Did the Glory of Moses’ Face Fade?
A Reexamination of καταργέω in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18
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The translation of καταργέω as “fade” in 2 Cor 3:7-18 has little justification outside biblical literature or within it. Most scholars have abandoned this translation as inaccurate. Yet, it persists in modern Bible versions. Examination of the lexical evidence finds no support for this translation nor does reexamination of the Exod 34:19-24 context that the word is intended to describe. Moses’ face does not diminish in its glory; it is merely blocked or “rendered ineffective” by the mask. Finally, examination of 2 Cor 3:7-18 reveals that a translation of “hinder” or “block” best accounts for Paul’s understanding of the Exodus situation within his own purposes. Further, it is suggested that the use of τέλος by Paul in 2 Cor 3:13 may be connected to his use of τέλειος in 1 Cor 13:8-12.

Key Words: 2 Cor 3:7-18, καταργέω, fade, Exod 34:19-34

With tongue firmly planted in cheek, Richard Hayes, in a recent article, captures the frustrations of those who seek to unlock the mysteries of 2 Corinthians 3, saying:

Unfortunately, 2 Corinthians 3, though squeezed and prodded by generations of interpreters, has remained one of the more inscrutable reflections of a man who had already gained the reputation among his near-contemporaries for writing letters that were “hard to understand” (2 Peter 3:16). It is hard to escape the impression that, to this day, when 2 Corinthians 3 is read a veil lies over our minds.1

Though certainly Hayes as well as others provide analysis and research which helps lift the veil over this passage,2 this study contends that

the golden key to allow readers to peer in at a true reflection of this passage’s glory is the one word καταργέω

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