

Dr. Ayo Adewuya, 2 Corinthians, Session 4, 2 Corinthians 3, A Ministry of the New Covenant

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This is Dr. Ayo Adewuya in his teaching on 2 Corinthians. This is session 4, 2 Corinthians 3, A Ministry of the New Covenant.

We come to 2 Corinthians chapter three.

We're going to look at the ministry of Paul and see Paul as a minister of the new covenant. Let's begin by saying that criticisms are commonplace in society, and ministers are not exempt. Usually, what we see is that people put their yardstick on; they will put their own measuring rods as instruments of assessment. They want to assess the minister based on their own understanding.

The question is how one responds to such criticisms. This is one of the questions we're going to be answering as we look at 2nd Corinthians chapter 3. And, of course, we'll ask another question. Who is a minister? What is a yardstick with which a minister is to be measured? What actually makes a minister? You see, if the minister is to avoid being sidetracked and remain faithful to God, then only God's standards matter. You see, Paul faced all kinds of criticism by the Corinthians, and in the face of such criticism, Paul had no doubt of who he was and what God had called him to do.

In other words, he had a very clear sense of God's call and purpose, which we all as ministers should have. As such, he could not only bear but also forcefully rebut all the criticisms that were heaped at him. As Paul would argue in this chapter, he was a minister of the new covenant.

Let's read from verse 1 through verse 6. Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely, we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? You yourselves are a letter written on our hearts to be known and read by all. Are you sure that you are a letter of Christ prepared 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? Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God, nor that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us. Our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Let's quickly go back to chapter 2, verse 17, where Paul makes a statement that is sufficient unto these things, and then he sets himself apart from many who are peddlers of God's Word. So, Paul continues now in an attempt to establish in the mind of Corinthians not only the sufficiency of his ministry, the sufficiency of his

ministry, but the superiority of his ministry to those peddlers. And Paul was going to show that his ministry is Christ-centered and bold in its open proclamation.

When you read chapter 3, verse 1, and you see if we are beginning to commend ourselves, you see the first question: should we, surely, not need, as others do, a letter of recommendation? The answer to these questions will be no. Behind each of these two questions, both of which expect the answer no, stands an actual charge or expected charge against Paul.

You see, in chapter 2, verses 14 to 16, Paul has just spoken about the role of the apostles as a fragrance of life, and he has spoken of his divine commission in chapter 2, verse 17. Now, some might begin to say, oh, come on, he's bragging now. Some might say, Paul, once again, oh, you are indulging; you are indulging in your notorious habit of self-commendation.

And Paul says no, that's not what is happening. The second assertion that Paul answers was made by some of the many who are making a profit out of preaching. Doesn't that sound very much like today? Ministry has become business.

Paul says no, I'm not like that. You see, since Jerusalem is a fount of Christianity, anyone walking outside Jerusalem must be able to give proof of his commission by letters of recommendation. Some of these people might have been saying, we brought to Corinthians, come and written letters from Jerusalem.

Paul says I don't need a letter of commendation like the others. So, he set himself apart, he defends his apostolic ministry, and Paul puts a distance between himself and the many. You see, it's a theological issue with practical implications and ramifications.

Paul says, they are there, I am here. In terms of theology, in terms of doctrine, we don't agree. I'm commissioned by God; the Holy Spirit has changed lives through my ministry.

Like the New Covenant, his ministry shares, like the New Covenant, his ministry shares God's glory. Like most of Moses' ministry, his own ministry takes hard-heartedness away. So, Paul has a lot to say in this chapter.

Who is an authentic minister? What qualifies a person for ministry? These are questions that are just as important today as they were at the time Paul was writing 2 Corinthians. So, it seems, or it appears, that some of the interlopers at Corinth have questioned Paul's lack of a letter of recommendation. Now you understand what we mean by letters of recommendation.

If you have ever sought a job, you are likely to have been asked to provide names of persons whom the prospective employer might contact to request reference letters concerning you. You see, letters of introduction have their place. In fact, they were used in the early church as a means of establishing the credentials of itinerant preachers.

In fact, when you look at Romans chapter 16, verses 1 and 2, in Romans chapter 16, verses 1 and 2, you see an example of what we're talking about in terms of letters of recommendation. Paul talks about it in Romans 16, verses 1 and 2. I will read that to you. And you see there, here it goes, Romans 16, 1 and 2. All right, there we are now.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at St. Croix, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints and help her in whatever she may require from you. For she has been a helper to many, and to myself as well. And you see again in 1 Corinthians in chapter 16, verses 10 and 11.

