

Paul, A New Covenant Jew
(8th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

2 Corinthians 3:1-6—Ministers of the New Covenant

1. Defense: Paul does not need a “letter of recommendation” (2 Cor 3:1-2)
2. Technical term: carried to receive hospitably from recipients (cf. Rom 16:1-2).
3. Living Letter: Corinthians *themselves* are his letter of recommendation;
 - a. written “not with ink” on “tablets of stone”
 - b. But rather “with the Spirit” on “tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor 3:2-3).
 - c. Allusion the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (Exod 24:12; 31:18)
 - d. and Jeremiah’s famous prophecy of a “new covenant” (Jer 31:31-33)
4. New Covenant: Paul a “minister” (Greek *diakonos*) of new covenant (2 Cor 3:6)

The Old Covenant

letter (Greek *gramma*)
 ministry of death
 tablets of stone
 splendor
 ministry of condemnation
 faded away
 (cf. 2 Cor 3:6, 7, 9, 10-11)

The New Covenant

Spirit (Greek *pneuma*)
 ministry of the Spirit
 tablets of human hearts
 must far exceed it in splendor
 ministry of justification
 permanent
 (cf. 2 Cor 3:6, 9, 10-11, 11)¹

The Living Tradition

St. John Chrysostom: *The law was spiritual, but it did not bestow the Spirit. Moses had letters but not the Spirit, whereas we have been entrusted with the giving of the Spirit.* Whence also in further completion of this contrast, he says, “For the letter kills, but the spirit giveth life.” ...And what does this mean? In the Law, he that has sin is punished; here, he that has sins comes and is baptized and is made righteous, and being made righteous, he lives, being delivered from the death of sin. The Law, if it lay hold on a murderer, puts him to death; the Gospel, if it lay hold on a murderer, enlightens him and gives him life. And why do I instance a murderer? The Law laid hold on one that gathered sticks on a Sabbath day, and stoned him. (Num 15:32, 36) This is the meaning of, “the letter kills.” *The Gospel takes hold on thousands of homicides and robbers, and baptizing delivers them from their former vices.* This is the meaning of, “the Spirit giveth life.” The former makes its captive dead from being alive, the latter renders the man it has convicted alive from being dead. For, “Come unto me, you that labor and are heavy laden,” (Matt 11:28) and, he said not, “I will punish you,” but, “I will give you rest.” For in Baptism the sins are buried, the former things are blotted out, the man is made alive, the entire grace written upon his heart as it were a table. (Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2*

¹ Adapted from Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2017), 355.

Corinthians 6.2; in NPNF1 12:307)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (8th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

1. How is the anointing later known as “confirmation” a “seal” of the “Spirit”?

For Further Reading

1. Stegman, Thomas D., S.J. *Second Corinthians*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009.
2. Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*. Translated by F. R. Larcher, O.P., B. Mortensen, and D. Keating. Edited by J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón. Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012.
3. Bray, Gerald, ed. *1-2 Corinthians*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VII. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999.
4. Brant Pitre, Michael P. Barber, and John A. Kincaid. *Paul, a New Covenant Jew: Rethinking Pauline Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2019.