

New Covenant Glory: The Minister's Motivation

2 Corinthians 3:7–11

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Introduction

As most of you know, I serve as the Pastor of Local Outreach Ministries here at Grace Community Church. It's my job to oversee our church's efforts to evangelize our community here in the greater Los Angeles area. I also teach a class on the theology and practice of evangelism each fall semester at The Master's Seminary. And in all the discussions that I participate in and read about with respect to evangelism, there's a topic that always shows up in the books, blogs, articles, and round table discussions. And that is: How can pastors *motivate* their people to evangelize? What is the biblical motivation for evangelism? That's a question that never fails to be a chapter in a book, the subject of an article, or a topic of conversation.

You see, as Christians, we all understand that it is our duty to evangelize. The New Testament commands each and every one of us to be regularly engaged in the proclamation of the Gospel to the lost world around us. Whether taking to the streets, knocking on doors, or simply taking opportunities to speak to your co-workers and neighbors in your daily routine, we all understand that we have been commissioned by our Lord to preach the Good News of forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in Christ alone. And yet, there are so few of us who do it. And there are even fewer of us who do it without constant reminders and motivation. And so pastors and professors and other Christian ministers talk, and write books and articles, to help one another think through the biblical motivation for evangelism. In fact, this week I'm heading to Carey Hardy's church in North Carolina to do a weekend evangelism conference for their church, and my second seminar is on the motivation for evangelism!

Now of course, we *need* to be motivated to evangelize. We have been called to no easy task. 1 Corinthians tells us that the word of the cross is *foolishness* to those who are perishing (1:18)! We preach Christ crucified: to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles *foolishness* (1:24). We have been commissioned to tell the world that the God of the universe has become man in the Person of a Jewish carpenter 2,000 years ago. And that He didn't come and take over the world, but instead was executed as a criminal on a Roman cross, and then rose from the grave three days later!

And not only is that message foolish in the blinded minds of the world. It's also extremely offensive to the pride of man. It is not our mission to make that reasonable in the minds of fallen men and women. We are not called to spin that message in a way that makes the world attracted to it. We have been tasked with going to our neighbors, and simply *declaring* to them—with no

apology—that they have so offended this Holy God of the universe that they deserve to perish eternally in hell. And that nothing they can do of themselves is sufficient to earn them heaven, but they must confess their own utter inability and look entirely outside of themselves to this crucified Messiah for righteousness! And that there is no other way to have their sins forgiven, except to trust in and follow Jesus alone.

And in a relativistic, pluralistic, inclusive, “that’s-good-for-you,” “only-God-can-judge-me” society like ours, that kind of message simply doesn’t fly. A message of certainty, a message of conviction, a message that speaks of sin and condemnation and punishment, a message that is exclusive and points to only one way of escape—there is no message that is more offensive to our culture—no message that provokes more hostility from the society that we live in. And because we are sinful—because we love our comfortable lives, because we don’t like conflict and tension and intense conversations—our flesh concocts all manner of excuses for us to withhold this message of life from those who so desperately need to hear it.

In a culture as debauched and depraved as ours—in a culture that celebrates perversion and enshrines the murder of one’s own children as a “women’s rights” issue, the great need of the hour is for Christ’s people to be instilled with a *boldness*—with a *fearlessness*—that does not retreat from this depraved culture, but marches right into the middle of this depraved culture, and preaches the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, which alone can melt hearts of stone.

But where is that boldness—that Gospel-fearlessness—where is that to be found? Well the Apostle Paul found himself ministering in a society that is no less hostile to Christ and His Gospel than ours is. And he faced the broad spectrum of that hostility as a result of his ministry. We’ve read the list of his sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11 a number of times: whipped, beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, dangers from rivers and robbers, from Jews and Gentiles, in the city and in the wilderness; hunger, thirst, sleeplessness, cold, exposure.

And then besides that opposition from outsiders, Paul had those who were seemingly from *within* Christendom attacking him as well. The letter of 2 Corinthians was written in the context of attacks on Paul’s ministry from false teachers who had infiltrated the church in Corinth. They hurl every accusation they can think of at him, and do everything they can to discredit his ministry in the eyes of the Corinthians, so that they can peddle their false gospel. Paul speaks about them preaching “*another* Jesus” and a “*different* gospel” in 2 Corinthians 11:4.