So, let no one despise him. Speed him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I'm expecting him with the brethren. As for our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brethren, but it was not at all at his will to come now.

He will come when he has the opportunity. So, even Paul himself had to give commendations or letters of recommendation to other people and let them know. But Paul says, no, I'm exempt.

I don't need it. He did not need letters of recommendation for his ministry to the Corinthians. That's what we read right there in verse 1. Do we need any letters? Do we commend ourselves? You see, today, we can make analogies to the letter of commendation, which might include a certificate of ordination, a letter of recommendation, or an academic degree in theology.

I mean, some churches don't employ you, except you have the minimum degree, evil masters of divinity. Sometimes it's not even paper, eloquence, or personal charisma. Many people think that a certificate of ordination, or having a degree in theology, means that you have the credentials for ministry.

Not necessarily. You can have all that. As we put it this way, you may have as many degrees at the back of your name as a thermometer.

It doesn't make a difference if you are not called by God. While those things are important, and don't get me wrong, those things are important. I remember somebody talking to John Wesley.

The story goes this way. The person told John Wesley that God is not interested in your education or your learning. John Wesley said that God is also not interested in or proud of your ignorance.

So, it's not either-or. So, we're not saying it's not important to study theology. Of course, it is important.

There's a place for it so that our doctrine can be sound and we can explain the word very well. But we're saying that that is not the primary thing. The call from God, the credentialing from God, is the first and foremost thing that we need in ministry.

And that is very, very important for us today. He says we don't need letters. While those things are important and have their place, it must be realized that a piece of paper is, itself is never a proper credential.

The true credentials of ministry change lives. We become living epistles. Paul's work and commission were confirmed by the results of his ministry.

I like what Annie Johnson Fleet wrote, which says very well. It says we are the only Bible the careless world will read. We are the sinner's gospel.

We are the scoffer's creed. We are the Lord's last message, given in deed and word. What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blood? We are Christ's message.

And Paul says, listen, I am called by God. God called me. He said I don't need a letter of recommendation.

You see, Paul's opponents apparently carried letters as credentials. Of course, when you read Romans chapter 16, verse 1, you read Acts chapter 9, verse 2, Paul himself was going with a letter before his conversion. He was on the way to Damascus.

He was going to Damascus, and he repeated that in chapter 22, verse 5. So when you read about letters of commendation in 2nd Corinthians chapter 3, you know where Paul is coming from. Because it is something that was done in antiquity. And because Paul did not present one to these people, they're saying, well, let him show us his letter.

Paul says, do we need the letters of commendation like others do? He says, no, because you yourself, you are our letters in the gospel. I mean, that's a powerful imagery. It makes a bold statement.

Calling the Corinthian believers is the letter. They were letters of Christ written with the Holy Spirit by the apostles' ministry. By the apostles' ministry.

They were credentialed by God. Paul is making a powerful statement for these people to understand that he was indeed the apostle. You see, this activity of God in their lives, in the lives of the people, was written indelibly upon Paul's own heart.

He could not forget the way the Spirit had walked in their lives through his proclamation of the gospel. And, of course, in verse 3, Paul makes it clear that this divine work was written upon their own hearts and lives. What that means is that a letter must be legible if it is to be read.

It ought also to be logical and consistent. Otherwise, the letter is meaningless. Above all, a letter should express the writer's thoughts and personality.

And you know it very well. Have you ever gotten a letter from someone? Once you read the letter, you can always tell the mood of that person because you are familiar with that person. You know that person well, and when you read the sentence, you can tell whether the person is smiling or is frowning.

Because you are so much used to hearing the voice of that person, and by the way, isn't that exactly the way we should read the Bible? To hear the voice of God. To hear the voice of God.

Do you understand what I mean? For instance, when your wife writes a letter to you, you are not just reading words. You are hearing her voice. Even though you are reading words, you are actually hearing your voice through the letter.

You are reading, but you are hearing the voice. And you can almost say word for word; this is the way she reads it. This is the way she's writing it.

And so, Paul says, you are our letters. A letter. Paul's effective ministry among the Corinthians bore witness to the validity of his calling.

Those who were acquainted with these results needed no letter of introduction and commendation from the Apostles. You see, believers today must realize that being a letter of Christ is not a matter of choice. Do we want to be letters of Christ or not? It is not a matter of choice.

We must realize that we are letters of Christ, not only in churches but in various social contexts. We must be letters of Christ wherever we find ourselves, such as schools, offices, workplaces, in which we may find ourselves.

