

**(In)Adequate**  
**2 Corinthians 3:4-6**  
**Dr. Pierre Cannings**

**I. (Un)certain v. 4**

a. Confidence –

- i. **a state of certainty about someth. to the extent of placing reliance on, *trust, confidence***
- ii. While Paul’s “confidence” was a subjective conviction, it was based on objective facts. In this regard, **ΤΟΙΔΥΤΗΝ** is retrospective (not prospective)
- iii. There was the character of Paul’s apostolic ministry: he was God’s agent in disseminating in every place the knowledge of Christ in an unadulterated form (2:14–17). The second demonstrable fact was the effectiveness of his service—that is, the very existence of a Christian church in Corinth demonstrated the reality of his apostleship (3:1–3). But beyond his being God’s agent everywhere and Christ’s amanuensis at Corinth, Paul’s confidence was secure because it was **διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, that is, it resulted from his union with Christ, or, more specifically, it came as a gift from Christ
- iv. his confidence before God should not be taken to imply self-competence, far less any independence of God. In this further rejection of fallacious self-commendation (cf. 3:1a)
- v. His confidence is based on his calling through Christ; but since it is also “before God” (see 2:17), he is constantly reminded of his proper place. What sufficiency he has to fulfill this ministry assigned to him comes only by God’s grace through Christ (see 1 Cor 15:9–10). We see more clearly human limitations when face to face with “divine omnipotence.” But we also see more clearly God’s power that can work mightily through human imperfections and frailties.

b. Through Christ

c. Toward God

**II. (In)adequate v. 5**

a. Not Adequate in Ourselves

- i. Adequate - “depending on our own power/wisdom” or “on our own authority,”
- ii. “as originating/proceeding from ourselves” or “as belonging to ourselves” = “as our own.”
- iii. Paul is disowning any qualification to claim credit for himself for any aspect of his ministry. “It is not that we are adequate in ourselves to reckon anything to our credit”
- iv. Since God alone guarantees adequacy for Christian ministry (v. 5c), credit must go to God alone when it is carried out successfully. The Christian worker is ineligible to claim honor for success.
- v. In saying that he does not reckon that we have any sufficiency from ourselves, Paul is not resorting to false humility.
- vi. God has demolished Paul’s former confidence in himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews, a zealous Pharisee who was blameless when it came to righteousness under the law (Phil 3:5–6). He no longer places any trust in his own heritage, devotion, or natural powers and now knows that the only resource from which he can draw is the infinite reservoir of grace provided by God’s empowering Spirit.

b. Adequacy from God

- i. Adequacy - **to meeting a standard, fit, appropriate, competent, qualified, able, w. the connotation worthy, good enough Confession of personal incapacity is thus accompanied by confession of God as the basis of all personal capacity**
- ii. **degree which is sufficient—‘enough, sufficient.**
- iii. The qualification that God gave Paul and his apostolic colleagues was the giftedness and motivation to fulfill their apostolic mission, to serve as God’s agents under the new covenant
- iv. ἰκανός sometimes represents the Hebrew name (*El*) *Shaddai* (by a suspect etymological derivation) and so became a divine title, “the (All-)Sufficient One,” the one who is not only sufficient in himself but also able to provide others with total sufficiency

### III. Adequate v. 6

- a. Servants - **one who serves as an intermediary in a transaction, agent, intermediary, courier**
  1. The word *diakonos* does not simply connote humble service. In this context it refers to an agent's charge to transmit messages, and Paul consistently uses the term in relation to the charge laid upon him to preach the word of God
  2. Worldly rulers might bestow positions of responsibility on individuals, but such appointments can never give the competence to exercise authority effectively. God bestows both the authority and the competence.
- ii. New covenant
  1. Not of the letter
  2. Of the Spirit
    - a. Paul is talking about "ministry" or rendering service to God. The letter and Spirit refer to the two different ways of rendering service to God under the two different covenants. The one is carved in letters on stone tablets which require obedience, while the other is written on human hearts and impels obedience through divine agency.
    - b. Paul is called to mediate the Spirit now being poured out as a result of the cross of Christ to a people whose hearts are being transformed to obey the covenant stipulations of the Law
- iii. Letter kills
  1. Paul argues in Gal 3:10–14 that the law pronounces a curse on all who fail to obey it. Since no one is able to obey it in every respect, all stand under this curse. The law's curse is removed only through Christ's death, which also bestows the promised Spirit on all who believe (Gal 3:13–14). "Spirit" refers to the Spirit of God. The Spirit's power to direct the Christian's conduct from within not only has replaced all feeble and vain attempts

to heed the laws of the Torah on our own but it also has resulted in righteousness and life instead of condemnation and death

2. The “letter” denotes what is merely written, and when Paul contrasts it with Spirit, he is contrasting an external code with an indwelling power that can transform believers into the image of God
3. A comparable view interprets the “letter” to mean a legalistic interpretation of the law. This interpretation relates the letter to the veil that hardens the minds of those in Israel who hear the reading of the old covenant (3:14).

iv. Spirit gives life

1. The Spirit is the power that enables the moral life and sets people free. The Spirit therefore completes God’s action in giving the law because it gives obedience, life, and the potential for the old to become new (5:17; Eph 4:22, 24; Col 3:9–10).
2. The Spirit is understood to be the hermeneutical key for understanding Scripture. Although this principle may be true, it is not what Paul had in mind when he distinguished letter and Spirit. The Spirit denotes a divine power that gives life rather than a divine inspiration that opens the true meaning of Scripture. The Spirit implies God’s new action in Christ that enables believers to do what they could not otherwise do—obey the letter
3. The “letter and Spirit” are therefore regarded as a contrast between what humans do and what God does. The law, which is holy, just, and good (Rom 7:12), cannot penetrate the heart and can easily be twisted by unspiritual minds so that it leads to death. This analysis of what humans do with the law is certainly true. All too frequently we turn God’s revelation into a rigid, death-dealing code or into a set of rules that establishes or confirms our own righteousness.

## Word Studies

Confidence - a state of certainty about someth<sup>1</sup>. to the extent of placing reliance on, *trust, confidence*<sup>2</sup>

πεποίθησιν τοιαύτην ἔχομεν διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν *such* (as explained in what precedes) *is the self-confidence we have through Christ toward God* (who, acc. t<sup>3</sup>o what follows, is the real basis for the apostle's self-confidence) **3:4.** <sup>4</sup>

Adequate - to meeting a standard, *fit, appropriate, competent, qualified, able, w*<sup>5</sup>. the connotation *worthy, good enough*<sup>6</sup>

*Confession of personal incapacity is thus accompanied by confession of God as the basis of all personal capacity: ἡ ἰκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃς καὶ ἰκάνωσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης (2 C. 3:5 f.)*<sup>7</sup>

ἰκανός<sup>a</sup>, ἢ, ὄν: a degree which is sufficient—‘enough, sufficient.’<sup>182</sup>

ἰκανὸν τῷ τοιοῦτῳ ἢ ἐπιτιμία ‘the punishment is sufficient for such a person’ 2 Cor 2:6. In some languages one can express the concept of sufficiency in 2 Cor 2:6 by introducing a negative, for example, ‘it is not necessary to punish such a person more.’ For another interpretation of ἰκανός in 2 Cor 2:6, see 78.14. V 1, p 692 <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **someth. someth.** = something

<sup>2</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 796.

<sup>3</sup> acc. to **acc. to** = according to

<sup>4</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 796.

<sup>5</sup> **w. w.** = with

<sup>6</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 472.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, “ἰκανός, ἰκανότης, ἰκάνω,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 295.

<sup>812</sup> Compare ἰκανός<sup>b</sup> meaning ‘a relatively high point on a scale of extent’ (78.14) and also ἰκανός<sup>e</sup> (59.2) and ἰκανός<sup>f</sup> (59.12) referring to quantity.

<sup>9</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [\*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains\*](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 691.