And so in the course of the defense of his ministry, Paul says a number of *really* bold things. He says in chapter 2 verse 14 that despite his many sufferings, he is always led in triumph by Christ. He is like a soldier in the victory parade of a conquering general. He says that he himself is the fragrance of Christ in the world. He says that the message he preaches has *eternal* consequences for *everyone* who hears it—whether for eternal life or eternal death. He takes a shot at the false

apostles by saying in chapter 2 verse 17: “We are not like many, *peddling* the word of God.” In the opening verses of chapter 3, he claims that Christ Himself has written him a letter of commendation certifying his ministry, which is the transformed lives of the Corinthians themselves. And then, after asking who is qualified for such a ministry—to march alongside Christ in conquest over sin and death, to be the instrument of the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ in every place, to speak the message of the Gospel as if he were the very mouth of God Himself—he says that *he* has been made adequate for such a ministry!

And as Paul makes all these extremely bold claims, he anticipates the objections. “Paul, where do you get off talking like this? Calling people peddlers, claiming to be always led in triumph and claiming adequacy for yourself!” And as he speaks about his trials—afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake—he anticipates the incredulous questioning: “Paul, why do you keep getting back up for more?”

And he’s concerned to answer this in 2 Corinthians. You see it in a number of places. He says in chapter 3 verse 12: “Therefore . . . we use great boldness in our speech.” In chapter 4 verse 1: “Therefore . . . we do not lose heart.” Verse 13: “Therefore we also *speak*.” Verse 16: “Therefore we do not lose heart.” Chapter 5 verse 6: “Therefore, being always of good courage.” Verse 11: “Therefore . . . we persuade men.” Verse 20: “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ.” You see? He is at pains to explain why he goes on speaking boldly, why he doesn’t lose heart, how he can continue to be of good courage even in the midst of all of the hostility he’s facing. And the answer to those questions comes in our passage for this morning. All of those “therefores” point back to the argument that Paul makes in 2 Corinthians 3 verses 7 to 11. Let’s read that text together:

“But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, ⁸how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? ⁹For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. ¹⁰For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. ¹¹For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.”

The answer that Paul gives for why he can continue to be so bold in his claims for the Gospel—why he can face all the hostility and persecution and opposition from the world and keep getting back up for more—is that he has been entrusted with a *glorious* ministry. Notice how many times Paul uses that word “glory” in this brief paragraph. This passage is absolutely shot through with the language of glory! In these five short verses, Paul uses the word “glory” ten times!

You see, the sheer glory of the ministry of the New Covenant—the sheer glory of the Good News of forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in Christ—the glory of that ministry is

sufficient to sustain the heart of the Apostle Paul through the most intense suffering for the sake of the Gospel. The glory of that ministry is sufficient to fuel all of his boldness, all of his fearlessness, all of his resolve to continue to go on proclaiming the message of the Gospel even in the face of severe opposition.

So in keeping with what I've outlined as the theme of 2 Corinthians, we ask the question: How can we be strengthened for joyful, enduring ministry even in the midst of affliction? What *is* the believer's motivation for evangelism, as we minister in a society as hostile to the Gospel as ours? Answer: *glory*. The glory of the Gospel message—that a Holy God declares guilty sinners righteous on the basis of the righteousness of His own Son, which He grants to them freely, through faith alone—the glory of the Gospel message that transforms hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, and turns haters of God into delightful, willing slaves of God—that Gospel is *glorious*.

It's so important for you to notice that, right at the outset. Scripture expects you to be motivated to faithfulness in Gospel proclamation by *glory*. When you are tempted to shrink back from your commission in hateful silence, you need to know where to go for strength! It's not by pummeling yourself with *guilt*; it's by enticing yourself with *glory*. And my aim this morning is to set that glory before the eyes of your heart, to strengthen you for joyful, enduring ministry in the midst of affliction.

Now, another introductory comment is in order, because of the specific way that Paul argues for the glory of New Covenant ministry. Paul doesn't just list out all the things that are amazing about the Gospel, though he certainly could have done that. He argues for the glory of New Covenant ministry by setting it in stark contrast to the ministry of the Old Covenant.

