

Message #9

II Corinthians 3:4-11

There is no doubt that the one thing that messes up peoples lives and minds the most is religion. Everywhere you turn there is some religion or some denomination that is telling people they have figured out the real way to live and be right with God. They form their system of beliefs and rules and tell people that if they follow them, everything will turn out okay.

If you were to ask most religious people today if they can be saved by keeping the O.T. Law or by keeping the Ten Commandments or by trying to live up to the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, most would probably say “yes.” Of course, we know God would say “no.”

The vast majority of people in this world think they can earn salvation by trying to be the best they can or by trying to be as good as everyone else. The truth is most people are not willing to admit that in order for them to go to heaven, they need someone else’s righteousness.

That is why a man like the Apostle Paul becomes such a threat to the world of religion. The Apostle Paul went from city to city and said just the opposite of what every religion said. The Apostle Paul was a minister of pure grace. That is what he preached and that is what he lived. He taught that faith alone in Jesus Christ would reconcile a person to God (II Cor. 5:18-19). That message was foreign to a religious world that featured works.

Now Paul’s biggest antagonists were Judaizers who tried to mix O.T. Law into salvation and sanctification. They told people that in order to really be right with God they had to keep the O.T. commandments. These men carried credential letters which they claimed proved they were telling the truth. So Paul combats that here and says “no way.” What he says is this:

NO ONE CAN HAVE ANY LIFE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH THE O.T. LAW, BUT LIFE WITH GOD COMES ONLY THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, WHICH GIVES THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

Paul is fighting for grace in a religious world given to works and law. Paul is fighting for sound doctrine and sound theology in this church of Corinth. As near as I can determine, there are three main theological points Paul makes here:

THEOLOGICAL POINT #1 – Any confidence we have toward God is through Christ.
3:4-6

Paul says “I don’t have an impressive group of letters to offer you.” “I don’t have an impressive list of credentials.” In fact, any confidence I have is through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul says anything and everything we have in our relationship with God is “through the Christ” (διὰ του χριστου). In other words, the only way we have anything at all with God is through a relationship with the one and only Jesus Christ. You have nothing with God without Him. Jesus Christ is the specific, only way to have any connection to God in any way.

Paul says we do not consider ourselves adequate for anything in regard to God except through Jesus Christ. This great truth immediately resolves and settles the Lordship salvation controversy. Proponents of Lordship salvation say look at yourself to see if you have adequate works and Paul says I don't ever consider myself adequate.

The word "adequate" (ικανος) is a particular Greek word that speaks of being at a sufficient, competent, fit level of strength and ability (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 215). It means to be at a sufficient level in number, quantity, size.

Now there are two realities Paul admits about being adequate or competent or fit in our relationship with God:

(Reality #1) - We do not consider anything adequate in ourselves for any relationship with God. **3:5a**

Now this gets interesting. The word "consider" (λογιζομαι) is the word that means to make a mental calculation. It means to mentally make a judgment (*Ibid.*, p. 270). This is the same word that has to do with judicial justification.

Paul says we do not make a mental calculation at all that we are competent or fit in any way in and of ourselves to have any connection and relationship with God. In fact, Paul said that he was the "least of the apostles" (I Cor. 5:9) and the "worst of sinners" (I Tim. 1:15). Paul says I do not consider one thing in me to be adequate in any way when it comes to God.

(Reality #2) - We do consider that our adequacy is from God. **3:5b-6**

Paul says the mental calculation we make is that any competency or ability for anything with God is "from God" or literally "out of the God" (εκ του θεου).

Kent Hughes said the only man who can know and prove the total sufficiency of God's grace is one who "is humbly aware of his complete weakness" (*II Corinthians*, p. 69).

Now Paul specifically talks about this adequacy by bringing out certain facts:

Fact #1 - God has made us adequate. **3:6a**

The verb "made" (ικανωω) is aorist which means at one moment of time, the moment one believes on Jesus Christ, God makes one and renders one fit for a relationship with Him (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 215). The Law does not make us fit for a relationship with Him; Jesus Christ does.

Fact #2 - God has made us servants of a new covenant. **3:6b**

The word "servant" (δικονος) or "ministry" (διακονια) occurs 5 times in **verses 6-11**.

This is the word from which we get our English word “deacon.” Paul says we have been made by God to be ministers of a new covenant ministry, which is grace.

