

Introduction

In 2005, Karen and I had the opportunity to move to Albuquerque. It had been my desire for a while to move there to be there for my parents as they got older. We sensed it was God's will and we moved. I did not sense God telling me to plant a church at that time, so we looked for a church to plug into. Since people in New Mexico were not familiar with me or my ministry, Dave Meadows, the lead pastor at our church in Acworth was kind enough to write a letter of commendation to introduce me. Here was his letter of commendation.

Dear Mark,

Greetings from Acworth, Georgia, and may God bless you richly. I am the pastor of Oakwood Community Church where Bill and Karen Murchison were members before moving to NM. I thought it would be good to write you, pastor to pastor to encourage you to take advantage of the blessing the Lord has sent your way. Bill and Karen both have servant's hearts. I have known the Murchison's for probably about 7 or 8 years.

Initially I met Bill at a pastor's Morning Prayer meeting where we met weekly for about 2-3 years. Often in those meetings, I was able to share a ministry issue and ask for counsel or advice for the situation and Bill's counsel was always significant, full of wisdom and Biblically-based.

As you probably know, Bill came out of the pastorate when his daughter was diagnosed with leukemia. His time was consumed with the hospital and travel for bone marrow transplant. Bill suffered the cruel accusations of believers that concluded that Bill had sin in his life therefore God was punishing him. Through it all Bill has remained true to our Lord.

About 2 ½ years ago, Bill and Karen (and family) came and joined Oakwood Community Church. I was very excited because I had grown to love and trust Bill and I greatly respected his Biblical knowledge and I knew he would be a great role model and a great servant. I used Bill in several roles – Men's Ministry, Small Groups, Sunday School Teacher, - I used him as the main speaker at our elders retreat, he preached for me several times. I found Bill to be extremely supportive, non-divisive, a great communicator, in love with the church and with the Lord.

Bill will never intentionally cause you any grief. I would encourage you to tap into the wealth that God has deposited in the Murchison's. Bill is a driven man of God. I expect you have seen that. That drive needs channeled, so I would encourage you to plug him in and use him.

This quick note feels so inadequate, so let me encourage you to call me. 404-931-9590.

Sincerely,

Dave Meadows
Pastor of Oakwood Community Church

Paul and his ministry are under attack in Corinth. Someone was saying that he was not a man of his word, and he could not be trusted. He was accused of being harsh, and unqualified. Much of 2 Corinthians is a response and defense of himself and his ministry. He has just spoken of his

triumphant ministry. Paul had a strategic ministry, and he carefully planned his ministry. At the same time, he allowed the Spirit to lead him, and change plans. Paul had a grateful ministry. He recognized that God was the reason for his triumphant ministry. Paul was grateful to God and show gratitude to others. Paul had a caring ministry. He cared more about people than ministry itself. He was so concerned for the welfare of the Corinthians that he left Troas to go on to Macedonia to get a report from Titus. Paul had a fragrant ministry. He manifested the aroma of Christ everywhere he went. It was an aroma of life to those being saved, and an aroma of death to those who were perishing. Finally, Paul had a sincere ministry. He was not peddling the word like some, but he was transparent and spoke in the sight of God. He had nothing to hide, and no ulterior motives.

Paul starts our passage today with a couple of questions. His first question is whether he is commending himself again. His second question is whether he needed letters of recommendation to the Corinthians or from the Corinthians. Unlike me, who was unknown to the churches in New Mexico, Paul was the one that established the church in Corinth. He was the one that had led most of them to the Lord, and taught them the Word of God for one and a half years. (See Acts 18:11.) Paul did not need a letter of commendation.

Even though Paul's ministry is well established and known in Corinth, Paul gives an introduction to his ministry. He addresses four things. First, he addresses the need for a commendation. Second, he talks about his adequacy or sufficiency. Third, he speaks of the glory of the ministry of the gospel. Fourth, he wrote about real kingdom work, the transformation of lives.

Introduction to Paul's Ministry (2 Cor 3:1-18)

1. The Commendation
2. The Adequacy
3. The Glory
4. The Work

(2 Cor 3:1–3) “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? {2} You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; {3} being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

(2 Cor 3:4–6) “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. {5} Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, {6} who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

(2 Cor 3:7–11) “But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, 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, fading *as* it was, {8} how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? {9} For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. {10} For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses *it*. {11} For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory.”

(2 Cor 3:12–18) “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 Christ. {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. {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.”