And he does this because the false apostles are Judaizers. The “other Jesus” and “different gospel” that they were preaching was the message that faith in Christ was not enough to be a true Christian, but that you also had to keep the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant in order to be saved. Because of that, beginning in chapter 3 verse 6, and then continuing throughout the rest of the chapter, Paul contrasts the law and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus. His great burden is to give an account for his boldness in ministry. But as a master theologian, he does that while also undermining the false apostles' teaching, and demonstrating how the ministry of the *New* Covenant is vastly superior to the ministry of the Old Covenant.

And so in our passage this morning, Paul showcases the glory of the New Covenant by contrasting it with the Mosaic Covenant. And specifically, he sets up **three contrasts** between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, and argues from the lesser to the greater. And we'll take those **three contrasts** and make them the structure of our outline this morning.

So we're going to look at **three contrasts** between the Old and New Covenants that display the surpassing glory of Gospel ministry. And my prayer is that as we behold the glory of New Covenant ministry, displayed by the inspired pen of the Apostle Paul, that you, as ministers of the New Covenant, would be stirred up and sufficiently motivated to proclaim this glorious Gospel to a society that desperately needs to hear it.

I. Death vs. Spirit: The New Covenant Brings Spiritual Life (vv. 7–8)

Let's look at that **first contrast**. Expounding on his final comment in verse 6, in which he says, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life," Paul identifies the Mosaic Covenant as "the ministry of **death**," and he calls the New Covenant "the ministry of the **Spirit**." Look with me at verses 7 and 8: "But if the ministry of *death*, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, ⁸how will the ministry of the *Spirit* fail to be even more with glory?"

Ministry of Death

Now, there are a number of observations to make through this first statement of Paul's argument. The first is that the Mosaic Covenant was a **ministry of death**. Now, that's quite a startling statement in and of itself, but it's *especially* startling for a Judaizer to read. There was a sense in which the promise of *life* attended the Law of Moses. In Leviticus 18:5, God says, "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may *live* if he does them." In Deuteronomy 32:47, Moses tells Israel that the covenant law which he declared to them on that day was "not an idle word for you; indeed," he says, "it is your *life*. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land." Even Paul, in Romans 7:10, speaks of the law as "the commandment which was to result in life."

And yet at the same time, the law itself testified that it was a ministry characterized by and dealing in **death**. At Mount Sinai, at the very beginning when the law was being revealed to Israel, God threatened with death those who came too close to the mountain. Exodus 19:12 says, "You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.'" Right at the outset, this law was death-dealing! Besides this, there were multitudes of transgressions for which the prescribed penalty was death: from kidnapping (Exod 22:16) to cursing one's parents (Exod 22:17); from bestiality (Exod 22:19) to profaning the Sabbath (Exod 31:14–15). And just as sure as the promise of blessing and life attended those who kept the law, the threat of cursing and death attended those who failed to keep it. Deuteronomy 27:26 says, "Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them." Deuteronomy 30:17–18 threatens, "But if your heart turns away and you will not obey,

but you are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely *perish*.”

The law defined and declared the perfect standard of God’s holiness. It informed God’s people of their duty as they sought to live in covenant with Him. And indeed, if a man were to keep the law, he would have lived *by* it, as Leviticus 18:5 promised. But there was the problem: man, in the natural state of his fallenness, has a heart of stone! Because we are sinful to our very core, we can’t keep the law perfectly! No one can! Even though it is holy and righteous and good, as Paul says in Romans 7, and even though the promise of life attends obedience, we are sinful! And so Galatians 3:10 says, “For as many as are *of* the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them.’” James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.” And so the Law kills, because when it is met with sinful human nature that fails to meet its standard of perfection, it pronounces upon us a sentence of death.

And not only does the law demonstrate how far short of God’s holiness we fall, it also stirs up the sinful desires in us. Paul says this very thing in Romans 7:7. He says, “I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind.”

