

2 Cor.3:4-18 (WCF 7:4-6) “Letter and Spirit”

For the Children: Car companies regularly bring out new models of their cars. Quite often they bring out an up-dated form of a model that has been around for a long time. For example, Toyota Corollas were around when I was a teenager! When the companies up-date these popular models, they leave some things the same; some things are similar, but improved; and other things completely new. It is still a Corolla, but a somewhat different Corolla. The Lord had one basic model of the covenant of grace. But there were 2 variations: the old and the new. In the new covenant, He left some things the same (like the 10 Commandments); but He also added some differences, such as sending His Son to die on the cross and to pour out the Holy Spirit. **Questions:** Is the Law good or bad? Why did the Holy Spirit need to be poured out? What is “better” about the new covenant?

Introduction:

First Point: The Old Administration

- 1) A Ministry of the Letter: The “letter” is talking about the Law of God engraved in stone. When v. 6 says that it “kills,” this does not mean that the Law is bad. Rather, the Law alone cannot overcome the hardness of a sinner’s heart. The same is true of all parts of God’s Word. All parts of His Word are good and spiritual. Bu the Holy Spirit is needed in addition to the Word to change sinners’ hearts. The problem, then, is the sinner, not the Law.
- 2) A Ministry of Condemnation: The Law alone cannot rescue sinners, but it can and does condemn them for not living up to the Law. The Law also incites sinners to more sin. See v.9.
- 3) A Ministry of Death: The penalty the Law pronounces on those who do not perfectly obey is death. Hence, the old covenant is described as a “ministry of death” (v.7), compared to the new covenant.
- 4) A Ministry of Glory: At the same time, the old covenant came with glory (vss. 7-14). Moses’ face reflected it, though in a fading, temporary way. The glory of the old covenant seems to have no glory when compared to the glory of the new covenant (v.10).
- 5) A Ministry That Pointed Ahead: Yet the Spirit was active in the Old Testament, enabling faith in the coming Messiah who was revealed in a shadowy way in all parts of the OT. But because His work was not so extensive, many of God’s people hardened their hearts against the Lord and were justly destroyed for their rebellion and sin.

Second Point: The New Administration

- 1) A Ministry of the Spirit: The new covenant is described as a “ministry of the Spirit” (vss.6-8), because the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, working in a more extensive and intensive way in God’s people. See Joel 2;28-29. He did not replace the Law, but worked with God’s Word to change many more hearts. The Spirit is mentioned 7 times in this chapter, but not to supplant the Lord Jesus. The Spirit could only be poured out because Christ accomplished redemption, fulfilling the OT. Christ’s coming and the Spirit’s out-pouring are the 2 big differences between the old and new covenant. The unity of their work is seen in vss.17-18. NT preaching and sacraments reflect that difference.
- 2) A Ministry of Righteousness: Because of the work of Christ and His Spirit, the new covenant has a ministry that focuses on righteousness (imputed and imparted) rather than condemnation (v.9).
- 3) A Ministry of Life: As a result, it is characterized by a ministry of life rather than death (v.6). This life is a result of Christ’s death and rising again. The NT word for “covenant” therefore means “a last will and testament” of the Testator, Christ, who leaves eternal life to us as our inheritance.
- 4) A Ministry of Greater Glory: The old covenant involved glory, but it was “veiled” and “fading” (vss.7,11,13, 14). For God’s rebellious people couldn’t face the glory. The veil over their hearts still existed in Paul’s time. But with the work of Christ and His Spirit in the new covenant, many more were now having the veil lifted. They were being brought into the glory of God in Christ. The Spirit’s sanctifying work was transforming them more and more into Christ’s glorious likeness. They would one day see that glory face-to-face. The new covenant thus has far more glory than the old (vss.9-11). That is also reflected in the liberty and boldness enjoyed by members of the new covenant (vss.4,17) – in contrast to the veiling of the glory in the old covenant.

Conclusion: