

2 Corinthians 3:1-18

3:1 – The two questions seem to be Paul’s response to an existing accusation against him and his ministry team. His answer is a rhetorical, “No, we are not commending ourselves!” and “No, we do not need to bring you letters of recommendation (reference letters, ordination papers, etc.)”

- “Letters of recommendation” – other traveling ministers would bring letters recognizing their approval from the Jerusalem church. Or, the Corinthian church may send someone on their way with a reference letter after having spent time ministering in Corinth. These letters would become a sort of licensing or certification for a traveling teacher to become a professional minister and make a living. Paul was dismissing this practice in this case and asking the Corinthians to do their own evaluation of Paul (and, of the other traveling ministries!)
- Examples of letters being used properly by the church:
 - Acts 15:22-23, after Jerusalem Council: “The apostles and elders, ...choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch...With them they sent the following letter:...”
 - Acts 18:27 – “When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him.”
 - Galatians 2:9 – Paul was recommended by the “three pillars” of Jerusalem Christianity: Peter, John, James; but his opposition, the Pharisaic wing of Christianity also had letters from their legalistic group in Jerusalem.
 - Romans 1:1-2
 - 1 Cor. 16:3, 10-11
 - 2 Cor. 8:16-24

3:2 – The most important letter for Paul in Corinth was the Corinthians themselves.
Their transformed lives and personal testimony was the letter written on their hearts.

3:3 – Paul’s was not using certification papers to prove he was a minister,
but Paul was instead a results based ministry

This illustration grows into writing on stone (as well as writing on papyrus).
The false apostles are like the Jews physically writing a legalistic law on stone.
Paul is writing righteousness on the hearts of men with the spirit of life and freedom

3:4 – Paul is not successful because he has such a great technique, but he has a glorious message.

3:5 – Our competence comes from God -

3:6 – “us” is “us all” in the Greek. God equips his believers to minister the glory

- All are “competent as ministers”
- Ministers of “a new covenant”
- “Not of the letter, but of the Spirit”
- “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

3:7 – ministry of death in letters on stone came with glory

- The old covenants written code pronounced a sentence of death as stated in Romans 7:9-11 and Galatians 3:10
- The New Covenant was by the Spirit and transformed the lives of believers: Romans 7:6 and 8:3. Christ did the work (Heb. 13:20-shed blood) and the bread and cup are symbolic (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25), the power is when the Spirit applies the New Covenant to the believer's life.

3:8 – ministry of the Spirit be more glorious

3:9 – Old Covenant condemned men; New Covenant brings righteousness to men

3:10 – Old glory that is fading is surpassed by New glory

3:11 – New glory will not fade away, so its glory is a greater glory

3:12 – This hope makes us bold as ministers of this New Covenant of great glory

3:13 – Not like Moses who covered his face for the people

- Exodus 34:29-35 (Midrash) – Moses would have to cover his face to conceal the glory that was showing through his face from being in the presence of the Lord. Though, the glory was not permanent, but fading.
- Exodus 34:34 – Moses would uncover his face when he went into the Tabernacle

3:14 – Israel's minds are dull and hide from the glory even though it now can save them.

3:15 – OT understanding is veiled

3:16 – OT is understood in Christ

3:17 – Lord is the Spirit;
The Lord is freedom

3:18 – We have the glory which is transforming us into his likeness. An increasing glory.