
“And not as Moses”

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— Keith R. Blades

In connection with the fact that God has two distinctly different programs set forth in the Bible — i.e. His program with Israel, and His program with the church the body of Christ in this present dispensation — we often naturally notice that there are marked contrasts between the Apostle Paul and his ministry to us today, and that of ones in God’s program and dealings with Israel. For example numerous distinctions exist between Paul and Peter. This includes not only the different gospels God gave to each of them to preach, but also such things as the commissions under which each operated, the goals of those commissions, and the like.¹ Likewise similar types of differences can be seen between Paul and other individuals in God’s program with Israel.

Now along these lines there is one special area in which the Apostle Paul personally draws a striking contrast between himself and one of the chief figures in Israel’s program — Moses. It too is a dispensational distinctive, but it especially concerns the unique way in which each conducted himself with respect to the particular testament of God of which he was a minister.

The Distinction

Moses, of course, was a minister of “the old testament.” Paul, on the other hand, was made an ‘able minister of the new testament.’ Now in being a “minister of the new testament,” as Paul declares, he uses “great plainness of speech.” And he certainly does do that. For example, in no uncertain terms he plainly declares to us exactly what the “old testament” is, blatantly pronouncing it to be “the ministration of death” and “the ministration of condemnation.” And indeed with respect to “the old testament” this is

now what God wants openly declared and plainly made manifest about it. However as Paul points out, Moses was not so candid when he was a minister of “the old testament.” Moses did not use “great plainness of speech” like Paul. Rather he conducted himself differently. In fact, as Paul states in verse 13, instead of using “great plainness of speech” Moses engaged in a doctrinal cover-up, so to speak.

12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

13 And not as Moses, *which* put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *veil* is done away in Christ.

II Corinthians 3:12–14

Now Moses’ peculiar conduct at first can seem downright incongruous. What possible reason could he have had for not being candid with the children of Israel? Obviously there had to be one. And the reason which Moses had is important for us to understand so that Paul’s reason for not acting like him with us today can be all the more appreciated by us.

Moses’ Cover-Up

When Paul says, “And not as Moses,” and then proceeds to describe how Moses conducted himself with Israel, he is not criticizing Moses, or blaming him in any manner or form. Rather Paul is actually setting forth how it is that Moses *had* to conduct himself being the minister of “the old

testament" that he was. The fact is that Moses simply was not at liberty to use "great plainness of speech" in connection with "the old testament." The situation forbid it. For example, he was not at liberty to plainly tell the people of Israel up front about the absolute futility of trying to obtain the glory of God by conforming to the performance system of good works set forth in the Law testament. He, therefore, was not at liberty to plainly call "the old testament" "the ministration of death" and "the ministration of condemnation." What Paul could now do, Moses could not. Instead he *had* to conduct himself in a reserved, less than plain manner.

Not only was Moses not at liberty to use "great plainness of speech," but when he himself physically manifested the glory of God through "the glory of his countenance" having been in God's presence, he "put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished." He in essence used a physical cover-up to enforce the doctrinal cover-up. Moses "put a veil over his face" to cover-up the issue of the fading glory of his countenance and thereby prevent what it signified from being plainly perceived.

Now the key to understanding and appreciating Moses' conduct is to realize that it was both needful and the only consistent thing for him to do in view of the way in which "the old testament" operated.

The Need For The Cover-Up

What made this needful was the issue of a particular and persistent 'blindness of mind,' or spiritual blind spot, that Israel possessed concerning their true spiritual status in God's sight. And what made Moses' conduct consistent was that "the old testament" took Israel's persistent, pride-based blind spot into account, and in connection with doing so it was a ministration that taught its lessons to them *the hard way*.

In view of Israel's blind spot, they rejected the notion that they themselves fully needed to be dealt with by God on the basis of His "Jehovah-ness" and grace. They thought instead that they were not by nature in the same spiritual predicament as any of the "sinners of the Gentiles." They, being the seed of Abraham, saw themselves as naturally fit for God's use. With such thinking, therefore, they rejected the idea that God Himself would have to make them fit to be utilized by Him in His plan and purpose for them. They would not entertain the notion that God would have to fully undertake for them and do for them Himself what they could not do for themselves, which is what God's very name "Jehovah" was designed to doctrinally signify to them.