We are letters of Christ. So, the question is, what type of letter are we presenting? But note something else again. You cannot miss the corporate nuance of the passage.

It is communal. Together, the entire congregation constituted just one letter. Read it there in 2nd Corinthians.

It didn't say you are letters. You are the letter of Christ written on our hearts. It is corporate in orientation, in thought.

What an important lesson for the local congregation today. Although we are saved personally, together, collectively, as a community of faith, we reflect the life of Christ. Together.

Together. You see, Paul has shown that his letter of recommendation is far superior to those of his critics. His critics' letters were humanly authored and written on paper.

What of Paul's ministry? Talking about authentic ministry, was he self-appointed? Was his ministry a result of his personal growth? The answer to those questions is no. His ministry was also verified by his unwavering confidence in God. It was God who empowered him for service.

You see, Paul's confidence before God in claiming that the Corinthians were a letter written by Christ came through Christ. It was not the product of a pious wish or imagination. You see, no one can claim to be adequate for the ministry left to one's own resources and strength.

So, the final court of appeal is God's own enabling in verses 5 and 6. And the only endorsement of the ministry worth having is that which passes muster in the sight of God and is true to Christ. Let me repeat what I've just said. The final court of appeal is God's own enabling power.

And, of course, the only endorsement of the ministry that is worth having is that which passes muster in God's sight and is true to Christ. So when we talk about authentic ministry here, we're talking about a ministry of the Spirit. A ministry that is guided and directed by the Spirit.

Paul realized in verse 6 that to be divinely commissioned was to be divinely equipped. To be divinely commissioned, his equipment to be a minister of a new covenant was given at his Damascus road experience when he was named a chosen instrument of God and was filled with the Spirit. So, a minister of the new covenant is a ministry of the Spirit.

And of course, it's a ministry of grace. Paul is going to contrast the two basic characteristics of the old and new covenants. You see, the basis of the old covenant between Yahweh and Israel was basically a lifeless written code.

In the Book of the Covenant, you see that in Exodus chapter 24, verse 7. But the basis of the new covenant between God and the church is a dynamic, pervasive spirit. The written code of the letter pronounced death, a sentence of death. You see that in Romans chapter 7, verses 9 to 11.

But the Spirit brings a transformation of life. Though the new covenant was ratified by the shedding of Christ's blood and is symbolized in the communion cup, it becomes operative through the indwelling Spirit of God, who gives us a new life. Where the letter was powerless, the Spirit is powerful.

The Spirit is powerful in producing holiness in life and in enabling us as believers to meet the righteous requirements of the law. I mean, you see a huge difference between Paul's ministry and the old covenant. It was God who empowered him for service.

Paul's confidence arose not out of an attitude of self-sufficiency but one which was through Christ. Paul understood the Lord walking through his proclamation of the gospel. Walking through his proclamation of the gospel, he knew very well that it was that which made him adequate.

So, when Paul asked the question in chapter 2, is it sufficient unto these things? He is now answering that question bit by bit, and he is going to talk about the surpassing glory of the new covenant. But in the meantime, in verse 6, he describes more clearly and more fully the adequacy which God grants. He said God has made us adequate as servants.

Think about that again. In our last session, when we examined chapter 2, we mentioned the fact that Paul did not lord it over the faith of the believers. Now he says again, God empowers us as adequate servants.

He does not empower us to lord it over others. Rather, God empowers us to serve him and to serve others. God empowers us as servants of a new covenant.

The fact that God wrote on the hearts of the Corinthians shows that Paul and his co-workers were competent ministers of the new covenant. So, the ministry of Paul was a ministry of the Spirit, it's a ministry of grace, it's a Christ-centered ministry, it's a ministry of reconciliation, it's a ministry that is characterized by integrity. So, when you are asking about who an authentic minister is, we begin to answer these questions as we look at 2 Corinthians chapter 3, chapter 4, and we move on.

Then, from verse 7, if the ministry of death chiseled in letters or stone tablets came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come into glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more

does the ministry of justification abound in glory. Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory. For if what was set aside came through glory, much more as a permanent coming glory.

Since then, we have had such hope. We act with great boldness, not like Moses who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened.

Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

Now, the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

So far, in chapter 3, Paul's thought has progressed from the idea of commendatory letters written on their hearts by the Spirit to reflection on the new covenant promised by God through Jeremiah, on which the Lord will be written on people's hearts. You see that in Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 31 to 34. Now, that quotation makes Paul listen to the comparison of the old and new covenants and old and new economies.