1. **The Commendation** (2 Cor 3:1-3)

It is pretty astounding that some people in Corinth were asking or demanding that Paul give a letter of commendation to them. They are questioning his calling and the authenticity of his apostleship. They want to know who accredited Paul, and will vouch for him. So Paul begins by asking if he was beginning to commend himself again. Paul did not need to commend himself. The word for commend is *synistao* (Strong's G4921), which means to approve, or commend. Paul also did not need someone else to commend him to the Corinthians. I needed a letter of commendation to introduce myself to the churches in New Mexico. They did not know me or my ministry. The Corinthians knew Paul and they knew his ministry. He did not need an introduction or a commendation. Unfortunately, the person that had attacked Paul and his ministry, had put Paul in such a bad light, that his credibility was being questioned.

(2 Cor 3:1) “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?”

Letters of commendation were fairly common in Paul's day. He wrote a commendation to the church in Rome for Phoebe, who was a deaconess in the church in Cenchrea. They did not know her and her valued service, so Paul commended her to them and told them to help her in whatever needs she had.

(Ro 16:1–2) “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; {2} that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.”

When Paul first became a Christian, he had a bad reputation among the believers in Jerusalem. He had arrested, imprisoned, and put to death many Christians. Some did not believe that he had become a Christian and they were afraid that he was trying to associate with the Christians with evil motives. Barnabas knew of his genuine conversion, and he brought him before the apostles, and commended Paul to them. With Barnabas' commendation, Paul was then able to freely move about among the believers in Jerusalem. Commendations are very helpful when the credibility of someone is unknown. However, in Paul's case, the Corinthians already knew Paul, and the credibility of his ministry. It was an outrageous thought that he would need a letter of commendation for the Corinthians.

(Ac 9:26–28) “When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. {27} But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. {28} And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.”

What was Paul's letter of commendation? It was the church in Corinth. He had preached the gospel to them. He had faithfully taught them the word of God for eighteen months. He had planted the church in Corinth. The Corinthians were proof of his ministry. Their transformed lives were known and read by all men. Corinth was known for its sexual immorality and idolatry. The Corinthians had been brought out of that worldly culture and their lives had been changed. God did the work of transformation, but He used His servant, Paul, to preach the gospel and teach them God's word. The Corinthians were a letter of Christ, cared for by Paul, and it was not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It was not written on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts. This is reference to the giving of the Law in the first covenant, where God wrote the Law on tablets of stone. Now, God is writing His commandments on the hearts of men. The first covenant was an external obedience, and the new covenant is an internal obedience.

(2 Cor 3:2-3) "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; {3} being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

Jeremiah prophesied about God writing His commandments on the hearts of His people. God said, "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days...I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Jesus came and established a new covenant, and God was writing His law on the hearts of people. God had used Paul, but it was the Spirit of God that had written on their hearts.

(Je 31:33-34) "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. {34} "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

In the remainder of 2 Corinthians, Paul will revisit this apparent suggestion that he needed a commendation. He uses the word four more times: 2 Cor 5:12, 10:12, 10:18, 12:11. In 2 Corinthians 10:12, he said that the real commendation for anyone is the one that comes from the Lord. Paul did not need to be commended by the Corinthians or to the Corinthians; they knew his character and his work. Paul also did not need to be commended because he was approved as God's workman.

(2 Co 10:12-18) "For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding....{18} For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends."

2. **The Adequacy** (2 Cor 3:4-6)

Paul was confident about his ministry. He knew that he did not need a commendation from or to the Corinthians. It was not an arrogant confidence; it was a confidence that he had through Christ toward God. He said that he was not adequate in himself to consider anything as coming from himself, but his adequacy was from God. The King James translates it as sufficiency. Paul's sufficiency was from God. The Greek word is hikanos (Strong's G2425), which means to arrive

or come in ample amount. It is used forty-one times, and is most often translated as many (11x) or much (6x). God gave Paul much and he was adequate and sufficient because of God.

(2 Cor 3:4–6) “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. {5} Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, {6} who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

We live in a day where people talk about being self-sufficient. Some people want to be off the grid and have their own water, energy, and food supplies. Other people think in terms of being able to live on their own, without the assistance of parents or the government. After Covid, many people that were in churches no longer go to church. They think that they can get along fine by just hearing a message, but they have no need of the body; they are self-sufficient. The scriptures tell us that there are many members in the body of Christ, and we cannot say that we have no need of the hand, or foot, or other members. We need one another. God has not designed us to be self-sufficient. He gave each one of us a unique gift, and we are to serve others with our gift.