Now this spiritual blind spot in particular began manifesting itself at the time when God started the process of bringing Israel out of Egypt, and it gave full evidence that it existed before God ever brought Israel to Mount Sinai.²

The Background To The Cover-Up

As Exodus chapters 3 through 18 set forth, during the time when God brought Israel out of Egypt and up until He brought them to Sinai He pointedly educated them in the doctrine of His "Jehovah-ness" and in their absolute need for them to be dealt with by Him on the basis of His grace. In connection with doing so God even gave them a foretaste of what the alternative of being dealt with by Him on the basis of their own works would be like, and He gave them undeniable proof of their inability to perfectly keep a Law of His commandments and so merit His blessing and pleasure thereby.

All of this, once again, God did before He ever brought Israel unto Mount Sinai and offered them the Law covenant. He, therefore, "proved them," just as He said He would do. He showed them what they were made of and manifested to them that though they went out of Egypt "with an high

hand," they also were high-minded. In truth their heart was lifted up and they exited Egypt wise in their own conceits.

For this reason Moses later on reminded them of what God did both before and after Sinai to "humble" them in view of their high-mindedness. Moreover later on in the Song of Moses they are indicted by God regarding how they failed to learn about, and to appreciate, the issue of their absolute need for His "Jehovah-ness." And in view of doing so, as God relates, they "lightly esteemed" the "Rock" of their salvation. These things they began to do, and gave abundant evidence of, right after they came out of Egypt.

Israel indeed, therefore, had a pride-based blind spot regarding their natural spiritual status in God's sight. And it persisted to exist even in the face of God educating them to think otherwise about themselves, and to realize their absolute need for His "Jehovah-ness" and grace.

Hence when they came to Mount Sinai as recorded in Exodus 19 and were offered the Law covenant as the basis for being dealt with by God, that offer was set forth in the light of the issues about which God had just plainly educated them. Yet their blind spot persisted. They therefore rejected the truth regarding their absolute need for God's "Jehovah-ness" and grace. And they opted for the Law covenant instead.

Consequently they immediately experienced a complete change in God's demeanor towards them, which was perfectly commensurate with their decision.³ Moreover, in accordance with the educational operating principle of the Law covenant, they consigned themselves over to a system of ministration that would teach them the lessons they needed to learn; but it would do it *the hard way*.

Since they had rejected God's direct, forthright, and plain teaching, they would have to learn what they needed to learn through 'the school of hard knocks,' so to speak. And just such a 'school' the "old testament" would be, with its "tutors and

governors"; its "rudiments" and "elements"; its "curses," pedantic "chastisements" and "punishments"; its "schoolmaster"; along with its administrator, who needed to conduct himself in accordance with all of this. Which is just what Moses did.

Hence Moses did not, and could not, use "great plainness of speech" as a minister of "the old testament." He did not, nor could not, call it "the ministration of death" and "the ministration of condemnation" that it was. Likewise in connection with the instituting of "the old testament" he did not let the fading "glory of his countenance" and the significance of that be plainly seen. Rather he conducted himself in full accordance with Israel having to find out about these things *the hard way*.

It would be through the miserable experience of trying to live up to the standards of the Law by their own futile performance of all of its dictates that they would learn *the hard way* that they are not what they think they are; that they are in truth naturally unrighteous and unholy in God's sight; that they are helpless of themselves and in themselves to do anything about it; and that their only hope rests in God's "Jehovah-ness" and grace.

Such was Israel's educational predicament under "the old testament," and Moses' conduct was in complete and correct accordance with it.

No Longer A Cover-Up

Now, however, with the "old testament" having done its job, and in view of the establishment of the glorious "new testament" through Christ, (which made "the old testament" to be "old"), there is no longer the need for such a cover-up. Now, instead, the glory of what God has done by His "Jehovah-ness" and grace through Christ is to be manifestly declared. And now God also wants the weakness and unprofitableness of the "old testament" in contrast to "the new testament" to be plainly spoken about and clearly seen.