Each one involved a ministry that was accompanied by glory, but so superior was the glory of the new covenant that the glory of the old one faded into insignificance by comparison. That's what it means. It's like when you have a candle light, and that's all you have.

You see with a candle light, but suddenly the electricity comes back up, and it's as if the candle is no longer there. The light of the candle is still there, but you have a brighter light. So, it's not that the light of the candle is no light; it's there, but apparently, if you have something better now, in that sense, the light of the candle is a kind of faded glory because you have a better one.

That's a comparison. It's not talking in terms of uselessness, but in terms of comparison that the glory of the new covenant is much more better, and is surpassing than the glory of the old covenant. So, we wouldn't say the old covenant is useless, but we're simply saying, in comparison with the new, why would you still be using a candle when you have 100 white lights or 200 white lights? You say, I don't need this because I've got something better.

If you've been cooking with an ordinary stove, and somebody brings a gas stove or gas range into your house, I don't need that anymore. That's exactly. So you find Paul now, this section from verse 7 to 18 is very, very significant, and we want to go through it as carefully as we can because you see Paul now quoting, I'm referring to Exodus chapter 34 from verses 29 to 35.

We must remember that Paul provides a commentary on selected points of the narratives in Exodus 34, 29 to 35. Now go back, let's go back to verse 7. Now, if the ministry of the chiseled and letters of stone tablets came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses's face because of the glory on his face, a glory now set aside. How much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory.

So, in these three verses, you see an allusion to what happened to Moses. You see, when Moses descended from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments, his face shone brightly. It was so bright that the Israelites could not look steadily at him, and they had to cover their faces; we couldn't look at it.

Well then, Paul argues, if such glory attended the giving of the law, on that the ministry or administration that brought death and condemns people, how much more then, will the glorious ministry of the Spirit be that brings righteousness? I mean, Moses's face was shiny, and we can't look at this. And Paul says, well, if you can look at that, think about what we now have. Think about what God has now done in Christ.

How much more glorious. What was a distinctive and positive feature of the old order, must also characterize the new economy, but in a greater measure. The old order had glory.

The new order has glory. But the new order, the new economy, is greater. So, Paul uses the imagery of two covenants to show the superiority of his ministry to that of his opponents.

He contrasts the ministry and the effectiveness of the two covenants and observes that this new covenant is more glorious on both counts. Number one, he observes that the new covenant is more glorious than the old in its ministry. This is manifest by the fact that the old covenant slew sinners, while the new covenant gives life to sinners.

You see, the law can show you your sin, but it does not provide a way out of your sin. The Lord tells you, this is sinful, this is sinful, this is sinful, but can't help you beyond

that. But the grace of God that comes under the new covenant, based on Christ's death and resurrection, offers divine forgiveness.

You do not only see sin, but you see a way out—a way from darkness into light and from death into life. The law pronounces condemnation and death, but the gospel offers life and reconciliation.

Then, also with reference to the ministry of this covenant, the ministry of the old covenant ceased, while the ministry of the new continues. In verses 12 to 18, Paul begins to talk about veiling and unveiling. Look at 12 and 13 to begin with.

He says, 12 and 13, for if what was set aside, sorry, verse 12, since then we have such a hope, we act with great boldness. We act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face. See, in 12 and 13, Paul shows that as participants of the new covenant, he and his fellow apostles and preachers had a very sure hope that it was a permanent, irrevocable covenant, never to be superseded, and never to be, I mean, surpassed in splendor.

This accounted for their boldness and confidence in preaching. They had nothing to conceal, but they had every reason for a fearless candle. You see that in verse 12, this idea of openness prompts Paul to continue his comment on Exodus 34, 29 to 35.

You see, that passage that we mentioned a while ago suggested that after each encounter between Moses and Yahweh in the meeting, whenever Moses returned, he covered his face. They were dazzled by the radiance of his face. When he had finished speaking to them, he used to unveil his face, but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he took the veil off until he came out.

Now, although the Old Testament does not explicitly state that the radiance on the face of Moses gradually faded and then disappeared, we don't read that in the Old Testament, Paul deduced that the reason for Moses veiling or masking his face was not so much to prevent the Israelites from being dazzled by his brightness, no, as to prevent them from continuing to gaze in till his face has totally lost the brilliance of the reflected glory, no. Paul was attempting to teach them that the newly established order was destined to be eclipsed and passed away. The newly established order was destined to be eclipsed and passed away.

