

In v. 11, Paul employs the verb *katargeō* (καταργέω), “to cause someth. to come to an end or to be no longer in existence” (BDAG),⁵⁵ describing how the ministry of condemnation is no more: “if that which fades away [*katargeō*] was with glory...” It notably also appears in his assertion of Romans 3:31, where Paul asks, “Do we then overthrow [*katargeō*] the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (RSV). Born again Believers are very much called to recognize the importance of God’s Torah, but how we uphold its validity is by the new “ministry of righteousness” (v. 9b) brought about by the Messiah’s work and example left for us (Matthew 5:16-17ff).

12 Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, 13 and are not like Moses, who 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. 14 But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Messiah. 15 But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; 16 but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

3:12 Recognizing the great transformation which is to take place as a result of the New Covenant enacted within the lives of those who receive Yeshua (v. 3), and the confidence that Paul has stressed that he has (v. 4), he further informs the Corinthians, “Since we have such a hope, we are very bold” (RSV). The term *parrēsia* (παρρησία) implies an openness of approach that people can have not just toward one another, but toward God. TDNT usefully describes some of the uses of this term in the Pauline Epistles:

“Paul, too, stresses apostolic *parrhēsia* in both life (Phil. 1:20) and preaching (Eph. 6:19-20). Openness toward God and men, and in the gospel, is meant (Eph. 3:12; 2 Cor. 3:12; Eph. 6:19-20). The face that is open toward God is also open toward others (2 Cor. 3:7ff.). This open face reflects the Lord’s glory in increasing transformation by the Spirit. Openness implies a confident freedom of approach to God (Eph. 3:12). In its human dimension it has the nuance of affection in 2 Cor. 7:4 and authority in Phlm. 8. The ground of *parrhēsia* is faith (1 Tim. 3:13), and it is effected by the Spirit and related to union with Christ (Phil. 1:19-20). Christ himself triumphs ‘openly’ over the powers in Col. 2:15.”⁵⁶

3:13 The confidence that Paul and his associates have, indicates that new realities have dawned. Their work is contrasted with previous servants of God like Moses, “who 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,” as Moses had to shield himself because of the glory shining forth from his face having been in God’s presence (Exodus 34:33-35). And why did Moses have to wear this veil or barrier? An extremely important thought, as offered by Peter Enns, in his commentary on Exodus, is “we may think of Moses’ veil functioning in a similar way to the veil or curtain in

⁵⁵ BDAG, 525.

⁵⁶ H. Schlier, “*parrhēsia*,” in TDNT, 795.

the tabernacle. Just as the people could not enter the Most Holy Place to behold God's glory, now they cannot behold the glory of God reflected in Moses."⁵⁷

The function of the veil, over Moses' face, can be rightly compared to the heavy curtain which separated out the Holy of Holies in the ancient Tabernacle and Temple, a curtain which was torn in two at the crucifixion of Yeshua (Mark 15:38; Matthew 27:51; Luke 23:45). There are differences of opinion, though, on how to take what Paul labels as *to telos tou katargoumenou* (τὸ τέλος τοῦ καταργουμένου), with a version such as the NASU having, "the end of what was fading away," and with the ESV having, "the outcome of what was being brought to an end." That the glory on Moses' face was to indicate something of limited value—as it was fading away—and that the veil he placed over his face represents a barrier to be removed, is clear enough. But what is the *telos* (τέλος) to be regarded as? Is it the eventual termination of "the ministry of condemnation" (v. 9a)? Or, is the *telos* of the fading glory, the greater glory inaugurated by the Messiah who was to come?

The clause *to telos tou katargoumenou* can certainly be rendered as "the goal of that which is fading away" (PME), as God's glory reflected off of Moses' face, a glory notably blocked by a veil, and a glory representing something of limited spiritual value (v. 11a)—is something which is to point to a greater openness (v. 12) that is only present when people recognize their need for restitution to "the ministry of death" (v. 7) problem. Paul makes the point that with such a veil on Moses' face, the Ancient Israelites were unable to clearly see toward the *telos* or culmination of what would be accomplished by the Messiah's ministry (cf. Romans 10:4, Grk.), the permanent atonement they needed, and hence the greater glory which would not fade away (v. 11b).