Therefore Paul as the "minister of the new testament" that he is uses "great plainness of speech" both in his description of "the old testament" and of "the new testament," and does not conduct himself as Moses did.

Now Paul plainly declares the Law to be just what it is and clearly describes its humbling, confidence-in-the-flesh-bashing functions. Hence Paul does not mince words, but blatantly declares "the old testament" to be "the ministration of death" and "the ministration of condemnation" that it is. Likewise throughout his epistles he 'pulls no punches' but unequivocally pronounces it to be "the yoke of bondage";⁴ to be that which "killeth";⁵ to be that which gives "the knowledge of sin,"⁶ is "the strength of sin,"⁷ produces "the motions of sins,"⁸ makes sin "exceeding sinful,"⁹ only brings forth "fruit unto death,"¹⁰ is "the spirit of bondage" to "fear,"¹¹ is only to "the satisfying of the flesh,"¹² and the like. Things Moses was not at liberty to declare, God has Paul now declare with "great plainness of speech." For now it is fitting and right to do so.

And Paul's "great plainness of speech" naturally also includes declaring and describing the incomparable grandeur and glory of "the new testament," as the able "minister of the new testament" that God has made him to be to us in this present dispensation. Hence in II Corinthians 3 Paul not only justifies the truthfulness of his ministry by appealing to the fact that he confidently ministers the provisions of "the new testament," but he also plainly declares "the new testament" to be what it is, and sets forth its grandeur and incomparable glory in contrast to the "old."

6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

7 But if the ministration of death, written *and* engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which *glory* was to be done away:

8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation *be* glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

11 For if that which is done away *was* glorious, much more that which remaineth *is* glorious.

II Corinthians 3:6-11

Incomparable Glory Indeed

The "new testament" is "the ministration of the spirit" in stark, and yet wonderful contrast to "the old testament" being "the ministration of death." As such the new testament's glorious effectual working is what "giveth life," while all "the old testament" can do is deliver up a death sentence.

The "new testament" is also "the ministration of righteousness" in equally wonderful contrast to "the old testament" being "the ministration of condemnation." As such the new testament's glorious effectual working is what can bring forth the righteousness of God, while all "the old testament" allows for is fleshly righteousness, which it must rightly condemn as unacceptable to God.

Moreover “the old testament” was only “made glorious” in connection with its schoolmaster method of teaching. But “the new testament” is naturally glorious in view of the natural glory of the Lord Jesus Christ who made it. Hence it has glory that “remaineth,” not being able to be “done away” at all.

In view of all of this the ministration of “the new testament” is nothing less than complete and confident “hope” to us, as its effectual working perfectly produces for us everything that is needed regarding justification and sanctification in God’s sight.

Hence there is little wonder that Paul goes on to say,...

12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

13a And not as Moses,...

II Corinthians 3:12–13a

Once again, now there is absolutely no need or reason for any such cover-up. In view of the “such hope” that we have in and through the effectual working of “the new testament,” anything less than “great plainness of speech” is both contrary to the will of God and an insult to the glory of “the new testament.” Moses’ reserved and less than candid conduct was rightfully fitting and needful when “the old testament” was of force. But not anymore. Now the exceedingly glorious ministration of “the new testament” demands otherwise. Now “great plainness of speech” is in order. — *K. R. Blades*

¹ For a listing of many of these differences, see the author’s doctrinal tract “The Apostle Paul and The 12 Apostles.”

² For a detailed examination of this issue, see the author’s video series “A Short History of God’s Program with Israel.” For a brief overview, see the author’s video “The Effectual Working of God’s Word in Israel’s Program.”

³ Cf. Exodus 19:7–25

⁴ Cf. Galatians 5:1

⁵ Cf. II Corinthians 3:6

⁶ Cf. Romans 7:5

⁷ Cf. I Corinthians 15:56

⁸ Cf. Romans 7:5

⁹ Cf. Romans 7:13

¹⁰ Romans 7:5

¹¹ Romans 8:15

¹² Colossians 2:23