Some commentators have suggested that the veiling of Moses's face was to prevent the Israelites from looking right onto the end of what was transient. Others believe that Moses wished to avoid the personal embarrassment of having the people realize the splendor of his face was fading. I don't think either of those was the concern of Paul.

All Paul was saying is that we are ministers of a better covenant, and this better covenant is the glory that does not fade, does not fade away, period. So, we stop where Paul stops. Why veiling on veiling is not relevant to us at this point, but what is Paul saying in terms of his ministry, in terms of who God has called him to be? He is saying that his ministry is more glorious than the old one in its effectiveness.

Though Israel saw the glory of God reflected in the face of Moses, and they feared, they did not obey God's law. They saw the glory of God, but they were afraid and blind to the truth. Even to this day, the law which holds its observers in bondage is unable to leave the veil from their hearts.

There are still people in our days who want to come to God by the law. When you look at verses 14 and 15, you see that Moses made an attempt. His attempt was laudable to veil his face, verses 14 and 15, but their minds were hardened. This to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there since only in Christ is it set aside.

You see, Moses' attempt to veil was not successful. I mean, instead of recognizing the significance of his veiled face, the Israelites became dulled in their powers of perception. You see, Paul finds evidence of this spiritual insensitivity in the fact that down to the time he was living, when the old covenant was read in the synagogue, listen, at the time of Paul, when the old covenant was being read in the synagogue or the Torah was being studied, the ability of the Jews to recognize the impermanence, the transience of the Mosaic order was impaired. They still did not recognize it.

A veil covered their hearts, comparable to the veil that covered the face of Moses. Paul could call it the same veil. Why? In both cases, the veil prevented a vision.

Your veil prevented a vision, whether physical or spiritual, or maybe because it was identical to the veil of ignorance about the transitory nature of the Mosaic economy. This veil remained unlifted in the case of the unbelieving Jew, because only as he came to Christ was the veil set aside. And let me tell you, not just the unbelieving Jew, today many people still have veils in their minds.

You talk about Christ, it doesn't make sense to them. Exodus 34 34, when you read it in the Septuagint, says that whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak to him, that's what you see in verse 16: he used to take off the veil until he went out. That's Exodus 34 34 in the Septuagint.

Whenever Moses went in before the Lord. Now the Septuagint is the Greek version of the Old Testament. We're appealing to that because we're looking at what Moses quote to be able, what Paul quote to be able to explain that.

He used to take the veil off until he went out. It's interesting that only three Greek words remain the same, as Paul here alludes to this verse, and he changes the tenses. The subject of the verb here in verse 16 is not expressed, but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is moved.

The subject of the verb turns is actually unexpressed. It may be the heart of a Jew from verse 15, it may be the Jew, it may be Israel, it may be a person, it may be a Gentile. Jew or Gentile.

I think the last option is preferable, but in the context of Paul, Paul is thinking about the Jew, but it's preferable to see when one turns to the Lord, either Jew or Gentile, the veil is removed. So today, when anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. What does Paul do in verse 16? He restates and amplifies what he already said in verse 14.

That's what he does in verse 16, that only in Christ is the veil set aside. When a person turns to the Lord and finds the Lord in him, the end of the fulfillment of the Lord, the Lord completely now removes the veil from the heart. No longer is the spiritual perception of the person dull.

The person comes to recognize that this time of grace, the grace of God, has superseded law now. That's why Paul could say in 2nd Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17 that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. New creation and the passage says the old is gone; the new has come.

Then you go to verse 17. We go to verse 17. Out of its context, this verse might suggest that Paul is identifying the risen Christ with the Spirit.

That verse has provoked a lot of arguments and discussions. Now, the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Now, before I go to the explanation, let me say that sometimes we use this: where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. I will quote that one as a freedom to worship, the freedom to sing, the freedom to clap, but please understand me. That's not what Paul is saying in that passage.

I'm not saying you shouldn't clap your hands or do whatever you want to do, but what we are saying is that that verse is not meant for that purpose. Paul is talking in terms of the new covenant, the old covenant, the Spirit, and the law, and that's what is comparing together. So, it's not, this is not liberty to shout, liberty to sing, liberty to dance.

Of course, you have the liberty to do whatever you want to do. I'm simply saying that in the context of 2nd Corinthians chapter 3 verse 17, that's not the answer, that's not

the meaning of that passage as we quote it and as we use it. But having said that again, feel free to dance, feel free to do whatever you want to do.

