

The Spirit's Way of Transformation

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2 Corinthians 3:1-18

¹ Are we beginning to “recommend” ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, formal letters of recommendation to give to you, or from you? ² **You yourselves are our reference letter**, written in our hearts, recognized and read by all people, ³ since it's clear that **you are a letter from the Messiah**, with us as **delivery messengers** (ministers), a letter written not with ink but with the **Spirit of the living God**, not on **tablets of stone** but on **tablets of living hearts**. (Jer 31:33)

⁴ That is the kind of **confidence** that we have through **the Messiah** toward **God**. ⁵ Not that in ourselves we have any capability to think of anything as coming from us, but **our capability is from God**, ⁶ who has made us capable as **ministers to deliver his new covenant**, not of **the letter** but of **the Spirit**. For the **letter kills**, but **the Spirit gives life**.

⁷ Now if the delivery of a sentence of **death**, carved in **letters on stone**, came with such **glory** that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was passing away, ⁸ will not the **bringing of the Spirit** have even more **glory**?

⁹ For if there was glory in delivering **condemnation**, how much more must the bringing of **vindication** abound in glory. ¹⁰ Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. ¹¹ For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will **what is permanent** have **glory**.

¹² Since **we have such a hope**, we speak with **great boldness**, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the end of something passing away. ¹⁴ But their **minds** were hardened. For to this day, when they read the **old covenant**, that same veil remains unlifted, because in the Messiah it is taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their **hearts**.

¹⁶ But “*when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.*” (Ex 34:34) ¹⁷ Now “**the Lord**” means **the Spirit**, and where **the Spirit of the Lord** is, there is **freedom**. ¹⁸ And **we all**, with **unveiled face**, beholding the **glory of the Lord** as in a mirror, are being transformed into **the same image** from one degree of **glory** to another. For this comes from **the Lord who is the Spirit**.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 God tells Jeremiah of a New Covenant

³¹ Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD (*Yahweh*), when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, ... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “Know the LORD (*Yahweh*),” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD (*Yahweh*). For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Exodus 32:19-20 Moses delivers the Covenant – Condemnation of Idolatry

¹⁹ And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the golden calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the stone tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰ He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire....

Exodus 34:34-35 Moses is Unveiled before God

³⁴ When Moses went in before the LORD (Yahweh) to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out ... ³⁵ the people of Israel would see Moses' face, that it was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with the Lord.

Romans 8:9-10 The Spirit unites in Believers God and Messiah

⁹ You, however, do not live lives determined by flesh but lives encompassed by Spirit, if in fact God's Spirit dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Messiah's Spirit is not part of him. ¹⁰ But if Messiah is in you, although the body is dead in its struggle with sin, the presence of God's Spirit is life itself because of God's faithful righteousness.

Galatians 5:22-25 The Fruit the Spirit Bears

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to the Messiah, Jesus, have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by Spirit, let us also keep in step with Spirit.

Our Faces Unveiled to God's Spirit and to Each Other

Last week we saw the whole life of God working by the Spirit in our lives to transform both the way we live now and as the creative power of new creation in the resurrection.

Following Jesus, Paul reflects a lot on how he had seen the Spirit working in the lives of believers, even when they are manifesting difficult problems. His experience with the Spirit's work has given him great confidence and boldness with all kinds of people.

In 2 Cor 3:16-18 is a vision of that transforming process set in a meditation on scripture. But look at the image. A community of people, all engaged with God's Spirit, who gives them freedom and boldness before God and with each other. Their faces (their whole person, identity, image) open to God and each other. They're focused on seeing the reality, the glory of the Lord Jesus, who is the face / image of God and the true human. As they see it they are transformed into that image, ever increasing in the way they experience that reality/glory. But what's in front of them is the mirror of Jesus in each other as the Spirit works in those lives to shape, challenge and embolden them toward the life given in Jesus.

Moses' Challenge and Jeremiah's Hope

Paul starts from the idea of delivering a letter/tablet/covenant from the Lord to the people.

The letter that counts is written from the Messiah by the Spirit on people's living hearts.

Paul leads us through a meditation on Jeremiah's prophecy of a "new covenant" in Jer 31 and reflection on the story of Moses and Israel at Sinai in Ex 32-34. Jeremiah saw the exile that came from Israel's hard hearts veiled to God's covenant. Paul himself had experienced that block to seeing where God was working in the Messiah and how the Spirit opened it.

Moses had a glory-filled experience with God as he received the Law. But the people already rebelled (golden calf) and the Law immediately became condemnation, a death blow.

In spite of high points, Israel's history of rebellion led to exile. Jeremiah expressed the hope for a new covenant, written on softened hearts, bringing forgiveness and renewal.

A Covenant of Transformation Inside and Out

Paul saw the power of the Spirit creating a new covenant in the communities of believers.

God's image was being renewed as the Spirit bore fruit in transformed lives.

Diverse people together reflected God's glory to each other and served with love in the world.