**Servant- one who serves as an intermediary in a transaction, *agent, intermediary, courier*<sup>10</sup>**

**3:4** πεποίθησιν δὲ τοιαύτην ἔχομεν διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. “Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.” πεποίθησις (“confidence,” “trust”) is a Pauline word not found elsewhere in the NT. Four of Paul’s six uses are in 2 Corinthians (1:15; 3:4; 8:22; 10:2 and Eph. 3:12; Phil. 3:4). Bultmann observes that there is “no material difference” between this πεποίθησις and the παρρησία of 3:12 or the καύχησις of Rom. 15:17.<sup>111</sup> While Paul’s “confidence” was a subjective conviction, it was based on objective facts. In this regard, τοιαύτην is retrospective (not prospective, as if πεποίθησις were defined by vv. 5b–6), alluding to at least two reasons for confidence. There was the character of Paul’s apostolic ministry: he was God’s agent in disseminating in every place the knowledge of Christ in an unadulterated form (2:14–17). The second demonstrable fact was the effectiveness of his service—that is, the very existence of a Christian church in Corinth demonstrated the reality of his apostleship (3:1–3). But beyond his being God’s agent everywhere and Christ’s amanuensis at Corinth, Paul’s confidence was secure because it was διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, that is, it resulted from his union with Christ, or, more specifically, it came as a gift from Christ. It could never be said that the πεποίθησις was δι’ ἡμῶν; it was not the product of a pious wish or imagination. The prepositional phrase πρὸς τὸν θεόν should not be construed directly with πεποίθησιν (“confidence in God,” GN<sup>12</sup>B, NA<sup>13</sup>B<sup>141</sup>). There is not only the distance between the two expressions;<sup>152</sup> the usual prepositions with πεποίθησις are either εἰς (as in 8:22) or ἐν (as in Phil. 3:4).<sup>163</sup> The phrase may mean “toward God,”<sup>174</sup> “before

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<sup>10</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 230.

<sup>111</sup> R. Bultmann, *TDNT* 6.8.

<sup>12</sup>GNB Good News Bible

<sup>13</sup>NAB New American Bible

<sup>141</sup> New American Bible

<sup>152</sup> Contrast Rom. 5:1, εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. also ἐπί with the dative (1:9) or the accusative (2:3) after the cognate verb πείθω.

<sup>174</sup> BAGD 643c, 710c; NAB<sup>2</sup>.

God,”<sup>185</sup> or “in regard to God” (TCN<sup>19</sup>T). All of Christian existence is “in relation to” God “through” Christ.<sup>206</sup>

**3:5** οὐχ ὅτι ἀφ’ ἑαυτῶν ἱκανοί ἐσμεν λογίσασθαί τι ὡς ἐξ ἑαυτῶν, ἀλλ’ ἡ ἱκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. “Not that we are qualified in ourselves to claim anything as originating from ourselves.” As in the case of οὐχ ὅτι in 1:24, Paul is correcting a possible misinterpretation of his previous statement (*epanorthosis*)<sup>217</sup>: his confidence before God should not be taken to imply self-competence, far less any independence of God. In this further rejection of fallacious self-commendation (cf. 3:1a), Paul first speaks negatively (v. 5a), then positively (vv. 5b–6). [ἔστιν] οὐχ ὅτι means “it is not the case that,” “it is not as if.” ἀφ’ ἑαυτῶν (“of/in/by ourselves”)<sup>228</sup> may be paraphrased “depending on our own power/wisdom” or “on our own authority,” and, standing with ἱκανοί ἐσμεν, it anticipates ἡ ἱκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ rather than ἐξ ἑαυτῶν. Some regard ἐξ ἑαυτῶν as simply repeating or redefining ἀφ’ ἑαυτῶν,<sup>239</sup> but this overlooks the fact that ὡς ἐξ ἑαυτῶν qualifies λογίσασθαί τι, not ἱκανοί ἐσμεν. The phrase means “as originating/proceeding from ourselves” or “as belonging to ourselves” = “as our own.”

There are three main ways of understanding the whole phrase λογίσασθαί τι ὡς ἐξ ἑαυτῶν:<sup>1240</sup>

(1) Paul is rejecting any fitness for wise thinking that is independent of God. “It is not as though we were fit in our own wisdom to conceive a single thought on our

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<sup>185</sup> Barrett 110; Furnish 173; Wolff 60. “In the presence of God” (Williams; Martin 44) is simply an expansion of “before God” (cf. 2:17; 4:2).

<sup>19</sup>TCNT Twentieth Century New Testament (1904)

<sup>206</sup> In Eph. 2:18 (cf. Rom. 5:1) we find this same combination of prepositions—πρὸς with God the Father, διὰ with Christ—when Paul is discussing access to God.

<sup>217</sup> See the commentary on 1:24. Winer (555) observes that οὐχ ὅτι here should not be treated as equivalent to ὅτι οὐχ (ἱκανοί ἐσμεν), “for we are not competent.”

<sup>228</sup> In the appropriate case and number, the reflexive pronoun ἑαυτοῦ may be used of all three persons (apart from the first person singular; see BAGD 211d, 212a–c).

<sup>239</sup> E.g., TCNT: “by ourselves, as if on our own authority.” Lietzmann (111) sees ἐξ ἑαυτῶν as a repetition caused by the circumstances of dictation.

<sup>2410</sup> The aorist infinitive λογίσασθαι is complementary and probably epexegetic after ἱκανοί: “qualified to reckon.” But it may be consecutive/ecbatic: “adequate, so that we evaluate” (Furnish, 173, 183).

own initiative.”<sup>1251</sup> “He has in view the whole work of thought within the framework of apostolic activity, i.e., thinking, judging, planning and resolving.”<sup>1262</sup>

(2) Paul is disclaiming any ability to form an accurate assessment of the results of his ministry (cf. 10:2). Plummer paraphrases the idea thus: “It is not a confidence that of ourselves we are competent to form any estimate of results.”<sup>1273</sup> A variation of this view links λογίσασθαί τι with an accurate analysis of the methods that ought to be employed in the discharge of the apostolic mission (Bernard 53) or a proper assessment of a preacher’s potential (Georgi, *Opponents* 232).

(3) Paul is disowning any qualification to claim credit for himself for any aspect of his ministry. “It is not that we are adequate in ourselves to reckon anything to our credit” (Martin 44).

This third view, which is preferable, enjoys the support of many translations<sup>1284</sup> and commentators.<sup>1295</sup> It sees 3:5 as a commentary on 1 Cor. 15:9–10: all that Paul was as an apostle, along with all that he did as an apostle, unfit though he was for the role (οὐκ εἰμι ἱκανὸς καλεῖσθαι ἀπόστολος), was by the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:10). So claiming anything as his own or seeking credit for his work was inappropriate. Since God alone guarantees adequacy for Christian ministry (v. 5c), credit must go to God alone when it is carried out successfully. The Christian worker is ineligible to claim honor for success.

ἀλλ’ ἡ ἱκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. “Rather, our qualification comes from God.” This is the only use of ἱκανότης in the Greek Bible. However it is translated—the options are “fitness,” “adequacy,” “competence,” “sufficiency,” “qualification,” and “capability”—an effort should be made to render the ἱκαν- root consistently in vv. 5–6: ἱκανοί and ἱκανότης (v. 5), ἱκάνωσεν (v. 6). It is unnecessary to restrict the noun here to some specific qualification, such as a God-given ability to think or judge aright (cf. λογίσασθαι) with regard to the ministry. As in 2:17, the ἱκανότης is general. The qualification that God gave Paul and his apostolic colleagues was the giftedness and motivation to fulfill their apostolic mission, to serve as God’s

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<sup>2511</sup> Bruce, *Paraphrase* 131. Cf. Bengel 3.364; BAGD 476b. This interpretation has sometimes been associated with the denial of free will or the doctrine of “total depravity,” but such an association is certainly not necessary.

<sup>2612</sup> H. W. Heidland, *TDNT* 4.288; cf. Bultmann 75.

<sup>2713</sup> Plummer 83; but cf. 84. Similarly Barclay (“to reckon up the effect of anything that we have done”). Some translations take λογίσασθαί τι to mean something like “to form any estimate”; e.g., “to reach any conclusion” (Conybeare in Conybeare and Howson 445 n. 6; Montgomery); “to form any judgment” (TCNT, Moffatt).

<sup>2814</sup> RV, Goodspeed, RSV, NEB, JB, NAB<sup>1</sup>, NIV, NAB<sup>2</sup>, REB, NRSV, Cassirer.

<sup>2915</sup> E.g., Allo 83; Barrett 109; Furnish 173; Thrall 230; also Spicq 2.221.

agents under the new covenant (v. 6). ἔκ τοῦ θεοῦ matches the ἐκ θεοῦ of 2:17 and is the antithesis of both ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν and ἐξ ἑαυτῶν.