(1 Co 12:20–21) “But now there are many members, but one body. {21} And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’”

Many people think that they are self-sufficient and do not need God. That was the problem at the tower of Babel. They wanted to build something so that they no longer needed God. We have been created by God and for God, and with a hunger and thirst for God that only He can satisfy. We need God's forgiveness. We need God's love and grace. We need God's provision. We need God's wisdom. In that respect, there are none that are self-sufficient; we all need God in our lives. Our adequacy comes from God, not ourselves.

What was Paul adequate in? He was adequate as a servant of the new covenant. God made Paul adequate as a servant or minister of the new covenant. The Greek word for servant is diakonos (Strong's G1249), which is used thirty-one times, and translated as minister twenty times and servant, eight times. The other three times it is translated as deacon, as it refers to someone in the position of deacon or servant in a local church. God made Paul adequate as a minister of the new covenant.

Paul transitions from being adequate to the glory of the new covenant. He said that he was a servant of the new covenant, not the of the letter but of the spirit. The letter of the law kills, but the Spirit gives life. Paul was made adequate of the new covenant, that gives life to people.

3. **The Glory** (2 Cor 3:7-11)

Paul spoke of the glory that came from the ministry of the old covenant through Moses. In Exodus 24:12, God told Moses to come up on the mountain, and He would give him stone tablets with the law and the commandment written on them.

(2 Cor 3:7) “But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, 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, fading *as* it was,”

(Ex 24:12) “Now the Lord said to Moses, ‘Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.’”

Moses came down, the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face. When Moses came down with the two tablets, he did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. But when Aaron and the sons of Israel saw Moses, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. So, Moses put on a veil and he would take it off when he went in the tent of meeting and spoke with the Lord. Paul said that this glory was great, but it was fading.

(Ex 34:29–35) “It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony *were* in Moses’ hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. {30} So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. {31} Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. {32} Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them *to do* everything that the Lord had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. {33} When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. {34} 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, {35} the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.”

One year at the Las Vegas Invitational, I decided to stay in my hotel room and memorize and meditate on Scripture when I was not practicing or playing. I spent hours meditating and journaling. It was that week that the Lord instructed me about meditation. My caddy that week made a comment about me glowing. The following week one of my friends in Orlando was caddying for me, and he said that I was glowing. I cannot remember any other time in my life when people said I was glowing. It came from spending many hours in the presence of the Lord.

Paul then compares the glory of the old covenant with the glory of the new covenant. He asks, “How will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?” The old covenant was based on law, and through the law came the knowledge of sin. The knowledge of sin did not resolve the problem of sin, or atone for our sins; it brought condemnation. The new covenant brought payment and forgiveness of our sins, resulting in righteousness. The glory of the new covenant of righteousness far surpassed the fading glory of the old covenant.

(2 Cor 3:8–11) “how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? {9} For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. {10} For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses *it*. {11} For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory.”

In Romans 8:1, Paul said that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” The Mosaic law brought condemnation and death, but the Spirit set us free from the law of sin and death in the new covenant. There is a surpassing glory in this new covenant where we have not condemnation, guilt, or shame.

(Ro 8:1–2) “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. {2} For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

When I was growing up, I learned to type on a manual typewriter. You had to press down firmly and pretty far when you typed. If you were making copies, you put a piece of carbon copy between the top sheet and the next sheet of paper. Typewriters were nice and typewritten texts were far more legible than things that were handwritten. When I went away to college, my parents bought me a Smith Corona electric typewriter. You barely had to press down on a key and you could type far faster than the manual ones. There was a return button instead of a manual return lever. The glory of this new typewriter far exceeded the glory of the manual one.

In the late 1980's I bought my first computer was a 286 and it had a hard drive with 20 Meg and a quarter Meg of RAM. I had a monochrome screen, and I was pretty excited to have a computer. I could do word processing, and easily make changes. I could store files electronically. I was able to do spreadsheets and tables, and keep all kinds of statistics. I was pretty excited about that first computer. Our computers today are nothing like those computers. The processing speed is so much faster. My current laptop has 32 Gig of RAM and a solid state 500 Gig hard drive. Let me give some comparisons. My new laptop has 128,000 times more RAM than my first computer. My new laptop has 25,000 times bigger hard drive, and is much faster and more reliable. The glory of these new computers greatly surpasses the glory of the old computers.

The old covenant brought condemnation, guilt, and shame. The new covenant brought forgiveness and righteousness, and took away our shame. The old covenant revealed our sins and the new covenant removed our sins. The glory of the new covenant greatly surpassed the fading glory of the old covenant.