And anyone who has ever been around children understands this. A friend invites your family to their home for dinner. You happily accept the invitation and arrive punctually. You walk through the door, and their house is just decorated beautifully! But your first thought is, “Please Lord, send the restraining mercy of the Holy Spirit so that my three year-old does not destroy this beautiful home!” And you’re smart, so you figure you’re going to try to get ahead of this thing, so you sit your child down and explain, “Son, this is not our house and these are not our things. We’re not going to touch the TV, OK?” And immediately, what happens? The kid turns and stares long and hard at the TV. And he lets two or three minutes pass just to give you a chance to forget about your instruction to him. And then he walks over to the TV. “Son...” And he looks at you, and he looks at the TV. And he looks back at you and smiles. And you can tell he’s wrestling with the desire to touch that TV when he knows he’s not supposed to. And you know what? There are 50 other things in that house that he’s not supposed to touch. But do you know why he’s wrestling with touching the TV? Because you told him not to. Because the commandment not to touch the TV produced in him desires of every kind to touch the TV. Because the natural, sinful human heart is only stirred up to more sinning when it is met with the law.

And so back in Romans 7:9, Paul writes, “but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I **died**; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in **death** for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it **killed** me.” 1 Corinthians 15:56 says it plainly: “the power of sin is the law.”

You see, the law, Paul says, was merely letters engraved on stones. The Old Covenant dealt merely in externals. It could only ever inform us of our duty, arouse the sinful passions, and show us how far short we have fallen of God’s glory. It could never change our sinful hearts. It could never provide the power for obedience. And so, it was a **ministry of death**.

Came with Glory

But! Paul says that this ministry of *death* nevertheless “came with *glory*.” You see, even though Paul is so bold as to call the law a ministry of death, he is at pains, in this passage as well in Romans 7, to assure us that he is not disparaging the law. That the law was an instrument of death is no fault of its own, but only the fault of the sin which is resident in us. Again, Romans 7:12, “the Law is . . . holy and righteous and good.” And that is, of course, because as God’s own Word—the revelation of His own mind—the law reflected the very character of God Himself.

It was appropriate, therefore, for the ministry of the Old Covenant—both in its inauguration and in its later administration—to have been attended with glory. In Exodus 19, as Moses was going up to Mount Sinai to receive the law, verse 16 says there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain. In verse 18 it says, “Mount Sinai was all in smoke because Yahweh descended upon it in fire . . . and the whole mountain quaked violently.” As Moses delivered to Israel the stone tablets of the covenant law, Exodus 24:16 says, “The glory of Yahweh rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. . . . And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of Yahweh was like a consuming fire on the mountain top.” And of course we remember the *shekinah* glory of God filling the Tabernacle as God takes up residence with His people; and we remember the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire that guided Israel through the wilderness.

But there was one particular illustration of the glory of the Old Covenant that Paul draws attention to here in 2 Corinthians 3. He speaks of the ministry of death coming with glory such that “the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face.” And here he’s referring to an incident recorded for us in Exodus 34. Turn there with me. Now, by this time, Israel has already broken the covenant that, in chapter 24, they solemnly promised to obey in its entirety. They’ve committed idolatry with the golden calf, and Moses has symbolically shattered the tablets upon which the covenant law was written. Moses castigates the people for their wickedness, and then goes back up onto Sinai to intercede for the people before Yahweh, and to receive the revelation of the law once more on new tablets.

Then, Moses comes down from Sinai and rejoins the people. And we pick it up in verse 29. “It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses’ hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him.³⁰ So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.³¹ Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them.³² Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that Yahweh had spoken to him on Mount Sinai.³³ When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.³⁴ But whenever Moses went in before Yahweh to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded,³⁵ the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.”

From the sheer reality of being in the glorious, holy presence of God Himself, Moses’ own face reflected the radiance of God’s glory. And that glory was so radiant, so brilliant, so resplendent, that it was like looking into the sun in its full strength. And as you can imagine, when the Israelites saw this glory reflected in the face of Moses, they were terrified! They remembered the thunder and lightning and smoke from Sinai—the threats of death for sinful men who get too close to the white-hot holiness of the glory of God. But Moses called them to himself, and apparently explained that seeing this mediated glory wouldn’t be hazardous to them. Then, with his face still shining, he spoke the words of the law to them. And after he was finished, he put a veil over his face to conceal the glory of God from the people. The only time Moses’ face was unveiled was when he was receiving revelation from Yahweh, and when he was delivering that revelation to the people.