In the LX<sup>30</sup>X (ὁ) ἰκανός sometimes represents the Hebrew name (*El*) *Shaddai*<sup>1316</sup> (by a suspect etymological derivation) and so became a divine title, “the (All-)Sufficient One,” the one who is not only sufficient in himself but also able to provide others with total sufficiency.<sup>1327</sup> Since Philo, too, sometimes speaks of God as “sufficient to himself” (ἰκανὸς ἑαυτῷ),<sup>1338</sup> this Hellenistic Jewish way of conceiving of God may well have been familiar to Paul. If so, Paul could be saying in 3:5, “Our sufficiency derives from the All-Sufficient One.” Just as his confidence came through Christ, his competence came from God, and he affirms this probably against the background of his opponents’ claim to be self-sufficient. Perhaps Paul is introducing here the prophetic motif of “sufficiency in spite of insufficiency.” Hafemann finds v. 5 to be evocative of the prophetic call of Moses (Exod. 4:10; cf. 3:1–4:17), Gideon (Judg. 6:11–24), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1–8), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4–10), and Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1–3:11). “The prophet is not sufficient (competent) in himself (because of an obstacle to be overcome), but is nevertheless made sufficient by God’s grace” (127; cf. *Moses* 39–62).

**3:6** ὃς καὶ ἰκάνωσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης. “Who indeed has qualified us as agents of a new covenant.” Against the πολλοί of 2:17 who claimed to be διάκονοι Χριστοῦ (11:23) and were preoccupied with qualifications (cf. 5:12; 11:18, 21b–23), Paul here defines the role for which he had God-given adequacy (v. 5). This relative clause is pivotal in the argument of ch. 3, for it brings together three crucial terms. ἰκάνωσεν looks back to ἰκανός (2:16) and ἰκανότης (3:5); διακόνους picks up διακονηθεῖσα (3:3) and anticipates the four uses of διακονία in 3:7–9; and διαθήκης prepares the way for the comparison of the old and new covenants and their ministries that is found in 3:7–18.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>LXX Septuagint

<sup>316</sup>Ruth 1:20–21; Job 21:15; 31:2; 40:2; Ezek. 1:24 (A).

<sup>327</sup>Cf. K. H. Rengstorff, *TDNT* 3.294 and n. 3; G. Kittel, *TDNT* 1.467. See further G. Bertram, “ΙΚΑΝΟΣ in den griechischen Übersetzungen des AT als Wiedergabe von *schaddaj*,” *ZAW* 70 (1958) 20–31.

<sup>318</sup>*Legum Allegoriae* 1.44; *De Cherubim* 46; *De Mutatione Nominum* 27, 46 (cited by Furnish 196).

<sup>34</sup>Murray J. Harris, [\*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text\*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 267–270.

**3:4** The Spirit's work in his ministry justifies and explains his confidence as an apostle. It is not an illusory feeling of self-confidence based on his own abilities and strengths or on the plaudits of others who cheer his religious powers. Paul refers to the content of his confidence, namely Christ.<sup>31351</sup> His confidence is based on his calling through Christ; but since it is also "before God" (see 2:17), he is constantly reminded of his proper place. What sufficiency he has to fulfill this ministry assigned to him comes only by God's grace through Christ (see 1 Cor 15:9–10). We see more clearly human limitations when face to face with "divine omnipotence."<sup>31362</sup> But we also see more clearly God's power that can work mightily through human imperfections and frailties.

**3:5** God has demolished Paul's former confidence in himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews, a zealous Pharisee who was blameless when it came to righteousness under the law (Phil 3:5–6). He no longer places any trust in his own heritage, devotion, or natural powers and now knows that the only resource from which he can draw is the infinite reservoir of grace provided by God's empowering Spirit. In saying that he does not reckon that we have any sufficiency from ourselves, Paul is not resorting to false humility. He would argue that he is fully sufficient to exercise his ministry, yet at the same time he fully admits that his sufficiency comes entirely from God's Spirit, who works in and through him. In interpreting God's call of Moses, Theodore asks, "When the God of all things used Moses as His minister, why did He choose for himself a man of stammering speech and slow of tongue?" His answer: "Because this displayed all the more his divine power. For just as He chose fishermen and tax-gatherers to be preachers of truth and teachers of piety, it is by means of a weak voice and slow tongue that He put to shame the wise men of Egypt." Paul would have agreed that the same applies to God's choice of him to be a minister of the gospel.

**3:6** Paul concludes this unit by giving the answer to the question raised in 2:16b, "Who is sufficient for these things?" The answer is, We are—through the empowerment of God. Paul uses the verb "to make us sufficient" instead of "to call" (Gal 1:15) to make the point that God makes fit for service those who are

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<sup>35311</sup> See Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 94.

<sup>36312</sup> Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:229.

manifestly unfit (1 Cor 15:9).<sup>31373</sup> Worldly rulers might bestow positions of responsibility on individuals, but such appointments can never give the competence to exercise authority effectively. God bestows both the authority and the competence.

The word *diakonos* does not simply connote humble service. In this context it refers to an agent's charge to transmit messages, and Paul consistently uses the term in relation to the charge laid upon him to preach the word of God.<sup>31384</sup> It conveys Paul's conviction that he is God's intermediary to them charged with a message from God.<sup>31395</sup> This idea moves beyond the issue of commendatory letters and leads to Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant written in the hearts (Jer 31:33). He also invites the contrast between the old Mosaic covenant written on stone tablets and the new covenant that is taken up in 3:7–18.

The phrase the "letter kills" has passed into everyday speech and has been invoked to assail everything from reading Scripture literally to any kind of moral constraints. Paul probably used the antithesis between letter and Spirit as "a handy formula expressing central convictions." But since it appears only in three texts (Rom 2:29; 7:6; 2 Cor 3:6), what he meant by it is not immediately evident.<sup>31406</sup>

"Letter" cannot refer to the law itself since Paul affirms that the law is "spiritual" (Rom 7:14), yet it clearly is connected to the law in some way and must refer to some aspect of it.<sup>31417</sup> Origen argued that "letter" referred to the literal, external sense of Scripture and that "Spirit" referred to the spiritual, internal sense of Scripture. This passage then became the support for the allegorical interpretation of Scripture which he championed and which dominated biblical exegesis for

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<sup>37313</sup> J. Lambrecht states, "That Paul is God's minister is not questioned, only the way he behaves as a minister" ("The Favorable Time: A Study of 2 Corinthians 6, 2a in its Context," in *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, ed J. Lambrecht and R. Bieringer, BETL 112 [Leuven: University Press, 1994] 523). R. P. Martin aptly comments: "He was not out to prove he was a servant; rather, because he is a servant, he can put forth what he does as an example of the power of God (12:9)" (*2 Corinthians*, WBC [Waco: Word, 1986] 172).

<sup>38314</sup> See 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 6:4; Eph 3:7; Col 1:23, 25.

<sup>39315</sup> See the analysis of the term in J. N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 73–191. The interlopers also understand themselves as "servants of Christ" (11:23).

<sup>40316</sup> S. Westerholm, "Letter and Spirit: The Foundation of Pauline Ethics," *NTS* 30 (1984) 229.

<sup>41317</sup> The Greek word for "letter" (γράμμα) in 3:6 is different from the word for "letter" (ἐπιστολή) used in 3:1–3 and is connected to the written law.

centuries.<sup>31428</sup> Few make the same distinction between two levels of meaning in the text, but some still argue that Paul contrasts two different ways of understanding the text, the literal and the spiritual.<sup>31439</sup> The Spirit is understood to be the hermeneutical key for understanding Scripture. Although this principle may be true, it is not what Paul had in mind when he distinguished letter and Spirit. The Spirit denotes a divine power that gives life rather than a divine inspiration that opens the true meaning of Scripture. The Spirit implies God's new action in Christ that enables believers to do what they could not otherwise do—obey the letter.<sup>32440</sup>

A comparable view interprets the “letter” to mean a legalistic interpretation of the law. This interpretation relates the letter to the veil that hardens the minds of those in Israel who hear the reading of the old covenant (3:14). Cranfield's comment, “ ‘Letter’ is rather what the legalist is left with as a result of his

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<sup>42318</sup> Westerholm, “Letter and Spirit,” 229. For a history of the interpretation of the letter and the Spirit in seven representative figures—Origen, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Augustine, the authors of the *Glossa Ordinaria*, Thomas Aquinas, Nicholas of Lyra, and Martin Luther, see W.-S. Chau, *The Letter and the Spirit: A History of Interpretation from Origen to Luther*, American University Studies, Series VII, Theology and Religion, 167 (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

<sup>43319</sup> Héring argues that after the opposition between letter and spirit, Paul “describes two ways of reading the Law of Moses: a literal way ... and a spiritual way” (*The Second Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, 23). Provençe (“ ‘Who Is Sufficient for These Things?’ ” 63) cites K. Barth's position: “In 2 Cor. 3 everything depends upon the fact that without the work of the Spirit Scripture is veiled, however great its glory and whatever its origin” (*Church Dogmatics* I/2 ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956] 515). Provençe points out, however, that when Paul refers to a veil that lies upon the reading of the old covenant in 3:14, “the veil is a veil of hard-heartedness which hides not the meaning of the Bible, but the glory of God” (“ ‘Who Is Sufficient for These Things?’ ” 63–64). The veil is removed when an individual is spiritually transformed and can see the glory of the Lord (3:18).

