



[2 Corinthians 3:5-9](#)

(5) Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. (6) He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (7) Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, (8) will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? (9) If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!

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The subject here is not the doing away with laws but the *change in administration* of existing laws. Remember that [Jesus](#) said not one jot or tittle will pass from the law ([Matthew 5:18](#)). In [Hebrews 8:10](#), where the context is the Covenant, the New Covenant is shown to have laws, which will be written in our hearts.

Paul is making a comparison, showing the superiority of the ministry's responsibility under the New Covenant to the priesthood's responsibility under the Old. He compares ink with spirit, stone with flesh, letter with spirit (or intent), and death with life.

The "ministration of death" was Israel's civil administration for punishing violations of civil law. The laws were not done away, but the Old Covenant administration and enforcement of the law was set aside because the church does not have civil authority. It is that simple.

The church does not have civil authority over the state. However, the ministry has the opportunity to play a large part in the ministering of *life* to those [God](#) calls—through teaching and administering God's Word. Thus, the letter killed because the Old Covenant could not provide for life. Words—even of divine origin—cannot produce life. A vitalizing Spirit must be present to charge the words with transforming power.

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for 2 Corinthians 3:5-9 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

Under the Old Covenant, God did not promise His [Holy Spirit](#), [forgiveness](#) of [sin](#), access into His presence, or [eternal life](#). Jesus raised the civil law from its merely carnal application to the nation of Israel to its spiritual application to the church, which would be drawn from all of mankind, including, of course, the Gentiles.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[The Covenants, Grace, and Law \(Part 18\)](#)



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