3:14 The sad observation that the Apostle Paul made, in the First Century, was that it was not just the Ancient Israelites in the wilderness who could not see the Redeemer's ultimate ministry coming. There is an obstinance present in their descendants, the majority of Paul's Jewish contemporaries. 2 Corinthians 3:14 includes some loaded words, as the Apostle unfortunately observed, "But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ" (NASU). How to properly deduce what Paul is saying here, particularly in terms of his statements being reflective of new spiritual realities manifested in those who have received Israel's Messiah, is not something easy for many Bible readers.

When most people read 2 Corinthians 3:14, they simply assume that when Paul makes light of the "reading of the old covenant," *tē anagnōsei tēs palaias diathēkēs* (τῆ ἀναγνώσει τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης), that means hearing the Torah or Tanach Scriptures read. A Messianic version like the TLV actually has, "the reading of the ancient covenant."⁵⁸ That a negative condition manifests itself *when something is read* is obvious enough.

Paul observes how for both the Ancient Israelites and the majority of the First Century Jewish community, "their minds were made dull" (NIV) or "their minds were made stonelike" (CJB). As Deuteronomy 29:4 informs us, "Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to

⁵⁷ Peter Enns, *NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 587.

⁵⁸ This rendering actually serves to indicate that various Messianic Jewish leaders and theologians do not have a firm handling of this passage.

know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.” Isaiah 29:10 also speaks of the reality of how “the LORD has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, He has shut your eyes, the prophets; and He has covered your heads, the seers.” Psalm 95:5 exclaims, “Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness” (cf. Exodus 17:2-7). This is reflective of a condition where sin has been perpetuated, not just erecting an obstacle between God and His people, but where the people themselves become increasingly calloused toward God and His intended ways and purposes. The great travesty is how this takes place even when God punishes His people, and then allows for some restitution and restoration to follow (cf. Nehemiah 9:16-31; Psalm 106:6-39; Ezekiel 20:8-36).

The Ancient Israelites had hardened minds, lacking the spiritual sensitivity required to acknowledge how Moses wearing a veil depicted how God’s holiness must be separate from sin, which in turn prevented them from looking into God’s further plan of redemptive history (v. 13). Just as Moses wearing a veil (Exodus 34:34) depicted a barrier that was representative of God’s holiness being separate from sin, in a similar manner, the unredeemed or unsaved are depicted as having a veil over their hearts. But Paul asserts, *hoti en Christō katergeitai* (ὅτι ἐν Χριστῷ καταργεῖται), “because in Christ it is being abolished” (Brown and Comfort)⁵⁹ or “because it is removed in Christ” (NASU). The Corinthians are among those who have experienced the transformative power of the Messiah, and do not have a veil lying over their hearts. Barnett astutely concludes “‘in Christ’...is ‘abolished,’ allowing the glory of God to shine brightly and forever ‘in the face of Christ’ (4:6).”⁶⁰ When the veil over the heart of someone is removed, via the salvation of Yeshua, an ability to truly experience the holy presence of the Lord is to be manifest (vs. 16-18).

The majority of Paul’s Jewish brethren are said to have an unlifted veil over their hearts “at the reading of the old covenant.” The way that this has customarily been approached, is that at the reading of the Tanach—commonly called the “Old Testament”—that the Jewish people as a whole have a stubborn inability to see Yeshua in its recorded passages. Also quite frequent to hear from Christian examiners, is that the Jewish people as a whole lack some ability to see that the Torah or Law of Moses has been abolished. Bruce is one who concludes, “When the Torah is read in synagogue, they cannot see that the order of which it speaks is a temporary one, which has now been superseded by Christ.”⁶¹ A dissenting opinion is offered by Hafemann, who instead says that “Paul’s introduction of the terminology ‘old covenant’ is a declaration of his eschatology, not a denigration of the law. He refers to the Sinai covenant as ‘old’ only because he is convinced that Jesus, as the Christ, has inaugurated the ‘new covenant’ of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27.”⁶²

That the era of the New Covenant has dawned is clear, as Paul is a minister of the New Covenant (v. 6). But what should also be clear, is that not all individuals have the realities of “the ministry of the Spirit” (v. 8) or “the ministry of righteousness” (v. 9b) operative within them—the promises of a new heart, a new spirit, *and* the supernatural transcription of God’s

⁵⁹ Brown and Comfort, 629.

⁶⁰ Barnett, 195.

⁶¹ Bruce, 192.

⁶² Hafemann, 159.