<sup>44320</sup> In 1:22 Paul reminds the Corinthians that God sealed them and placed the down payment of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Paul affirms that the promise of Ezek 39:29 has been fulfilled: “ ‘I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel,’ declares the Sovereign LORD.”

misunderstanding and misuse of the law,” is often quoted.<sup>32451</sup> The “letter and Spirit” are therefore regarded as a contrast between what humans do and what God does. The law, which is holy, just, and good (Rom 7:12), cannot penetrate the heart and can easily be twisted by unspiritual minds so that it leads to death. This analysis of what humans do with the law is certainly true. All too frequently we turn God’s revelation into a rigid, death-dealing code or into a set of rules that establishes or confirms our own righteousness. But is this what Paul meant by the antithesis between letter and Spirit? Misunderstanding or misapplying the law is not at issue in 3:6. This interpretation ignores that Paul specifically contrasts God’s inscribing the law on stones with God’s inscribing it on human hearts through the Spirit (3:3).

Interpreting “letter” to mean some warped perception or misuse of the law also does not fit well the contexts of the other passages where it occurs. In Rom 2:27 “letter” does not refer to a perverted understanding of God’s law but to the possession of the law in written form. In Rom 2:29 “letter” refers simply to the external rite of circumcision in the flesh which Paul contrasts with spiritual circumcision.<sup>32462</sup> Possessing the written code and being circumcised can lead to a false sense of security.<sup>32473</sup> It is false because it is the security of a prison that ultimately puts everyone on death row. In Rom 7:6 “oldness of letter” and “newness of Spirit” denote different ways of serving under the old and new dispensations respectively. “Letter” refers to the concrete demands of the Old Testament law which God’s people were duty bound to obey but which in fact resulted in a bondage to sin and death. The “letter” denotes what is merely

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<sup>45321</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975) 1:339. Barrett understands “the letter” to refer to the misuse of the law. “Letter thus points to the way in which (in Paul’s view) many of his Jewish contemporaries understood the law on which their religion was based, and through this to man-made religion in general, whether legalistic, antinomian, or mystical” (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 113). Years before, E. Käsemann argued in a scintillating and influential essay that God’s original, sacred intention in the law was perverted by humans resulting in “the letter,” which confused God’s demand for obedience as a demand for works (“The Spirit and the Letter,” in *Perspectives on Paul* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971] 138–66). See also Provençe, “‘Who is Sufficient for These Things?’” 65–67.

<sup>46322</sup> Westerholm, “Letter and Spirit,” 233–36.

<sup>47323</sup> Furnish comments, “*What is written kills* because it enslaves one to the presumption that righteousness inheres in one’s doing of the law, when it is actually the case that true righteousness comes only as a gift from God (cf. ‘a righteousness of my own’/‘the righteousness from God’—Phil 3:9, RSV)” (*II Corinthians*, 201).

written, and when Paul contrasts it with Spirit, he is contrasting an external code with an indwelling power that can transform believers into the image of God (3:18).<sup>32484</sup>

Paul argues in Gal 3:10–14 that the law pronounces a curse on all who fail to obey it. Since no one is able to obey it in every respect,<sup>32495</sup> all stand under this curse.<sup>32506</sup> The law's curse is removed only through Christ's death, which also bestows the promised Spirit on all who believe (Gal 3:13–14). "Spirit" refers to the Spirit of God. The Spirit's power to direct the Christian's conduct from within not only has replaced all feeble and vain attempts to heed the laws of the Torah on our own but it also has resulted in righteousness and life instead of condemnation and death.<sup>32517</sup> We therefore should not attach an unduly negative connotation to the "letter" since it played a divinely given but specific role in salvation history. The letter was to be obeyed, but humans failed to obey it. The problem is with humans and with the letter's inability to create obedience. Even the most valiant attempts to obey the letter are doomed. Since the letter only specifies God's demand and the punishment for failing to obey, it ends up only condemning the disobedient to death and never giving life or righteousness (Gal 3:21). The Spirit is the power that enables the moral life and sets people free. The Spirit therefore completes God's action in giving the law because it gives obedience, life, and the potential for the old to become new (5:17; Eph 4:22, 24; Col 3:9–10).<sup>32528</sup> In 3:6 Paul is talking about "ministry" or rendering service to God. The letter and Spirit refer to the two different ways of rendering service to God under the two different covenants.<sup>32539</sup> The one is carved in letters on stone tablets which require obedience, while the other is written on human hearts and impels obedience

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<sup>48324</sup> As C. Hodge put it: "A covenant is simply a promise suspended upon a condition. The covenant of works, therefore, is nothing more than the promise of life suspended on the condition of perfect obedience" (*Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950] 57).

<sup>49325</sup> A similar assumption is found in 4 Ezra 9:26–10:58; though the law is sown in us, we cannot keep it.

<sup>50326</sup> The reality of the law's curse may have been branded on Paul's mind by the lashings he submitted to in the synagogue (2 Cor 11:24). During the lashing, the curses prescribed in the law (Deut 28:58–59) were to be read aloud (A. Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* [1927; reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1957] 62, citing *m. Mak.* 3:10–14).

<sup>51327</sup> Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 239.

<sup>52328</sup> Paul maintains that his ministry among the Corinthians has demonstrated Spirit and power (1 Cor 2:3–5) and that it results in life in them (2 Cor 4:12).

<sup>53329</sup> Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 240.

through divine agency. S. H. Hooke astutely observed: “A vine does not produce grapes by Act of Parliament; they are the fruit of the vine’s own life; so the conduct which conforms to the standard of the Kingdom is not produced by any demand, not even God’s, but it is the fruit of that divine nature that God gives as the result of what he has done in and by Christ.”<sup>33540</sup> For Paul the letter is part of the old covenant now transcended by the new covenant inaugurated by the age of the Spirit.

Paul more fully lays out the contrasts in Rom 8:1–7. Those under the law must live with condemnation (8:1), the law of sin and death (8:2), slavery (8:3), the impotency of the flesh (8:3), an existence determined by the things of the flesh (8:4–5), death (8:6), and hostility (8:7). Those in the Spirit experience no condemnation (8:1), the freedom created by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ (8:2), the potency of God (8:3), an existence determined by the things of the Spirit (8:4–5), and life and peace (8:6).

We would argue that Paul is not engaging in polemics against opponents in this section, as so many contend, but seeking instead to remind the Corinthians that he serves as a minister of the new covenant directed by the power of the Spirit. Next, he will compare himself with Moses, a minister of the old covenant (3:7–18). If Moses’ ministry under the old covenant was marked by glory, so his ministry in the new covenant is marked by glory to an “incomparably greater degree.” As Hafemann aptly describes it:

Moses was called to mediate the Law to a stiff-necked people under the Law who could not obey it. Paul is called to mediate the Spirit now being poured out as a result of the cross of Christ to a people whose hearts are being transformed to obey the covenant stipulations of the Law.<sup>3355156</sup>

**4. πεποίθησιν δὲ τοιαύτην ἔχομεν διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.** Such is the confidence Paul possesses. He is confident that the very existence of the church in Corinth furnishes him with his apostolic credentials.<sup>27575</sup> But the content of his confidence may include also what he has said in 2:14–17 about his general

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<sup>54330</sup> S. H. Hooke, “What Is Christianity?” 264.

<sup>55331</sup> Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 173

<sup>56</sup> David E. Garland, [2 Corinthians](#), vol. 29, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 162–167.