The Ministry of the Spirit

Now *that* is glorious! And Paul’s point is: if that kind of amazing glory attended the **ministry of death**, how much more glorious must the **ministry of the Spirit** of *life* be! If the law could only ever inform us of our duty, but could never change our hearts so as to give us the power to obey, and it was so glorious, then the Gospel—the ministry of the New Covenant—which causes the life-giving Holy Spirit of God to dwell in us must be exceedingly more glorious!

Note that the way in which the Old Covenant was characterized by *death*, Paul here characterizes the New Covenant by the *Spirit*. And that contrast between “death” and “Spirit” works because of how synonymous the Holy Spirit was with *life* itself. In Romans 8:2 He is called “the Spirit of life.” In John 6:63, Jesus Himself says, “It is the Spirit who gives life.” In the passage just before ours, 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul says, “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

And the promise of this life-giving Holy Spirit was the distinctive promise of the New Covenant. The New Covenant is the ministry of Spirit-wrought regeneration. In that wonderful picture of New-Covenant regeneration of the Valley of the Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37, God Himself breathes the Spirit of life into the dry bones, and that which was dead miraculously comes to life. And so in Ezekiel 37:14 God promises, “I will put My *Spirit* within you and you will come to *life*.” Unlike the law which kills us by confronting our sinful hearts of stone with the holy commands of God, the **ministry of the Spirit** gives us a new heart, and writes the law on our hearts—internally. This is that great New-Covenant promise in Ezekiel 36, verses 26 and 27, where God promises, “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

Now, under the New Covenant—under **the ministry of the Spirit**—, God’s commands are not merely pressure from without—only informing you of the duty which is impossible for you to do—but now is power from within. By the power of the **Spirit** working in your heart, you are empowered to live a life of joyful obedience to God, with eagerness and gladness! One writer put it this way: he said, “The distinguishing feature of [the New Covenant in Christ Jesus] is that for every *precept* there is *power* and for every *statute* there is *strength* and for the otherwise impossible task of saying ‘yes’ to God’s commands there is the indwelling presence of the *Holy Spirit*” (Storms, 86). *That* ministry—that takes sinners who love their sin and so totally changes their hearts so that their affections are renewed, to where they love Jesus and love righteousness—surely *that* ministry will be more glorious than a ministry of death!

GraceLife, are you motivated to preach the glories of that Gospel, no matter what opposition you get from this corrupt culture? Are you tasting the strength that comes from the glory of the New Covenant, of which Christ has made you ministers?

II. Condemnation vs. Righteousness: The New Covenant Provides Saving Righteousness (vv. 9–10)

Paul extols the glory of the New Covenant by means of a **second contrast**. The Old Covenant brought **condemnation**, whereas the New Covenant **provides saving righteousness**. Look with me at verse 9: “For if the ministry of **condemnation** has glory, much more does the ministry of **righteousness** abound in glory.”

Now this is Paul making the same point as the previous, but just from a different angle. The Old Covenant was a ministry of death precisely because it was a ministry of **condemnation**. Condemnation is the verdict, and death is the sentence. In the same way, the New Covenant is a

ministry of the Spirit of life precisely because it **provides saving righteousness**. It is upon the ground of that saving righteousness that the verdict, “Justified!” is passed in the courtroom of heaven. And thus being declared **righteous**, on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Christ, the sinner is rewarded is eternal life.

And I want to take a step back for a moment and underscore this: the key theme with respect to the Gospel and evangelism is **righteousness**. The difference between an eternity in heaven and an eternity in hell is the matter of **righteousness**. We need to understand this, and it needs to affect our understanding of the Gospel and especially our evangelism. The reason people are condemned to eternal spiritual death is because they are without the **righteousness** that a perfectly holy God requires for fellowship with Him. And the only reason sinners are ever reconciled to God in heaven is because they have been graciously granted a **righteousness** that is suitable to that perfectly holy God. That’s why in Romans 1:16–17—that key thesis statement to the Book of Romans—that’s why Paul says the Gospel is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. “Because,” verse 17, “in [the Gospel] the **righteousness** of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the **righteous** man shall live by faith.’” 2 Corinthians 5:21: “The Father made Christ who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the **righteousness** of God in Him.”

