

# Questions About How Adventist Exegete 2 Corinthians 3:6-9

By Pastor Ed Anderson

How do 7th-day Adventists with their profoundly strong stance on obeying the Ten Commandments exegete these Scriptures?

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.

2 Corinthians 3:6-9 KJV

## Answer:

This is a powerful and often misunderstood passage from Paul in **2 Corinthians 3:6–9**, and Seventh-day Adventists have a well-developed, biblical way of understanding it that affirms **the continued value of God’s law** while exalting the superior **glory of the New Covenant in Christ**.

Let’s break it down with clarity, Scripture, and context:

## Verse-by-Verse Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 3:6–9 (KJV)

**“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.” (v.6)**

- **Biblical understanding:** The “**letter**” refers to **the law written on stone**, observed **without heart transformation**. It brings **condemnation** to the sinner when approached legalistically.

- The “**spirit**” refers to **the work of the Holy Spirit**, who writes the law on the heart (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10), transforming the person from the inside out.

**The letter condemns; the Spirit convicts, converts, and empowers.**

Bible Students and followers of God do **not discard the law**, but teach it must be **kept through the Spirit**, not mere external behavior.

**“But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious...”**  
(v.7)

- Yes, Paul calls the **Ten Commandments** a “**ministration of death**”. Why?
- Because when the **law is separated from grace**, it **only exposes sin** and pronounces death (Romans 6:23).
- It was **glorious**, as seen when Moses’ face shone—but it **could not save**.

The **problem wasn’t the law**, but the **sinful human heart** that couldn’t keep it (Romans 8:3).

The **glory that faded** on Moses’ face symbolizes the **temporary, external covenant**.

**“How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?”** (v.8)

- The New Covenant is **far more glorious** because:
- It brings **internal renewal**.
- It empowers believers to **obey the law from the heart**.
- It points to **Christ as the fulfillment of the law** (Romans 10:4 rightly understood = “goal” or “aim” of the law).

Theologians see this not as **abolishing** the law, but **fulfilling it through Christ in us** (Galatians 2:20).

**“For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.”** (v.9)

- The **Old Covenant law revealed our guilt**, condemning us as sinners.

- The **New Covenant ministry in Christ** justifies and transforms us into righteous people.
- That's the **superior glory**—but it doesn't make the law evil or obsolete.

Paul even says: *“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.”*—Romans 3:31

### Summary of 2 Corinthians 3

| Old Covenant (Letter)       | New Covenant (Spirit)       |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Written on stone (external) | Written on heart (internal) |
| Exposes sin, condemns       | Transforms and justifies    |
| Glorious but fading         | More glorious and eternal   |
| Powerless to save           | Christ saves and empowers   |
| Death to sinners            | Life through the Spirit     |

**All followers of God should affirm the law**, including the Ten Commandments, especially the **Sabbath** (4th commandment), as still valid—but must understand it must be kept **in the Spirit**, not in legalism.

### The Larger Picture

- Paul is **not criticizing the law itself**, but the **old system of relating to it**—one of externalism, fear, and self-righteousness.
- Adventists teach that the **New Covenant doesn't abolish the law**; it enables true obedience through the **indwelling Spirit of Christ**.

Jesus said: *“If you love Me, keep My commandments”*—John 14:15

*“Not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”*—Matthew 5:18

### Conclusion

2 Corinthians 3 highlights the **superior glory** of the New Covenant ministry—not by **erasing** the Ten Commandments, but by **transferring their observance from tablets of stone to hearts of flesh** through the Spirit.

Thus, Adventists uphold the **law of God**—not as a method of salvation, but as the **beautiful standard of righteousness**, which the **Spirit writes into our lives through grace**.