<sup>57275</sup> Bachmann, p. 144; Plummer, p. 84; Barrett, p. 110; Collange, *Énigmes*, p. 57.

apostolic task, and his implicit assertion of his adequacy for it.<sup>27586</sup> This is not self-confidence, however, for it is made possible only through Christ: Christ is the ‘author’ of the apostle’s ‘letter of recommendation’, and his preaching is done ἐν Χριστῷ (2:17). Moreover, Paul possesses his confidence ‘before God’,<sup>27597</sup> or, ‘in the presence of God’.<sup>27608</sup> perhaps the point is that he has that proper sense of human limitations which comes to full realisation only when man sees himself confronted with divine omnipotence.<sup>27619</sup>

**5. οὐχ ὅτι ἀφ’ ἑαυτῶν ἱκανοὶ ἐσμεν λογίσασθαί τι ὡς ἐξ ἑαυτῶν, ἀλλ’ ἡ ἱκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ**, Paul disavows any implicit suggestion that he has any inherent adequacy. Adequacy for what, however? There are two ways of understanding λογίσασθαί τι ὡς ἐξ ἑαυτῶν. The first form of exegesis loads λογίσασθαί with a weight of positive meaning, attaches the τι to it, and leaves the phrase ὡς ἐξ ἑαυτῶν as a somewhat redundant repetition of the preceding ἀφ’ ἑαυτῶν. If this is correct, the most likely sense of λογίσασθαί is ‘pronounce judgement’, ‘evaluate’, as in the allusions in 10:2 and 10:7 to Paul’s opponents’ actual or reported judgements of his apostolic worth (cf. 11:5 and 12:6 for similar uses).<sup>28620</sup> It may function, it is suggested, as a slogan in the apostle’s debate with his critics. What is at issue is the ability of the preacher to assess potential, both his own and that of others.<sup>28631</sup> In favour of this interpretation it may be said that the evaluation of missionary credentials and capacity is certainly relevant to the

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<sup>58276</sup> Bachmann, p. 145; Bultmann, p. 78; cf. Furnish, p. 196; Martin, p. 52.

<sup>59277</sup> Furnish, p. 173.

<sup>60278</sup> Martin p. 44. From the grammatical viewpoint it is necessary to note that the phrase πρὸς τὸν θεόν is not the immediate complement of πεποιθήσιν in the sense ‘confidence in God’. As Collange, *Énigmes*, p. 58, points out, the noun πεποιθήσις and the verb πέποιθα are followed by εἰς, ἐν, and (in the case of the verb) ἐπί to indicate the one in whom confidence is reposed, but never by the preposition πρὸς.

<sup>61279</sup> Martin, p. 53, on the following verse.

<sup>62280</sup> Bultmann, p. 79. It is not likely that there is any reference to the construction of a system of theological teaching, *pace* Klöpper, pp. 184–5, since it is not Paul’s teaching as such which is the point of contention in this letter. Nor is it probable that Paul has in mind the making of plans for the discharge of his apostolic duties, *pace* Meyer, p. 194, and Prümm, *Diakonia Pneumatos* I, p. 112. The question concerning sufficiency in 2:17 clearly refers to the whole of the apostolic task, not simply to the prior mental consideration of evangelistic projects.

<sup>63281</sup> Georgi, *Opponents*, pp. 230–2, 235.

context.<sup>28642</sup> The second interpretation gives to λογίσασθαι a less weighty and more neutral sense, and takes the phrase τι ὡς ἐξ ἑαυτῶν as an integrated sense-unit.<sup>28653</sup> Paul is not himself competent to consider anything (i.e., any part of his apostolic work) as deriving from his own resources.<sup>28664</sup> We would seem to have here a conflation of two ways of expressing the same basic thought: ‘I am not of myself adequate’, and ‘I do not regard anything as deriving from myself’.<sup>28675</sup> This second interpretation is to be preferred on two counts. In view of v. 6, the competency must be general and comprehensive, rather than limited and specific, and also this way of looking at Paul’s sentence goes some way towards explaining the apparent duplication present in the ἀφ’ ἑαντῶν and ἐξ ἑαντῶν. He has, then, no self-generated capacity for his apostolic task. This was not what he meant when, in 2:16c–17, he affirmed his sufficiency. What he was speaking of was the adequacy for the fulfilment of his vocation bestowed on him by God.<sup>28686</sup> His ‘sufficiency’ comes from the one who was sometimes termed ‘[the] sufficient

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<sup>64282</sup> It is doubtful, however, whether λογίζομαι should be seen as a kind of technical term used as a catchword (introduced by Paul’s opponents) in the debate in Corinth. It is one of the apostle’s own favourite words, used in several different contexts with various connotations: Paul uses it 32 times, whilst in the remainder of the NT there are 8 occurrences only. See also Collange, *Énigmes*, p. 59 n. 2, and Murphy-O’Connor, ‘A Ministry Beyond the Letter’, p. 114.

<sup>65283</sup> The whole of this clause has been subject to textual disturbance. Some witnesses (C D F G 629 *pc*) read λογίξεσθαι, probably as a result of simple scribal error. In others (p<sup>46</sup> B) τι is omitted as a result of homoioteleuton. The reading αὐτῶν (B F G *pc*) is due to the use of the contraction αὐτῶν for ἑαυτῶν.

<sup>66284</sup> This interpretation has support from, e.g., RSV, JB, NEB, REB, BCN; Plummer, p. 84; Allo, p. 83; Barrett, p. 109; Furnish, p. 173; Martin, p. 44.

<sup>67285</sup> Murphy-O’Connor, ‘A Ministry Beyond the Letter’, p. 114.

<sup>68286</sup> Käsemann, ‘The Spirit and the Letter’, p. 150, sees here a development of the theme of ‘the justification of the ungodly’. God makes use of instruments in themselves totally ineffective. This may be true to Paul’s thought, but the emphasis in 3:4–6 lies more on the divine gift of adequacy than on the fact of human insufficiency.

one', [ὁ] ἰκανός.<sup>28697</sup> Whilst Paul's basic theological point is not dependent upon the particular vocabulary in which it is expressed, the point is sharpened by the connection between the designation of his apostolic capacity as ἰκανότης, and the occasional use of ἰκανός as a divine title.

**6. ὅς καὶ ἰκάνωσεν ἡμᾶς σιακόνους καινῆς σιαθήκης, οὐ γράμματος ἀλλὰ πνεύματος τὸ γὰρ γράμμα ἀποκτέννει, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωοποιεῖ.** The first half of the verse has an explanatory function, indicating what task it is to which this divinely-bestowed adequacy (v. 5) relates.<sup>28708</sup> That Paul has in mind his fundamental apostolic mission, for which he has been empowered from the beginning of his life as a Christian, is suggested by the aorist tense of ἰκάνωσεν, which refers, in all probability, to the moment of his conversion and calling.<sup>28719</sup> He was called and empowered at that moment, as agent of a new covenant. This description of his function is unique to the present context, and may be occasioned by the situation in Corinth. To understand what is more particularly meant by it requires a consideration of both its component parts.

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<sup>69287</sup> Plummer, p. 85, cites the following references in the LXX: Ruth 1:20; Job 21:15; 31:2; 40:2; cf. Windisch, p. 108; Barrett, p. 111; Bruce, p. 190; Knox, *Gentiles*, p. 131 n. 1; Furnish, p. 196. See Furnish, *ibid.*, on the theme of God's self-sufficiency in Philo. In *Mut. Nom. (Change of Names)* 46, for example, Philo says: ἰκανὸς ἦν αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ὁ θεός ('God was sufficient unto Himself', LCL), and the same phrase ἰκανὸς ... ἑαυτῷ occurs in *Cherub* 46; cf. *Mut. Nom.* 27. Furnish observes, *ibid.*, that this usage in hellenistic Judaism may suggest that we should be cautious in accepting the view that it must have been rival missionaries who introduced the terminology into the Corinthian debate: Paul will have been familiar with it himself. Whether his rejection of human adequacy owes something to current hellenistic-Jewish thinking is perhaps more doubtful. Windisch, p. 108, sees a number of parallels in Philo, but the only relevant example appears to be in *Somn.* II 25, where it is said that we do not think ourselves to be competent (ἰκανοὺς εἶναι ἑαυτοῦς) to cleanse ourselves spiritually without God's guidance. Bultmann, p. 79 (cf. Furnish, pp. 196–7), points out that this lacks the Pauline tension between total human inadequacy and the powerful capacity for achievement bestowed by God. The distinction is a fine one, however, and it may well be that Paul was influenced by some such current idea.