4. **The Work** (2 Cor 3:12-18)

The glory of the new covenant gave Paul great boldness in his speech. He did not have to put a veil over his face to share the word of God with people. In Christ, the veil is taken away or removed, and people can behold the glory of the Lord. For those who are not in Christ, a veil remains unlifted, but when someone comes to Christ, the veil is removed. When someone comes to Christ, they receive the Holy Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Sin brought condemnation, bondage, and death, but the Spirit brings righteousness and liberty. As a Pharisee, Paul taught the Law. As a minister of the new covenant, Paul now has the privilege of sharing a more glorious covenant. He can now preach forgiveness, righteousness, and hope. Having such a hope allowed Paul to use great boldness in his speech.

(2 Cor 3:12–17) “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 Christ. {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. {17} Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty.”

The work of Moses was to give the Law of the old covenant, and he did it with a veiled face. The work of Paul was to give the word of the new covenant, and he did it with an unveiled face. Paul said we are with an unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and are being

transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. We are transformed by being in the presence of the Lord, and seeing His glory. The work of Paul was to preach the gospel so that the veils were removed, and then to present every man complete in Christ. Paul was helping people become Christ-like, which is spiritual transformation. Paul had a passion for seeing people transformed and made complete in Christ.

(2 Cor 3:18) "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."

Notice what Paul wrote to the Colossians. "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." Paul's work began with proclaiming the gospel. Then, he admonished and taught people to become complete in Christ. Paul labored, striving according to God's power to accomplish this. Paul's work was to encourage people to know the Father, to know and follow His word, and to be transformed.

(Col 1:28–29) "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. {29} For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."

In Romans 12, Paul exhorted us to present our bodies as living and holy sacrifices, acceptable to God, which is our spiritual service of worship. Then, he exhorted us not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, proving what the will of God is, that which is good, acceptable, and perfect. Paul's ministry in the new covenant was to preach the gospel, and help believers renew their minds and be spiritually transformed. We are being transformed into the image and glory of the Lord.

(Ro 12:1–2) "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. {2} And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Conclusion and Applications

Paul did not need a letter of commendation from the Corinthians or to the Corinthians. They were his commendation. Paul had led many of them to the Lord and taught them for eighteen months. Paul did not have any selfish motives; he was just being obedient to God's calling on his life. In the same way, the fruit of our ministry in peoples' lives should be our commendation.

Paul's adequacy or sufficiency came from the Lord. He did not consider anything as coming from himself. In the same way, our adequacy should come from the Lord. We should not consider anything as coming from ourselves. Everything we have comes from the Lord. Our gifts, abilities, aptitudes, salvation, calling, and provision come from the Lord. He makes us adequate as servants of a new covenant.

The old covenant revealed sin, and brought condemnation and death. When God gave the Law to Moses, his face reflected the glory of the Lord. The ministry of the old covenant had glory, but it was a fading glory. The new covenant brought forgiveness from sin and salvation; it brought life.

If the old covenant had glory, the new covenant has far more glory. You and I are ministers of this new covenant. Therefore, we should have great boldness in our speech. You and I do not have to put a veil on our face when we share the good news with people; we should be bold.

God has removed the veil from those that turn to the Lord. He has given us His Spirit, and where the Spirit is, there is liberty. As you and I behold the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed. We are being transformed into His image. God's plan for our lives is to be transformed into His image. He wants us to be holy for He is holy. He wants us to be loving because He is love. He wants us to spend time with Him so that we can behold His glory and be transformed.

Concluding Prayer

Father, may You write our commendation on our hearts, and may we be read by all men. May our adequacy is in You and from You. Apart from You we cannot do anything, but You make us adequate to be Your servants of a new covenant. It is in You that we live and move and have our being. Father, may we comprehend and appreciate the glory of this new covenant that You have made us ministers of. Give us great boldness in our speech. Holy Spirit, we ask you to fill us. Where You are, there is liberty, and may we walk in the liberty that You bring. Lord, You are coming back for a bride without spot or wrinkle, for a holy bride. I pray that we will be transformed into Your image, as we gaze into the mirror that shows Your glory. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction to Paul's Ministry

Introduction (Acts 18:11, 2 Cor 3:1-18)

1. **The Commendation** (2 Cor 3:1-3, Ro 16:1-2, Acts 9:26-28, Je 31:33-34, 2 Co 10:12-18)
2. **The Adequacy** (2 Cor 3:4-6, 1 Co 12:20-21)
3. **The Glory** (2 Cor 3:7-11, Ex 24:12, 34:29-35, Rom 8:1-2)
4. **The Work** (2 Cor 3:12-18, Col 1:28-29, Rom 12:1-2)

Conclusion and Applications