirit. Brevard Childs is absolutely correct when he states: “Even scripture, when read without knowledge of its true subject, can serve to conceal the truth.”<sup>27</sup> The same idea is rightly emphasized by Earle: “[T]he whole OT understood and applied without the illumination of the πνεῦμα often resulted not in γραφή but only in γράμμα. In Judaism this synthesis of Word and Spirit had been lost and the Scriptures had become mere ‘letters’;

<sup>25</sup> Ro 9:6; 1Co 14:36; Col 1:25; 1Ti 4:5.

<sup>26</sup> Tit 1:3; 1Th 2:13; 2Ti 2:9; cf. Ac 26:22.

<sup>27</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 243.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis E. Earle, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, 27.

the Law had become an end in itself rather than a means to evoke faith in God's grace."<sup>28</sup>

The study of this passage makes it clear that Paul believed that the gospel is there in the Old Testament; however, it is veiled for many today and yet is unveiled for those who turn to the Lord.

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