<sup>70288</sup> Bachmann, p. 147; Collange, *Énigmes*, p. 60. The precise force of the καί is debatable. It may emphasise the relative pronoun, 'It is he who ...': so NEB, JB, REB; or it may stress the verb ἰκάνωσεν, 'who indeed made us adequate': Allo, pp. 83–4; Martin, p. 44. But what is new, and therefore should carry the emphasis, is the definition of the sphere of operation of Paul's adequacy (rather than its divine origin, or the fact of it). Hence, it may be best to see the καί as emphasising the relative clause as a whole, with particular reference to the phrase διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης.

<sup>71289</sup> Plummer, p. 85; Windisch, p. 109; Hughes, p. 93; Collange, *Énigmes*, p. 60; Furnish, p. 184.

The impression often given by lexicons is that the primary meaning of δῖάκονος is ‘servant’.<sup>29720</sup> This can be misleading, however. An extensive study of the non-Christian sources by J. N. Collins shows that the underlying idea of the δῖάκον-terminology is that of being a ‘go-between’, of acting in an ‘in-between’ capacity. This can, of course, include the function of a servant, but has also a much wider application. The words may refer to the doing of an errand, the transmission of a message, the activity of an agent, and the like, and the δῖάκονος (while subordinate to his principal) by no means possesses an inherently low status. All this is true in religious as well as secular usage, i.e., where the ‘between’ is between heaven and earth as well as where it is between human beings.<sup>29731</sup> In the present context, where Paul has been speaking about the proclamation of the gospel, he will term himself δῖάκονος because he sees himself (as in 1 Cor 3:5) as an intermediary who is charged with a message from God,<sup>29742</sup> i.e., the message of the new covenant which he transmits through his preaching.<sup>29753</sup> Is there, however, some further reason for his use of the word here? The remarkable concentration of the δῖάκον-terminology in chaps. 1–9 suggests that there may be. According to 11:23, the rival missionaries called themselves δῖάκονοι Χριστοῦ. On Paul’s lips, therefore, δῖάκονος may have a polemical bearing.<sup>29764</sup> He might intend to insist on his own better entitlement to it. But it is

<sup>72290</sup> LSJ s.v. δῖάκονος 1.; BAGD s.v. I.a.; cf. H.W. Beyer, on δῖάκονος, in *TWNT* II, p. 88.

<sup>73291</sup> Collins, *Diakonia*, pp. 73–191.

<sup>74292</sup> See Collins, *Diakonia*, pp. 195–8.

<sup>75293</sup> This does not mean that in Paul the word has become a technical term for an itinerant preacher who is God’s representative. Georgi, *Opponents*, pp. 28–9, argues that this is so, since, he claims, the majority of NT uses can be understood on the basis of what Epictetus says about the Cynic philosopher, who is a δῖάκονος of God with a missionary function to the world, and appears to be ‘the envoy of God in the sense of being his authorized representative’: see *Diss.* III 24:65; 26:28; IV 7:20. There are two objections to this view. First, as Collange, *Énigmes*, p. 61, observes, in Paul’s own vocabulary δῖάκονος is followed (except in 1 Cor 3:5 and Phil 1:1) by a defining genitive, which shows that in itself it is a general word rather than a technical term. Secondly, Collins, *Diakonia* pp. 170–6, claims that Georgi has misread Epictetus. Nowhere in the *Discourses* does the actual word δῖάκονος refer to a philosopher (Stoic or Cynic) acting as a messenger. It is true that the noun δῖάκονία in III 22:69 (its only occurrence) refers to the Cynic’s ‘sacred commission’ to be an itinerant preacher, but the word is not in itself the technical designation of such a commission. See also Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>76294</sup> Murphy-O’Connor, ‘A Ministry Beyond the Letter’, p. 115. With reference to Friedrich, ‘Gegner’, pp. 185–6, he notes that there are 15 δῖάκον-words in 2 Cor 1–9, and 4 in 2 Cor 10–13; in Romans there are 8, in 1 Corinthians 3, and there is one example in Galatians, in Philippians, in 1 Thessalonians, and in Philemon. This

not certain that the opponents of 11:23 are the same as the πολλοί of 2:17. Moreover, the use of διάκονος by the latter is not the only possible explanation of the frequency of the διακον-words in this section of the letter.<sup>29775</sup>

The content of Paul's function as διάκονος is defined in the following genitival phrase καινῆς διαθήκης: he proclaims the inauguration of a new covenant.<sup>29786</sup>

This language is not originally Paul's own. Consequently, he was not himself making a conscious choice between the two available words for 'new', καινός and νέος nor is it clear whether he would be concerned with the question of whether διαθήκη refers to a unilateral divine enactment or to a covenant regarded as a two-way process. It has been argued that καινός implies the superiority of the new thing to the old<sup>29797</sup> and that in the NT it signifies the miraculous newness of the era of salvation.<sup>29808</sup> This distinction is in any case somewhat doubtful. It originated in a study of classical usage, and may not be applicable to the NT,

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suggests that the concept had suddenly become important at the time of the writing of 2 Cor 1–9. (This section in fact contains 16, not 15, instances of the terminology.)

<sup>77295</sup> In 2 Cor 1–9, six of the instances (8:4, 19, 20; 9:1, 12, 13) refer to the collection and are here part of Paul's own vocabulary (cf. Rom 15:25, 31; 1 Cor 16:15). One (3:3) refers to his instrumentality in founding the Corinthian church, and may have been chosen as a means to indicate this without forcing the metaphor of the letter too precisely. In five instances (3:6, 7, 8, 9 [twice]) the words are used in the comparison and contrast between the apostolic ministry and the ministry of Moses, and may have been selected as general terms which could be used of both (unlike ἀπόστολος and ἀποστογή which are specifically Christian terms). Furthermore, it is characteristic of Paul's style to take up a word-group and use it repetitiously (cf. the use of παρακαλέω/παράκλησις in 1:3–7).

<sup>78296</sup> The genitive is objective: a new covenant is the thing with which his activity is concerned. This is rejected by Oliveira, *Diakonie der Gerechtigkeit*, pp. 15–60, who argues that the genitive indicates relationship, indicating the power by which the διάκονος is controlled. The διαθήκη-concept, he claims, is parallel to that of δικαιοσύνη (see 3:9), and hence may be seen as a controlling power in the same way as δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ. Furthermore, both καινὴ διαθήκη and δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ are pre-Pauline concepts and originate in the hellenistic-Jewish Christianity which was the place of origin of Paul's opponents. Consequently, these people may themselves have claimed to be διάκονοι καινῆς διαθήκης. Against this it has to be said, first, that δικαιοσύνη itself does not always signify a determining power, and in any case a similarity between two ideas does not mean that all the characteristics of each can be transferred to the other; secondly, that there is no necessary allusion to opponents here (the ἡμᾶς is not in an emphatic position), and that Paul himself was in some degree a product of hellenistic-Jewish Christianity.

<sup>79297</sup> Plummer, p. 85; Allo, p. 84; νέος is 'new' in an ordinary sense.

<sup>80298</sup> J. Behm, on καινός, in *TWNT* III, pp. 450–1.

where the two adjectives appear to be interchangeable (as in the LX<sup>81</sup>X).<sup>29829</sup> And even should there be exceptions, the phrase καινή διαθήκη comes originally from Jer 38:31 (LX<sup>83</sup>X). and from the Last Supper tradition (1 Cor 11:25), so that the use of καινός rather than νέος would naturally follow. The question of whether the διαθήκη is unilateral or bilateral is best decided on the basis of the LX<sup>84</sup>X.<sup>30850</sup> Here the word is the equivalent of the Hebrew *b<sup>e</sup>rit*.<sup>30861</sup> It can be argued, therefore, that it does not mean a one-sided, unilateral arrangement,<sup>30872</sup> but rather a reciprocal relationship, since in the making of a covenant there would usually be some degree of reciprocity. There are, however, several different kinds of covenant in the OT, and different covenant-beliefs,<sup>30883</sup> and also different ways in which scholars interpret the same form of covenant. The Sinai-covenant, for example, which contains commandments, might be seen as bilateral in that both parties are put under obligation, or as unilateral in that the commands are a declaration of the sovereign will of God. The promised new covenant of Jeremiah, in particular, might be regarded as such a declaration.<sup>30894</sup> If Paul understood the OT passage in this way the emphasis here might lie on the divine saving initiative.<sup>30905</sup> This is all the more likely in that, whilst he takes the phrase καινή διαθήκη from tradition (1 Cor 11:25), it is connected with the death of Christ,

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<sup>81</sup>LXX *Septuaginta*, ed. A. Rahlfs, Stuttgart, sixth edition.