And Paul is saying—both here and elsewhere—that the **righteousness** God requires for salvation could never have been bestowed by the law. Romans 3:20: “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified”—that is, no one will be *declared righteous*—“for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now,” verse 21, “apart from the Law the **righteousness** of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe.” Galatians 2:21: Paul says “if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.” And then over to Galatians 3:21: “For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.” What’s the implication? That the law was not able to impart righteousness. The law was not ever, nor is it now, able to save anyone! It could only ever bring the knowledge of sin, show us the standard, and prove to us that we don’t have the righteousness that God requires in ourselves. That’s what Paul goes on saying. Galatians 3:22: “But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise”—that is, the New Covenant promise—“by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” Verse 24: “Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified”—so that we may be declared **righteous**—“by faith” in *Christ’s* works, and not by the doing of our own works.

And so if you sit here today, hoping and believing God will save you because you were baptized, or because you regularly participate in some ritualistic ceremony like a mass, or because you perform some set of religious duties—I tell you: you are without the saving righteousness of God here this morning! If you sit here today, hoping and believing God will save you because you’re

a pretty good person, because you try to live a good life, because you don't hurt anybody—I tell you: you are without the saving righteousness of God here this morning! You are seeking to be justified—to be declared **righteous**—by a ministry that can only bring **condemnation**! Friend, you need to repent of conceiving yourself as more righteous than you are, you need to repent of conceiving of God as less holy as He is, and you need to be bowed in despair before the unattainable standard law of God! And you need to look to the only One who ever fulfilled that law perfectly—the Lord Jesus Christ—who also paid the penalty for the sins of His people when He died on the cross, and you need to trust in *His* lawkeeping—in *His* righteousness—to get you to heaven.

You see the Gospel of the New Covenant **provides the saving righteousness** that the law never could! And to get back to Paul's point: if the ministry which only brought **condemnation** was so glorious, surely the ministry which brings **righteousness** is vastly superior in glory! Charles Hodge wrote, "How can that which only makes us know that we are sinful and condemned, be compared with that which delivers us from sin and condemnation? . . . As much better therefore as justification is than condemnation to eternal death, so much better is the gospel than the law" (435, 437). Indeed, Paul says in verse 9, "if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness *abound* in glory."

In fact, verse 10, "what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it." The New Covenant is so tremendously more glorious than the Old Covenant that, even though the Old Covenant was glorious—unspeakably glorious! thunder and lightning and smoke and fire and "glowing-face" *glorious*—when you compare that glory to the New Covenant it's like it's not glorious at all.

Imagine being out in the wilderness on a stormy night. You're without any flashlight, and the clouds have hidden the light of the moon and stars that might have guided you along your way. And you can't see three inches in front of you. You are entirely lost and don't even know how to take the first step to be found. But then, after hours of wandering, the rain lets up, the clouds begin to divide, and you see the moon and the stars. And there's hope! Light! You can begin to make your way home! To a person wandering in the dark, the guiding light of the moon and the stars is glorious! Oh, but if you can make it till morning, the surpassing glory of the sun outshines all the glory of the moon and stars. The moon and stars are glorious! They're not just bright; they shine their light over the entire earth! They are guiding lights for those who are lost in the darkness. But when the sun comes up, the moon and the stars don't go away! They're still shining in the heavens! But the exceeding brilliance of the sun renders those glorious luminaries as nothing in the light of its own brilliance!

Paul says, That's what the New Covenant did to the Old. The ministry of **condemnation** was *glorious*! The Israelites could behold *the glory of God Himself* reflected on the face of Moses!

But Moses couldn't justify his people. Moses was not the mediator of a ministry of righteousness. Oh, but the Lord Jesus Christ, friends, He *can* justify *His* people! Christ "has obtained a more *excellent* ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a *better* covenant, which has been enacted on *better* promises," Hebrews 8:6. And that covenant is the New Covenant—the ministry of **righteousness**.

III. Fading vs. Eternal: The New Covenant Remains eternally (v. 11)

Finally, we just have a few moments to consider the **final contrast** that Paul makes in this passage to showcase the glory of the New Covenant. And that is that the Old Covenant was **fading** and **temporary**, while the New Covenant **remains eternally**. Look at verse 11: "For if that which *fades away* was with glory, much more that which *remains* is in glory."

