

Worksheet #3: 2 Corinthians 2:12–3:18

Introduction:

In this passage, Paul launches into an extended defense of his own ministry that continues until 7:16. He begins by briefly mentioning his ministry in Troas and Macedonia, and then defends his apostolic ministry as the divinely-ordained means by which the word of God is spread as “the fragrance of Christ” in the world (2:12–17). In 3:1–3, Paul argues that rather than needing written letters of commendation, his ministry is commended by the work of God in the Corinthians’ hearts. This work in their hearts, Paul argues in 3:4–6, is carried out through the sufficient work of God in them, and thus needs no other human validation. The work of God is carried out through the ministry of the new covenant, which is revealed in Christ and surpasses the old covenant in glory, resulting in the progressive sanctification of believers in Christ (3:7–18).

Abbreviated Outline¹ (current passage in bold):

- I. Introduction (1:1-11)
 - A. Salutation (1:1-2)
 - B. Prayer of Thanksgiving (1:3-7)
 - C. Explanation of Paul’s Thanksgiving (1:8-11)
- II. Paul’s Relationship with the Corinthians (1:12-2:11)
 - A. Paul’s Pure Conduct (1:12-14)
 - B. Paul’s Change in Plans (1:15-22)
 - C. The Reason for the Change in Plans (1:23-2:4)
 - D. Forgiveness to the Repentant Sinner (2:5–11)
- III. **Paul’s Defense of his Ministry (2:12-7:16)**
 - A. Paul’s Ministry in Troas and Macedonia (2:12-17)**
 - B. Paul’s Letters of Recommendation (3:1-3)**
 - C. Paul’s Competence (3:4-6)**
 - D. Ministry of the New Covenant (3:7-18)**
 - E. The Unveiled Truth (4:1-6)
 - F. Treasure in Clay Jars (4:7-18)
 - G. The Coming Resurrection (5:1-10)
 - H. The Ministry of Reconciliation (5:11-6:2)
 - I. Catalog of Paul’s Sufferings (6:3-13)
 - J. Call to Separate from Paul’s Opponents (6:14-7:1)
 - K. Paul’s Final Defense (7:2–16)
- IV. The Collection for the Believers in Jerusalem (8:1-9:15)
- V. Paul’s Renewed Defense of his Apostleship (10:1-13:4)
- VI. Final Exhortations (13:5-12)
- VII. Closing (13:13)

¹ Adapted from Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Academic, 2009), 484.

Interpretation: *Read through the passage, and then review and make notes under the questions below.*

1. What does Paul mean by saying that God “always leads us in triumph in Christ” (2:14)?

2. How does Paul distinguish between those who are “peddling the Word of God” and those who proclaim it in “sincerity” (2:17)?

3. In what ways were the Corinthians themselves “an epistle of Christ” (3:3)?

4. On what basis does Paul claim that the Corinthians were “an epistle of Christ” (3:4–5)?

5. In 3:7–18, Paul contrasts the old covenant under Moses (Exod. 34:29–35) with the new covenant in Christ (Jer. 31:31–34). How does Paul demonstrate the glory of the old covenant, and how does that compare with the glory of the new (3:7–11)?

6. What analogy does Paul draw when he compares Moses’ use of a veil (3:12–13; cf. Exod. 34:29–35) with the Jewish understanding of the Old Testament (3:14–15)? How does this compare with the experience of a believer (3:16)?

7. Based on 3:16–17, what does it mean to “behold ... the glory of the Lord” with an “unveiled face” (3:18)?

Application: *Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today.*

8. What does this passage mean for your walk with the Lord?

9. How does this passage challenge the way you think about situations in daily life? What should you do about that?