<sup>82299</sup> In relation to the NT, the claim that there is a distinction between νέος and καινός goes back to R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, London, 1876, pp. 211–17. For the denial of the distinction (on the grounds noted above), see R. A. Harrisville, ‘The Concept of Newness in the New Testament’, *JBL* 74 (1955), pp. 69–79. Behm (see n. 298), p. 450, does allow that the distinction becomes weaker in the course of time. Professor C. E. B. Cranfield suggests, however, that καινός does seem to be used more readily with theological significance.

<sup>83</sup>LXX *Septuaginta*, ed. A. Rahlfs, Stuttgart, sixth edition.

<sup>84</sup>LXX *Septuaginta*, ed. A. Rahlfs, Stuttgart, sixth edition.

<sup>85300</sup> In secular usage διαθήκη usually means ‘disposition of property by will’, ‘testament’ (LSJ s.v. διαθήκη I), although it sometimes means ‘compact’ (LSJ, *ibid.*, III.). The making of a will is a unilateral act, but this sense is inappropriate in the present context.

<sup>86301</sup> See G. Quell, on διαθήκη, in *TWNT* II, pp. 106–7, who notes that there are 270 examples.

<sup>87302</sup> Bultmann, p. 79 n. 20, specifically denies that in 2 Cor 3:6 the sense is ‘einseitige Verfügung’, as Kümmel, p. 199, supposes.

<sup>88303</sup> See, e.g., R. Clements, *Abraham and David*, SBT (2nd series) 5, London, 1967, p. 86: the idea of a ‘unilateral’ covenant is connected with ‘the Abrahamic-Davidic traditions’, whilst the Sinai-covenant was one ‘of mutual obligation’.

<sup>89304</sup> J. Behm, on διαθήκη, in *TWNT* II, p. 130.

<sup>90305</sup> Collange, *Énigmes*, p. 63; Hughes, pp. 94–5.

which was the supreme example of God's unilateral action for man's salvation (Rom 5:6–8). However this may be, the new relationship between God and his people promised by Jeremiah has been brought into existence through Christ. The nature of this new covenant is then defined in the remainder of the verse. It is characterised not by γράμμα but by πνεῦμα.<sup>30916</sup> The term γράμμα must have something to do with the law of Moses, in view of the allusion in v. 7 to the engraving ἐν γράμμασιν on stone which marked the inauguration of the old covenant. But what aspect of the law is it which is thus repudiated as uncharacteristic of the new order? At least three different views may be distinguished. (i) Paul has in mind two ways of understanding Scripture, the literal and the spiritual. In Rom 2:29 and 7:6 γράμμα and πνεῦμα are contrasted as outward sign and inward reality. Hence, in the present verse the γράμμα is the law of Moses in its literal sense whilst the πνεῦμα is the spirit of the law, its inward meaning. It is the latter which Paul preaches.<sup>30927</sup> This is the least likely possibility. The πνεῦμα of v. 6 must refer back to the πνεῦμα θεοῦ ζῶντος of v. 3, where the Spirit is not the true meaning of Scripture but a divine agency at work within human life. In consequence, γράμμα does not mean 'the literal sense of the law'.<sup>30938</sup> (ii) The term γράμμα connotes the law, written on stone tablets, as something which exerts an external and tyrannical control over those under its sway, evoking fear and a sense of slavery.<sup>30949</sup> The new order of things, by contrast,

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<sup>91306</sup> Some commentators understand the phrase οὐ γράμματος ἀλλὰ πνεύματος as qualifying διακόνους (not καινῆς διαθήκης): so Meyer, p. 196; Klöpper, p. 186; Heinrici, *Das zweite Sendschreiben*, p. 162, n. 2. In what follows, we are told that the γράμμα kills, and in v. 7 Paul speaks of the διακονία τοῦ θανάτου. The word order, however, suggests the attachment of the phrase to καινῆς διαθήκης: see, e.g., Rückert, p. 78; Bachmann, p. 148; Windisch, p. 110. This attachment, incidentally, makes it highly unlikely that καινὴ διαθήκη, as parallel to the παλαιὰ διαθήκη of 3:14, refers to a written text, *pace* J. Carmignac, 'Il Corinthiens iii. 6:14, et le Début de la Formation du Nouveau Testament', *NTS* 24 (1978), pp. 384–6. For criticism of Carmignac, see Furnish, p. 184, and Lambrecht, 'Structure', p. 362 n. 43.

<sup>92307</sup> Allo, pp. 85, 107; for further arguments in support of this view, see B. Cohen, 'Note on Letter and Spirit in the New Testament', *HTR* 47 (1954), pp. 197–203 (but see Furnish, p. 200, for a critique of his viewpoint). With reference to Allo, B. Schneider, 'The Meaning of St. Paul's Antithesis "The Letter and the Spirit"', *CBQ* 15 (1953), pp. 163–207, points out (p. 192) that Allo himself allows Paul to have been the probable originator of the antithesis in the sense in which he (Allo) wishes to understand it. If so, however, this new meaning would have to be made clear in the context, which is not the case.

<sup>93308</sup> E. Ebeling, 'Geist und Buchstabe', *RGG*<sup>3</sup> II, cols. 1290–6.

<sup>94309</sup> Klöpper, p. 186; less strongly, Hermann, *Kyrios und Pneuma*, p. 28.

is characterised by the power of the Spirit of God operating within the heart of the believer.<sup>31950</sup> The law was powerless to produce the behaviour it enjoined,<sup>31961</sup> it is far otherwise with the covenant of the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:2–4). This second interpretation is consonant with the passage on the new covenant in Jer 31:31–34, where there is an implicit contrast with the law as externally promulgated, and where the covenant related to this form of the law has been broken.<sup>31972</sup> We seem here to have an adequate explanation of the antithesis. (iii) The antithesis is to be seen as the contrast between human activity and divine activity, and γράμμα will signify the law interpreted and used in a legalistic sense so as to promote purely human achievement.<sup>31983</sup> The contrast between divine and human agency has appeared in vv. 1–3 in that the letters of the πολλοί were written by other people, whilst Paul’s ‘letter’ was the work of the Spirit of God.<sup>31994</sup> Moreover, when the γράμμα-πνεῦμα antithesis occurs in Rom 7:6 it is clear from what follows that it cannot be the law as such that is opposed to the Spirit, since in 7:14 the law itself is described as πνευματικός. Hence γράμμα is not ‘law’ pure and simple, but rather the law used in a perverted, i.e., legalistic, way.<sup>311005</sup> This is a possibility. At the same time, in the next verse Paul refers to the initial law-giving, not to any subsequent misuse of the law: the law in itself is γράμμα, inscribed ἐν γράμμασιν. Hence, the second interpretation may be preferable. The law as external command was powerless to remedy human sinfulness (Rom 8:3). Consequently, the old order brought death, which Paul sees as the final end of sinful humanity (Rom 6:23). This again may be seen as implicit in the passage in Jeremiah. The Mosaic covenant had promised life to those who obeyed God’s commands but death to the disobedient (Deut 30:15–20): hence, since the covenant had been broken, to kill had now become the function of the law. By contrast, the indwelling Spirit of life liberates believers from sin and death (Rom 8:2), and will eventually be instrumental in bringing to life their mortal bodies through resurrection from the dead (Rom 8:11).

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<sup>95310</sup> Hermann, *Kyrios und Pneuma*, pp. 28–9.

<sup>96311</sup> Kamlah, ‘Buchstabe und Geist’, p. 278, comments that the law, in Paul’s view, was unable to liberate man from bondage to the σάρξ.

<sup>97312</sup> Cf. Windisch, p. 110.

<sup>98313</sup> See, e.g. Barrett, pp. 112–13; Käsemann, ‘The Spirit and the Letter’, pp. 146–7; cf. Prümm, *Diakonia Pneumatos* I, p. 118.

<sup>99314</sup> Barrett, p. 112.

<sup>100315</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, pp. 339–40; Kamlah, ‘Buchstabe und Geist’, p. 277; cf. Käsemann, ‘The Spirit and the Letter’, pp. 146–7; Oliveira, *Diakonie der Gerechtigkeit*, p. 169.