Torah or Law onto a psyche transformed by Lord via the good news. Instead, the unredeemed—and for Paul’s purposes in v. 14, the majority of his fellow Jews—are subject to “the ministry of death” (v. 7) or “the ministry of condemnation” (v. 9a), the declaration of high and often capital penalties which are resultant from disobedience to God’s Torah. While the New Covenant is “the ministry of the Spirit” (v. 8) or “righteousness” (v. 9b), then the Old Covenant should logically be classified to be “the ministry of death” (v. 7) or “condemnation” (v. 9a).

If the Old Covenant has been correctly identified as a *function* of the Torah—the Torah condemning sinners—to be contrasted against the New Covenant where the Torah is supernaturally transcribed on the hearts of the redeemed, then how are we to take Paul’s assessment that the Old Covenant is somehow “read”? Perhaps we should consider the dilemma of the Romans 7 sinner, the one who when he hears the Torah’s commandments like the Tenth Commandment, can only sin even more, suffer a condition of spiritual death, and exist in a state of condemnation before the Lord (Romans 7:7-24). The answer to the sinner’s dilemma is being released from condemnation and exile from God, via the salvation provided in Yeshua—which is to then enable obedience to the Law (Romans 7:25-8:4). Commenting on the ministry of death/condemnation (vs. 7-8), Barnett concurs that “The complex ‘wretched man’ passage (Rom 7:7-25) may be, in part, Paul’s personalization of the devastating impact of the Law of God on a person sinful of heart.”⁶³ God’s Torah is, of course, not the problem (Romans 7:12)—**sin, rebellion, and obstinance in an unregenerated person are** (Romans 7:13)!

When Paul claims that the Old Covenant is read, “the ministry of death” (v. 7) or “condemnation” (v. 9a)—**he is speaking of the condemning aspects of the Torah pronounced upon sinners.** When spiritually-sensitive people hear such a ministry of condemnation read, they are cut to the quick by the convicting grace of God to repent of their sins, and are drawn to Yeshua’s sacrifice at Golgotha (Calvary), which in history removed the Tabernacle/Temple veil separating people from the Father’s presence—but has to be removed from our individual, sinful hearts via personal salvation.

For the case of Paul’s Jewish contemporaries, their dull and stubborn minds prevented the veil from being removed. When the Old Covenant ministry of death or condemnation would hence be read, they would not be convicted to turn to the Lord in repentance—much less turn to the Lord in repentance *and receive Yeshua*. Noting Paul’s language of “to this day” (NIV) in v. 14, Hafemann associates it with the Torah declaration of Deuteronomy 29:4, and concludes that “this divine prerogative not only explains Israel’s past disobedience, but also grounds Moses’ proclamation that Israel will continue to break the covenant in the future, suffering the judgment of Exile as a result.”⁶⁴ For Hafemann, this means that “the issue in 3:14-15 is not that Israel *cannot* understand intellectually the implications of her history...and her consequent need for the death of the Messiah. Rather, the problem is that she *will not* accept it as true for her. Israel’s ‘stiff-necked’ condition continues to ‘veil’ her response to the

⁶³ Barnett, 182.

⁶⁴ Hafemann, 158.

Sinai covenant.”⁶⁵ Paul himself only came to Messiah faith via a Divine intervention on the Damascus Road; for the majority of Paul’s Jewish contemporaries, when presented with their past history of violation of God’s Instruction and their condemnation by it, they did not want to change. Barnett draws the general conclusion,

“Paul is not dogmatizing from a distance; Moses himself said as much (Deut 29:2-4; cf. Isa 6:9-10; 63:17). As God speaking through Jeremiah tersely stated, ‘My covenant, which they broke’ (Jer 31:32). In Paul’s words the hardening of the minds is like a veil that blinds the people.”⁶⁶

For certain, Jewish people can see the veil as a barrier separating themselves and God, removed by faith in Yeshua the Messiah. Paul himself as a Jew benefitted from the reality of, “because it is removed in Messiah.” But too frequently, often with no Tanach background of the Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27 New Covenant, Christian examiners have thought that what is taken away is the relevance of the Torah and Tanach as a code of instruction to be followed.

