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## Where the Spirit of the Lord Is, There is Liberty

by Bill Lockwood

One of the more interesting passages in the New Testament that compares the greatness of the New Covenant with the inferior Old Covenant is 2 Corinthians 3. Not only is it an intriguing context but verse 17 has caused commentators no little difficulty, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." Let's do a short examination of 2 Corinthians 3:12-18.

*First, the main point is the superiority of the New Covenant.* Paul and the apostles, conscious of the greatness of the New Covenant when compared to the Old, declared that they spoke the word of God with "boldness" (v.12). This is a contrast to the false teacher at Corinth who misled with hidden agendas (2:17). This is even in contrast to Moses who needed to veil his face when coming down from Mt. Sinai, having been in God's presence. The veil was put on to conceal the fact that the glory of his face faded—which Paul shows was indicative of the fading nature of the Old Covenant.

*Second, the minds of the Israelites were hardened.* The hardness of their hearts consisted in the fact that they did not see and, even when Paul wrote, were not seeing the transitory nature of the Old Covenant (v. 14). Alfred Plummer paraphrases verse 14: "For down to this very day, when the records of the Old Covenant (which might teach them so much) are read, the same veil of ignorance as to the transitory character of the Law lies still upon their minds, still unlifted, because by becoming members of Christ, and in that way alone, it is done away."

*Third, the veil of ignorance is removed when any one turns to the Lord.* When Moses went back into the Lord's presence, the veil was removed. Just so, when any person turns to Christ, the veil is removed from the heart and he sees that the dispensation of the Law has come to an end (v. 16).

*Fourth, liberty is in Christ (v. 17).* "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Paul here simply applies the illustration. F. F. Bruce explains: "The fading glory on Moses' face is contrasted ... with the unfading 'glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (4:6), by way of pointing the contrast between the inferior glory of the law, introduced for a limited period and destined to pass away, and the surpassing glory of the gospel, 'the dispensation of the Spirit' (3:8). But even in the Exodus narrative Paul sees the gospel age adumbrated: as Moses removed the veil from his face when he 'went before the Lord' (Exodus 34:34), so 'when a man turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now Paul adds the Lord is the Spirit, [in this illustration, that is, we turn to the Spirit's dispensation just as Moses did to the Lord, bl] and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.' That is to say, 'the Lord' in the Exodus narrative *corresponds* to the Spirit in this new order, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom of access to the divine presence 'with unveiled face.'" In other words, the freedom of which Paul speaks is untrammelled freedom of access to the Father.

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Communion with God is what Christ *only* offers. Access to God is denied via Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and all other world religions. *Only through Christ* does mankind find complete freedom of access to God. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."