There remains the question of Paul's motivation in introducing the motif of the new covenant. It is uncertain whether this theme played any prominent part in his theological thinking in general.<sup>311016</sup> In any case, it is likely that it was some aspect of the situation in Corinth which caused its introduction here. Various possibilities are proposed. Did Paul, perhaps, need to counter the influence of opponents who themselves claim to be agents of a new covenant but who saw it as including, still, the observance of the law of Moses? There would be something of a non-Christian parallel to such an attitude in the outlook of the Qumran community. The actual expression 'new covenant' occurs in the Damascus Document (CD 6:19; 8:21 = 19:33; 20:12), expressing a relationship into which the members of the sect have entered, and in no way does this involve abandonment of the law.<sup>311027</sup> Elsewhere, the sectaries speak of the renewing of the covenant (see, e.g. 1QSb 3:26; 5:21).<sup>311038</sup> At the same time, there is also the belief that God has placed his Spirit within them (1QH 12:11–12), and this may be related to the concept of a new covenant (1QH 17:26–27).<sup>311049</sup> Perhaps there were people in Corinth who had been influenced by this kind of thinking.<sup>321050</sup> Paul would share with them the idea of the new covenant, but would strongly disagree on the question of the function of the law within this new order.<sup>321061</sup> The phrase οὐ γράμματος ἀλλὰ πνεύματος may be seen as distinguishing between *two* forms of the *new* covenant (rather than between the *old* and the *new*).<sup>321072</sup> Against all theories of this kind, however, it has to be said that in what follows there is no indication that Paul is contesting a contemporary christianised concept of a new covenant. It is the Sinai-covenant which concerns him.<sup>321083</sup> Moreover, had he wished thus to distinguish between one form of new covenant and another, he would have needed to say: οὐ πνεύματος καὶ γράμματος, ἀλλὰ πνεύματος μόνον. This second objection would apply also to the theory that he is responding to opponents who claimed to be divinely-inspired exegetes of Scripture and who,

<sup>101316</sup> It is seen as a significant element in his thinking by Van Unnik, 'Nouvelle Alliance', pp. 184–8; see also Furnish, pp. 197–8. For the contrary view see Murphy-O'Connor, 'A Ministry Beyond the Letter', pp. 127–8.

<sup>102317</sup> Jaubert, *La notion d' alliance*, pp. 209–10.

<sup>103318</sup> Jaubert, *La notion d' alliance*, pp. 210–11.

<sup>104319</sup> Jaubert, *La notion d' alliance*, pp. 242–3.

<sup>105320</sup> Jaubert, *La notion d' alliance*, pp. 447–8, tentatively suggests this. See also Rissi, *Studien*, pp. 23–4 and p. 23 n. 34, and Murphy-O'Connor, 'A Ministry Beyond the Letter', pp. 116–17.

<sup>106321</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, 'A Ministry Beyond the Letter', p. 117.

<sup>107322</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, 'A Ministry Beyond the Letter', pp. 116–17.

<sup>108323</sup> Davies, *Christian Origins*, p. 175.

by virtue of the Spirit dwelling within them, were able to deal with the letter of the tradition in such a way as to actualise the latent presence within the text of this same divine Spirit.<sup>321094</sup> Perhaps Paul is here not so much engaging in polemic against opponents as laying a foundation for his apologetic argument in 3:7–18. There he compares his own ministry with that of Moses, the agent of the old covenant. Here he establishes himself as the agent of the new covenant, and underlines the superiority of this covenant both negatively and positively. This is preliminary to the following argument that if Moses's ministry was characterised by glory, so must his own be, and to an incomparably greater degree. In what way the argument is related to the Corinthian situation will become apparent in the exegesis of vv. 7–18.

*(ii) Paul's ministry and the ministry of Moses (3:7–18)*

<sup>7</sup> Now if the agency of death, engraven in letters on stones, came into being<sup>321105</sup> with attendant glory, so that the sons of Israel were not able to gaze upon the face of Moses because of his face's radiance—radiance which was in process of effacement,<sup>8</sup> how shall not the agency of the Spirit be attended yet more certainly with glory?<sup>9</sup> For if glory belongs to the agency of condemnation, much more certainly does the agency of righteousness abound in glory.<sup>10</sup> For indeed, what has been glorified has not, in this respect, been glorified at all, on account of the surpassing glory.<sup>11</sup> For if what is being abolished was attended by glory, much more certainly is what endures characterised by glory.<sup>12</sup> Having therefore such a hope, we behave with much confident frankness,<sup>13</sup> and not in the same way as Moses used to put a veil over his face, so that the sons of Israel should not gaze upon the end of what was in process of effacement.<sup>14a</sup> To the contrary, their minds were hardened.<sup>14b</sup> For up to the present day, the same veil remains upon the reading of the old covenant, unlifted because (only) in Christ is it abolished.<sup>15</sup> What is more, until the present day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart.<sup>16</sup> 'But whenever he turns to the Lord, the veil is removed'.<sup>17</sup> Now 'the Lord' is the Spirit; and where there is the Spirit of the Lord, there is freedom.<sup>18</sup> And we all, beholding as in a glass,<sup>321116</sup> with unveiled face, the glory of the Lord, are becoming transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another,<sup>321127</sup> as happens in transformation by the Spirit of the Lord.

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<sup>109324</sup> Georgi, *Opponents*, pp. 249–50, 111–12; see pp. 137–48 on the type of scriptural exegesis to which he claims Paul's opponents were indebted.

<sup>110325</sup> Barrett, p. 109.

<sup>111326</sup> Barrett, p. 110.

<sup>112327</sup> RSV.

This section is clearly based on the story in Exod 34:29–35. When Moses came down from Sinai with the tablets of the law his face shone, and the Israelites were at first afraid to approach him. When he had given them the commandments he put on a veil. This he removed when he entered the Tent of Meeting where God spoke with him, and whilst afterwards he communicated God’s message to the Israelites. He then resumed the veil until he went into the tent again. Paul uses the narrative for his own exegetical purposes. Some exegetes suggest, however, that the passage may have had a prior existence as an independent unit, before it was incorporated into its present epistolary context. It may not seem to have any particular reference to the Corinthian congregation.<sup>321138</sup> Perhaps it was a sermon Paul had preached in a Jewish synagogue.<sup>321149</sup> Alternatively, he may be rewriting an existing exegesis of the Exodus narrative created by his Christian rivals and used to influence the Corinthians.<sup>331150</sup> He may be reacting against a view which sees Moses as the first Christian and Christianity as revealing the true glory of the law of Moses,<sup>331161</sup> or against opponents who regard Moses as the ‘divine man’ *par excellence* and themselves as ‘divine men’ who share his splendour through their possession of a deeper understanding of the power of the Mosaic scriptures.<sup>331172</sup> Other scholars would not claim that the section had a prior, independent, existence, but would agree that it has a polemical tendency. Paul may be contesting the influence of Judaizers who required at least some degree of conformity with the Jewish law.<sup>331183</sup> Or it may be that the issue is christological. Moses is regarded by the apostle’s rivals as the type of Christ, and Christians must follow both.<sup>331194</sup> Not all, however, would agree that the passage is polemical. Perhaps Paul is simply enlarging on the glory of his office because he felt that it was accorded too little respect by other missionaries who had arrived in Corinth and by those whom they had influenced.<sup>331205</sup> Most of these suggestions will be examined in the course of the exegesis. At this point we may briefly remark, first,

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<sup>113328</sup> Windisch, p. 112.

<sup>114329</sup> C.F.D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, London <sup>3</sup>1981, p. 70 n. 1; cf. Martin, p. 59.

<sup>115330</sup> Schulz, ‘Decke’, pp. 1–20; Georgi, *Opponents*, pp. 264–71; cf. Saito, *Mosevorstellungen*, pp. 3–15

<sup>116331</sup> Schulz, ‘Decke’, pp. 21–3.

<sup>117332</sup> Georgi, *Opponents*, chap. 3.

<sup>118333</sup> Plummer, p. 87; Barrett, p. 115; cf. Grässer, ‘Apostel des Neuen Bundes’, pp. 32–3.

<sup>119334</sup> Friedrich, ‘Gegner’, pp. 184–5, 191.

<sup>120335</sup> Hickling, ‘Sequence of Thought’, pp. 381, 384–95.

that the analysis of the structure of 2:14–4:6<sup>331216</sup> does not suggest that 3:7–18 originally had an independent existence, secondly, that the exegesis will show that Paul’s aim is apologetic rather than polemical, but, thirdly, that what he writes has a strong and specific apologetic thrust, i.e., it is not merely a general lack of respect for his apostolic office that is the trouble.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121336</sup> See above, pp. 189–90.

<sup>122</sup> Margaret E. Thrall, [\*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of the Corinthians\*](#), International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 228–239.