

## The Challenge of 2 Corinthians 3:

Many Christians, including some if not many biblical scholars, read this chapter as very much a condemnation of the Law of Moses (which is however more accurately described as the Torah of God).

Certainly the Apostle Paul uses strong rhetoric here, especially when contrasted with the words he would later pen in Romans 9-11. His strong rhetoric appears to be addressed to other teachers of Torah who oppose his approach.

It would appear that some Jewish teachers were trying to bring fear upon the Gentile converts that unless they became fully Jewish, that is undergo the rituals of Jewish proselytization ('works of the law'<sup>1</sup>), they would be condemned. Paul rejects this, as he believes that Gentiles should remain Gentiles (while still being obedient to the commandments of God).

I believe that the Apostle Paul is trying to free these Corinthians from compulsion and fear – most of Hellenistic Christianity has instead mistaken his statements as suggesting that they free themselves from Torah in general (and it seems, almost in total, given how immoral Hellenistic Christianity in general has become).

This is because Hellenistic Christianity does not understand much about God, about Torah, about freedom, and about the Messiah. In fact, it seems to me that Hellenistic Christians understand very little about Hebraic thought at all.

Paul after all states: *"Do we then nullify the Torah by this faith? Don't even think that! On the contrary, we uphold the Torah"* (Romans 3:31).

The Apostle Paul is trying to warn his audience against over-zealous Torah-keeping. Paul understood how good Torah was, but saw that it was important how both Jew and Gentile interacted with it.

He had after all also said: *"Is Torah evil? Don't even think that! ... the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good."* (Rom 7:7,12)

Many see that statement *"for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"* (2 Cor 3:6) as conclusive proof that the 'letter' (thought to refer to Torah here) is bad; that it kills!

Consider though that just a few verses earlier Paul has said that the Gospel of Messiah can 'kill' as well!

Just earlier in the same epistle he wrote: *"For we are an aroma of Messiah to God among those on the road to salvation—and among those on the road to ruin. Among those in the latter case [we are] a deadly fume that leads to death, but for those in the former a life-giving fragrance that leads to life."* - 2 Cor 2:15-16

Reflect on this! He has just stated that if the Gospel falls on hardened hearts it leads to death. In the same way as the Torah does!

Both the Torah and the Gospel (the Good News of the Kingdom of God) call for repentance and circumcised hearts.

What is a 'circumcised heart'? Circumcision involves removing a 'covering' and thus making the heart open to the Almighty. God wants us to remove the covering (of ego and selfishness, etc.) that we have placed over our heart so that we can restore our relationship with Him.

*"... having a relationship with G-d is essentially returning to what is most natural. The Hebrew word for repentance; 'teshuvah' means 'to return'. This is a return to the original state of affairs, being in harmony with what was always meant to be. It is not something new to be attained, nor is it some higher state of consciousness. It is returning to what is already ingrained within every single soul and in every single heart. It is about re-establishing the divine connection set in place at creation." --- Moshe Avraham Kempinski - from "The Teacher and The Preacher- a dialogue" p37*

We see this two-fold effect, this contrast before life and death in a number of places such as, Deuteronomy 30:15 and 19, *"See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil...therefore choose life!"*.

Paul clearly believed the 'New or Renewed Covenant' had in some way dawned with the arrival of Yeshua, because he saw the spirit-filled lives of Yeshua's followers. (Now with 2000 years of hindsight we may want to dispute to what degree

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<sup>1</sup> Explaining what the 'works of the law' really means - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Works%20of%20the%20Law.pdf>

it has arrived though).

When we read Jeremiah 31 carefully we should see most emphatically that we do not currently live in this time.

Consider 2 Cor 2:2-3: *"You are our letter, written in our hearts, **known and read by all men**; being revealed that you are a letter of Messiah, served by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of flesh."*

In referring to these Corinthian believers, Paul's tells us how they are his 'letter', that is how their community sees that they are followers of Messiah. He says that are 'known and read by all men'.

How are they read? By their actions, by their lifestyle.

The true heart is expressed in action. Their obedience to Torah is what is seen and is what demonstrates their faith. As followers of Messiah they are not legalistically adhering to the 'traditions of men' but displaying the love of God, just as he decreed through His Ten Words, when he essentially said *"if you love me, you will obey the commandments"* (see Lev 19).

Yes, Paul says the letter kills and the Spirit gives life. The letter, is NOT the Torah.

How can we be sure? Because Paul kept the Torah and it had not killed him, and because in Rom 7:12-14 Paul says: *"So the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. ... For we know that the Torah is spiritual, "*

The 'letter' is the legalistic adherence to the Rabbinic Law, to the layers of rules and regulations placed on the Torah. The 'letter' is trying to gain salvation by works, not being obedient to Torah because of our faithfulness, our circumcised hearts.

Remember, obedience to Torah does not save us, it is rather the out-working of our heart-felt desire, as a result of our salvation and indwelling spirit of Yeshua, to serve our Father.

There is no question that 2 Corinthians 3 is a challenging chapter. It is very easy to misunderstand its message. I therefore recommend 'LIFTING THE VEIL': THE CHALLENGES POSED BY 2 CORINTHIANS 3' by *Thomas D Stegman* to give a good introduction to the challenges – see <http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/scjr/article/view/1510/1363>