Now we have already established this truth in the texts we've turned to in the previous two points. The law was never designed to be God's final word. The law was not the be-all and end-all of God's revelation. It was not—contrary to the teaching of the Jews and Judaizers of Paul's day, *and* to the Jews and Judaizers of *our* day—the law was not an end in itself. It could not and cannot bring salvation. Again, Galatians 3: a law has not been given which was able to impart life. The law only acted as a tutor—as a schoolmaster—to lead us to Christ. Galatians 3:23 says that we were *kept in custody* under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. We were in the custody of the law; it was our guardian while we were not of legal age. But, verse 25, "But now that faith has come,"—now that the New Covenant has come—"we are no longer under a tutor." So you see, the law, from the very beginning, was temporary, impermanent.

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the ministry of the *New Covenant*—*that* remains forever. Paul calls it "that which remains" in verse 11. That which *endures*, that which *abides* forever. The New Covenant was not made to give way to or be superseded by a greater ministry after itself. The New Covenant promises of regeneration, the removal of the heart of stone and giving of a heart of flesh, the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the soul, the permanent forgiveness of sins never again to be held to our charge—these are the promises whose fulfillment is the consummation of the ages! These present blessings, experienced by participation in the New Covenant, signal to us that we are those, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:11, "upon whom the ends of the ages have come." These New Covenant days, these are the *last* days. There can be no new, intervening mystery age. There can be no new revelation given. The Gospel will never be superseded, for it is an *eternal Gospel*, Revelation 14:6! The New Covenant will never fade away, for it is the *eternal covenant*, Hebrews 13:20! Our salvation will never be outmoded, for it is *eternal salvation*, Hebrews 5:9!

If I can put it this way: the law came with an expiration date. And that was even illustrated by the very scene that Paul chooses to demonstrate the law's glory. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:7, the ministry of the Old Covenant was so glorious that "the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, *fading as it was*." You see, the glory of the law revealed in the face of Moses was glorious. But even that glory was limited. It was restricted to one person: to Moses only. And even in that restriction, it wasn't available for the people to behold at all times; Moses continuously veiled his face to cut off the people's access to God's glory. But, 2 Corinthians 3:13, we, the New Covenant people of God, "are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the Sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away." No, verse 18: "But we *all*"—all of us, every one of us who is a member of the New Covenant—"we all, with *unveiled* face, are beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." The glory of the law revealed in the face of Moses is no match for the glory of God revealed in the face of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4:6)!

And so Charles Hodge asks, "What was a bright cloud overhanging the cherubim, to the light of God's presence filling the soul?" (436). That's an amazing thought! I happen to think that the glory cloud over the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies was absolutely magnificent! And it was! But Paul is telling us that those glorious scenes of smoke and lightning on Mount Sinai, of the *Shekinah* glory filling the temple, of the fire in the wilderness have absolutely no glory compared to what you and I experience if we are in Christ here this morning! Not just a visible manifestation of the glory of God, but *God Himself dwelling in us*! opening the eyes of our souls to behold the glory of God shining in the face of Christ! That is infinitely greater glory than anything Israel experienced under the Old Covenant!

Conclusion

Oh, how glorious is this New Covenant ministry to which we have been commissioned!

And what is the conclusion? Look at verse 12: "Therefore, having such a hope, we use *great* boldness in our speech." Dear friends, the word of application is what I mentioned at the beginning. You and I—each and every one of us—has been sent by Christ into a depraved, hostile, dying, unbelieving world. We have been made *ministers* of this great New Covenant, of this Gospel of forgiveness of sins—freely, apart from works—through repentance and faith in Christ.

I know it can get discouraging. I know it's easy to lament over the corrupt state of our country. But we can never retreat. We can never lose heart. We must go on speaking this Gospel—not of moral and behavioral reform, not a new list of do's and don'ts, not a ministry of *death*. But the Gospel of *regeneration*—of *heart transformation* by the Holy Spirit of God, of desires changed and affections renewed! And in the times when you grow weary of the godlessness of this

generation, in the times when you are tempted to cower before the wrath of a hateful, intolerant, hostile society, you summon the *boldness* to go on preaching that Gospel by saturating your eyes with the glory of the New Covenant.