

THE MINISTRY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT | 2 CORINTHIANS 3:6-18

- Verse 6 -
 - In this very important (and misunderstood) verse, we need to settle a few matters before analyzing the message.
 - First, who is **us**?
 - The chapter begins with a contrast between **we** and **you** (v. 1), this continues with **ye** and **us** (**our**) in verses 2 and 3. In verses 4-5 there is further use of **we** and **our**.
 - Since nothing has changed, we are forced to begin with the incontrovertible fact that **us** in verse 6 is Paul and his companions, Sylvanus and Timothy (as defined in 2 Corinthians 1:19).
 - Therefore, from this passage, one can only conclude that Paul and his stated companions are **ministers of the new testament**. If one argues that *we* are such ministers, then the argument must be based on another passage of Scripture.
 - The word **minister** is δίακονος [diakonos] which is a "active duty" word, related to *dioko*, "to pursue."
 - The **new testament** is a translation of καινης διαθηκης [kainos diathekas].
 - The word *diathekas* is the word *covenant*.
 - The KJV translates this word as **testament** 14 times.
 - Six times with *kainos* as **new testament**, once as **old testament** (2 Cor. 3:14, using an anachronism, as we shall see in that verse), and seven times in various manners, but always relating to the old or new covenants.
 - The word *diathekas* itself is used 33 times, and typically translated as *covenant*.
 - Why is the word sometimes translated *covenant* and other times *testament*?
 - It appears that the translators used *testament* when referring to that which is applicable to the church, and *covenant* when it only applied to Israel.
 - For example, Hebrews 7:22 speaks of a **better testament** while Hebrews 8:6 speaks of a **better covenant**. In Hebrews 7 there is not a solid connection to the Mosaic covenant, but in Hebrews 8 the connection is undeniable.
 - All this says two things about the KJV translators.
 - First, they were dispensational, seeing something unique that belonged to the church-age alone.
 - Second, they interpreted the church as being under a "last will and testament," which they did not call a covenant, either to avoid confusion or for theological reasons. In the first they were correct, in the second there is room for debate.
 - My take: I applaud the KJV for making the distinction. Their distinction removes the problem of putting the church under the New Covenant (which is clearly for Israel). However, I am not convinced that the text itself speaks of the church age, but rather it does speak of the *new covenant* which is for Israel, not the church.
 - If this be the case, how can Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, claim to be minister of this covenant?
 - Note that Paul does not claim (here or anywhere) that *we* are *under the new covenant* nor experiencing the new covenant. He simply says he has been given

- the ability to be a *servant* of this covenant. **Made us able** is *ἠκανόω* [hikanoo] is *equipped or made sufficient*.
- Paul's *ministry of the new covenant* is one of telling the Jewish people that their covenant has not been delivered (which was beyond obvious) and could be delivered as they nationally receive their Messiah, Jesus Christ.
 - Note that the problem of placing the church under the new covenant is that the experience of the church (either corporately or individually) is not reflective of the promises of the covenant, as found in Jeremiah 31:31-34, nor is the church **the house of Israel** nor **the house of Judah** (Jer. 31:31).
 - Paul goes on to describe the **new testament** as being **not of the letter, but of the spirit**.
 - The word **letter** is *γράμμα* [gramma], from which we get *grammar*. It refers to a *written* instructions and not alphabetical letters (the same word is translated **written** in the next verse).
 - One reason why I believe that this **new testament** is the promised new covenant is because the new covenant is not going to be written in a code, but **in their inward parts and in their hearts** (Jer. 31:33).
 - The church, however, is wholly based upon the written code of Paul's epistles, and the "sole source of faith and practice" is in the written word of God. In fact, Paul uses this same root (*gramma*) in 2 Corinthians 1:13 of his own writing, and says, **I trust ye shall acknowledge** [what I write] **even to the end**.
 - In conclusion for this verse, Paul is writing about that which has future glorious implications for the Jewish nation.
 - It is Paul's constant desire that the Jews both individually find salvation in Jesus Christ (Rom. 9:1-3) and that they nationally receive their King and Kingdom (thus the book of Hebrews).
 - To further solidify this verse and the following context as a *future expectation* rather than a current experience, note that verse 12 speaks of the **hope** that Paul has, using a word that is entirely bound in the *future* (see note on v. 12).
 - Verses 7-8 -
 - In vv. 7-8, Paul speaks of the **ministrations of death** and the **ministrations of the spirit**.
 - The word **ministrations** is *διακονία* [diakonia], very closely associated with *διάκονος* [diakonos], used in verse 6 as **ministers**.
 - While *diakonos* is the person, *diakonia* is the work done by that person, that is, the *minister* and the *ministry* (as in Darby).
 - The **ministry of death** is that which was **written and engraven in stones**, which seems to be a clear reference to the Ten Commandments (which serve as the representation of the entire Law).
 - This ministry (of the Law) **was glorious** in its arrival (the Greek says, "came with glory"). This glory, however **was to be done away**, as seen in **the face of Moses** which, for a time, **Israel could not steadfastly behold**. Note that Paul speaks in the past tense.
 - Moving to the *future* (not present) tense, Paul says that **the ministration of the spirit** will be (future) **rather glorious**.
 - If Paul held the belief that he was a minister of the covenant under which the church now operated, he would have been inaccurate in his grammar.
 - Since we are obligated by the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration to accept the grammar as both grammatically and *theologically* correct, we are therefore obligated to conclude that Paul held the new covenant to be *yet future at the time he wrote to the Corinthians*, approx. 60AD.