Witherington does not agree with the conclusion that it is the veil which is nullified by faith in the Messiah, noting some grammatical points. He states, “The neuter participle *to katargoumenon* [τὸ καταργούμενον], ‘annulled,’ agrees with ‘that which was glorified’ in v. 10 and so applies to the whole of the old covenant...Therefore, what is spoken of as annulled through Christ in v. 14 is probably the Old Covenant rather than the veil.”⁶⁷ The grammatical points being what they are, Witherington’s mistake is in failing to identify the Old Covenant as the ministry of death or condemnation which Yeshua has nullified. This Old Covenant would be the Torah’s capital punishment declared upon sinners, a consequence which comes from violating the commandments now to be written upon the heart by the power of the New Covenant. The veil that Moses wore, like the curtain in the Tabernacle and Temple, is simply the epitomization of what the ministry of condemnation causes: **separation from God.**

Walter C. Kaiser, an Old Testament theologian, naturally has a very high view of the Torah for God’s people. He recognizes how only faith in Jesus can render the barrier, curtain, or veil placed between God and sinful people inoperative. In his book *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, he describes how, “This blindness can only be remedied and Moses’ veil ‘lifted’ and the glory...revealed in its ultimate significance...whenever men and women turn to the Lord. Only then is the veil ‘removed’ (v. 14). Thus it is the ‘veil’ that is to be ‘abrogated’ or ‘removed’ according to Paul...”⁶⁸ The veil does not then represent God’s holy standard of conduct in the Law, but is the sad consequence of how a holy Creator must be separate from the presence of sin. Moses, as God’s representative (v. 13), had to be shielded because of the Israelites’ sin. Similarly, unregenerated people have *to auto kalumma* (τὸ αὐτὸ κάλυμμα) or have “the same veil” (v. 14) over their hearts. But contrary to having to shield others, like the presence of God radiating off of Moses, the barrier on a sinner separates the heart from God. Only by

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Barnett, 194.

⁶⁷ Witherington, 380.

⁶⁸ Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 313.

appropriating the sacrifice of Yeshua can people have this barrier removed and can full communion with the Creator be restored.

The challenge, for many Bible readers, is in thinking that “the old covenant” (*tēs palaias diathēkēs*, τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης) is just akin to the Tanach Scriptures—when what is to occur is a transference in people’s lives from the sphere of the ministry of death/condemnation to the ministry of the Spirit/righteousness (2 Corinthians 3:8-9). When the stipulations of the ministry of death/condemnation are read from the Torah, we are to be convicted by them for our need for a redeemer, and turn to God via His Son Yeshua. The status of having a veil or barrier placed between a person and God is not just a Jewish problem, but can be the problem of *any unregenerated person* hearing the Law read. When unregenerated or unsaved people hear from Moses’ Teaching, all they can really do is be condemned. **They suffer from the power known as the Old Covenant**, not having the New Covenant’s final atonement and permanent forgiveness present in their lives.

3:15 The critical point made by Paul’s statement in v. 15, “Yes, till today, whenever Moshe is read, a veil lies over their heart” (CJB), takes on a different dynamic when “the reading of the old covenant” is associated with “the ministry of death” (v. 7) or “condemnation” (v. 9a), the penalties pronounced in the Torah upon Law-breakers. In order for it to be known that the Torah condemns those who violate its commandments—causing a veil, as a barrier on the heart, to be placed between oneself and God—the Torah needs to be a major part of one’s reading and study of Holy Scripture. The Jewish community, both in the First Century and today, has a major advantage, in that some attention is given every week in the Synagogue to the Torah portion. The institution of the Christian Church, in contrast, tends to be at a disadvantage, as the Pentateuch is not similarly read every week.

3:16 There has to be a recognition of a need for change, on the part of a person who hears the “Old Covenant” being read—the ministry of death/condemnation exiling one from God. As Paul states, “But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed” (ESV), *periaireitai to kalumma* (περιαιρείται τὸ κάλυμμα). Keener usefully indicates for the realities to be realized, “Whereas the glory of the first covenant was limited, transient, and deadly, those who ‘turn to the Lord’ receive the Spirit, hence the glory of the internalized, new covenant law (3:3, 6-11, 16-17).”⁶⁹ Guthrie further summarizes some of the significant realities to be experienced by those who turn to the Lord:

“[W]hen Moses put a veil over his face, cutting off the Israelites from the glory manifested in his ministry, they were kept from perceiving the true importance of the glory on Moses’ face—that God’s ultimate goal was for his covenant people to experience his presence and thus his glory. This would be at the heart of the new covenant, a covenant in which all of the covenant people would ‘know the Lord’ and have their hearts transformed (Jer. 31:31-34), when all would be able to go boldly behind the tabernacle curtain (which also stands as a barrier) into the holiest place of the Lord because their sins have been forgiven decisively (Heb. 10:19-20).”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Keener, 169.