So, out of context, I mean, what is Paul saying? Now, the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. The question is, the Lord here, who does he refer to? Out of context, these verses might suggest that Paul is identifying the risen Christ with the Spirit. Some scholars hold that view.

But verse 17 explains verse 16 that when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. The Lord referred to, in the quotation of Exodus chapter 34 verse 34, to whom the Jew must now turn for the removal of the veil is none other than the life-giving Spirit of the living God. So, this is an affirmation about the Spirit, not about Christ.

It describes the function of the Spirit, not his identity. This is not a matter of identity. You see, that's one view.

Another view finds a functional equivalence between Christ and the Spirit. In verse 14, it is Christ who removes the veil. It is Christ who removes the veil.

In verse 16, it is the Spirit. And again, some believe Hercules, or Christ, is identified as a life-giving Spirit. Paul's point in verse 17b is that though the Spirit is Lord, who has the right to exercise authority, his presence brings liberation, not bondage.

Not only does he remove the veil, but he also sets a person free from bondage to sin, bondage to death, and bondage to the law as a means of acquiring righteousness. That's the freedom that has been spoken about there. That there's freedom.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there's freedom. Freedom from what? Freedom from the bondage of sin. The bondage to sin.

Freedom from death. Freedom to the law as a means of acquiring righteousness. So, when he says where the Spirit of the Lord is, there's freedom, he's talking about freedom, not just to sin, but freedom from sin.

Then you come to verse 18, he said, and all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord, as though reflecting in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord the Spirit. In verses 4 to 6, Paul already spoke primarily of his apostolic ministry.

Now, as he draws to a conclusion, in verse 18, as he draws to a conclusion concerning the superiority of the new covenant, against the background of his commentary on Exodus chapter 34, he refers to the Christian experience in general. Verses 4 to 6 were about his ministry, but verse 18 goes beyond his own experience

and that of Christians in general. Under the new covenant, not one man alone, or not one woman alone, but all Christians now behold and reflect the glory of the Lord.

And then, moreover, unlike the Jews who still read the law with veiled hearts, Christians today, with unveiled faces, behold in the mirror of the gospel the glory of God, which is in Christ. Again, the glory is not displayed, is displayed not outwardly on the face, but inwardly in our character, that our life reflects the glory of God. Our behavior, our disposition, the glory of God is revealed.

So far from losing its intensity, luster, beauty, shining, or radiance, the glory experienced under the new covenant progressively increases until Christ finally acquires, until the Christian, rather, finally acquires a glorious body like that of the risen Christ. But in the meantime, God is transforming us. And we talk about holiness; yes, we talk about holiness as being instantaneous, but yes, holiness is progressive.

It's both instantaneous and progressive. It keeps. God makes us holy, and he keeps us holy, keeps on transforming us, and keeps on changing our lives. And remember, like the tabernacle where there should be no noise, the stones are to be cast in situ; God is making us into a holy temple, preparing us so that by the time we get to heaven, there's nothing to be done.

We just fit into the place. So, the glory of God is being revealed in our lives, and we're being transformed. And so, Paul concludes by noting that the progressive transformation of the Christian character is the work of the Lord who is the Spirit.

After conversion to the Spirit, there's liberation through the Spirit, and there's transformation through the Spirit. There's liberty through the Spirit, and there's transformation through the Spirit. Think about this very carefully. We are called believers.

God has called us unto himself, and if we claim to be ministers, we need to know what authentic ministry actually means, and we need to ask ourselves certain questions as we do that. Am I reflecting the glory of God? Remember, as a summary, the credential we need is the credentialing of the Holy Spirit. It's interesting because when Paul talks about commendation in verse one, this is just to summarize, is the Latin word *commendare*, which means two words, is two words joined together.

It means to commit together, to commit something, which means to commit or to entrust. Do we need letters? Paul asked the Corinthians if he needed letters of recommendation. And we need to ask ourselves today, do I have the commendation that I need, the credentialing by the Spirit? Remember, it's important we have degrees, and it's important that we study because God does not need ignorant preachers, no doubt about it.

Because if we preach what we don't know, we cause trouble for Christianity, and we have a lot of ignorant preachers around the world who do not know what they're talking about. So, thank God that we at least can study the word. But I'm saying that the Spirit is very important in our lives as we yield ourselves to him because we're ministers of a new covenant which is based upon better promises.

This is Dr. Ayo Adewuya in his teaching on 2 Corinthians. This is session 4, 2 Corinthians 3, A Ministry of the New Covenant.