⁷⁰ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 224.

While controversial for some, when Paul says that in order for the veil to be removed or taken away “whenever a person turns to the Lord,” *pros Kurion* (πρὸς κύριον), contextually relates to Yeshua the Messiah (v. 14). When the background of Exodus 34:34 is considered—“But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded”—then the statement of turning to the Lord in v. 16 can be taken as ancillary evidence, for sure, of Yeshua being integrated into the Divine Identity.

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But 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, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

3:17-18 The dynamic, transformative power of not just the Divine in general, but of different manifestations of the plural Godhead, is seen in the statement, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (v. 17, RSV). Those who have experienced the transformative power of the good news, with the presence of God in their hearts, are those who can truly understand the profundity of what Paul says. The *eleutheria* (ἐλευθερία), the liberty or freedom, is a release from condemnation; it is not some kind of permissiveness allowing for a dismissal of God’s Torah as Instruction to be heeded and followed. Barnett excellently states,

“It is ‘freedom’ from the ‘condemnation’ arising from inability through ‘the flesh’ to keep the Law of God (cf. Rom 7:7-12). Furthermore, it is a Spirit-empowered freedom, arising from the ‘righteousness’ of those dedicated to God ‘in Christ’ (1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 3:8; 5:21) to fulfill the ‘righteous’ requirement of the Law (Rom 8:4). The new covenant as promised by the prophets was not a covenant of lawlessness, but a covenant under which people would be moved by the Spirit to ‘follow [God’s] decrees and be careful to keep [his] laws’ (Ezek 36:27), to have ‘[his] law in their minds...[written] in their hearts’ (Jer 31:33)...”⁷¹

Of course, much of the new life which awaits those who see the operative power of the New Covenant within them, involves the fulfillment of the easy but difficult commands, as indicated by Barnett, “to love God and neighbor and to forgive one’s enemies (Mark 12:29-31; Matt 5:43-48; Rom 12:9-21; 13:8-10; Gal 5:14). This is the ‘law of Christ’ (Gal 6:2), the ‘royal law...the law of liberty’ (Jas 2:8-12).”⁷² Barnett is broadly reflective of Christian examiners who consider the so-called “moral law” of the Torah to be what is written on the heart and mind via the New Covenant, but such a vantage point is to be vastly preferred to those who would completely dismiss the view that the “laws” (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16) are indeed to be written on the heart and mind, as a consequence of receiving Yeshua into one’s life. Barnett is keen to draw attention to the existence of “the ethical passages that are so extensive in Paul’s writings and that, generally speaking, express the Law as radically crystallized—

⁷¹ Barnett, 203.

⁷² Ibid.

and...paradoxically, profoundly deepened—by Christ’s reinterpretation of the Law.”⁷³ And indeed, the very reason *why* born again Believers are to follow the Torah is because the Messiah Himself bids us to (Matthew 5:18-19), and **Messiah followers** must undoubtedly consider His interpretation of Moses’ Teaching to be prime!

The power of the New Covenant notably goes well beyond the Torah’s commandments being written on the heart, and even the availability to have permanent forgiveness with God. The New Covenant inaugurated in one’s life enables the redeemed to fully see the Lord—as any heavy veil or barrier separating us from His presence, which existed over our hearts when we were unregenerated sinners—is now to be gone! The Holy Spirit offers Believers great freedom, as the ministry of condemnation is no more (v. 17; cf. Romans 4:6-8; 8:1). This is why Paul can say how he and his ministry associates, unlike Moses who wore a veil representing God, can now in the New Covenant era go about bearing His presence as though they are unveiled: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord” (v. 18a). Paul himself, after all, had an epiphany of the Lord on the road to Damascus that changed him from within (Acts 9:1-18).

All Believers, as they grow in faith and knowledge of Yeshua, “are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (v. 18b). We should possess the confidence to speak forth what He has done within us (v. 12). And in a new condition of following the Lord, the New Covenant imperative of proper obedience should certainly be present—as we should possess the ability to see the importance of Moses’ Teaching with the veil removed!

⁷³ Ibid., 204 fn#33.