There are two main adjectives in Greek that may be translated “new.” One means new in time (νέος) and the other means new in kind (καινός). For example, you could purchase a new car that would be new to you in time, but not necessarily brand new, in which case you would use the first adjective. Or you could purchase a new car that is a brand new quality and kind of car in which case you would use the second adjective.

Now the adjective “new” (καινός) here is that which refers to new in quality and kind (*Ibid.*, p. 226). This Age of Grace preached by Paul is a brand new quality and kind of age. Having a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit the moment you believe is brand new in the program of God. God has made a brand new covenant with sinners in that faith in Christ will save them and make them acceptable to Him. This text refutes Covenant Theology, which says the grace covenant started in Genesis. No, it didn't.

Paul's job was to be a minister of this new covenant of grace. In other words, his job was to be servant attendant who traveled around teaching that we are no longer under the Law, but that we now have a living, new relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. We have been made ministers of a new covenant.

There are two new covenant points Paul brings out here:

New Covenant Point #1 - The new covenant is not based on the letter of the Law. 3:6c

At the time Paul was ministering, the Old Testament was in existence, but the New Testament wasn't. So Paul went from place to place communicating New Testament grace truth. The actual process of getting all of the books of the Bible in the Bible was a long process. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 215) and Origen (A.D. 250) were the first to distinguish between “old” and “new” testament writings. Most people were steeped in O.T. Law and ritual religion so Paul comes along and says that will never make one right with God.

In fact, Paul says the Law kills. No vital relationship with God will ever come through the O.T. Law. This new covenant is not an external, written code covenant. If you try to base your relationship with God on the externals of the O.T. Law, you will kill your spiritual life and you will kill those around you. The O.T. Law is a mirror, not a bar of soap. In other words, the purpose of the Law is to show that we are dirty; not to clean us up.

S. Lewis Johnson said he was in seminary with a guy who felt you must live life by the O.T. Law and Dr. Johnson said he kept telling this man for three years that he was wrong and that his theology was way off base. In their senior year, they both were taking a Greek exegetical class on the book of Romans. Dr. Johnson said halfway through the semester this man came to him and said “Lewis, I've discovered we're not under the Law.” Dr. Johnson said how did you

finally figure that out? The man said well we had to write a commentary on the first 8 chapters and I got to 6:14 and it says we are not under law but under grace.

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Then I got to chapter 7 and Paul says we are not under law and specifically mentions one of the commandments, "Thou shalt not covet." He said it dawned on me that we are not under any of the O.T. Law including the Ten Commandments.

That was Paul's grace ministry and message. He was given the assignment to go from place to place and preach a non-letter of the law and non-Mosaic Gospel.

New Covenant Point #2 - The new covenant is based on the life of the Spirit . **3:6d**

So our life sufficiency is in the fact that there is a new covenant, not the O.T. Law and there is the indwelling Holy Spirit. The life relationship that we have with God is based on these two realities.

In other words, having eternal life and having a life relationship with God is not based on our works or our dedication to the Law; it is based on the reality that we have believed on Jesus Christ and have God's life-giving Spirit in us.

Now to further drive home his point, Paul brings us to his second theological point:

THEOLOGICAL POINT #2 – The O.T. Law had a fading glory to it. **3:7**

We need to remember that at one time, the Apostle Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees and was totally dedicated to the O.T. Law to the point that he would track down Christians who believed in grace. But God had worked in his heart and mind and he saw the O.T. Law differently. There is a lot of doctrine to learn in these verses about the O.T. Law. There are six law realities:

(Law Reality #1) - The O.T. Law is a ministry of death . **3:7a**

Paul starts out with this reality and we had better understand this and get this point. The O.T. Law will condemn you and kill you and show you that you are dead in your relationship with God. John Calvin said the O.T. Law is given to show us that we all have a deadly disease that leaves us with no hope of a cure (*II Corinthians*, p. 178).

The Law shows we are guilty and condemned. The O.T. Law is lethal in that it shows us the reason we will physically die and it shows us we are spiritually dead and it shows us we deserve eternal death.

(Law Reality #2) - The O.T. Law was written on stones . **3:7b**

Now this is important because this takes us back to Exodus when God wrote the O.T. commandments on stone with His own finger (31:18; 34:1ff). The O.T. Law was a literal, written document. By virtue of the fact that it is written on stone means it is not brittle, but firm. You may go back and read it in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. What you will discover, if you are honest, is that the Law will break you because it will show you that you have

not measured up to the Law written on stones. That is what the written law will show us. It will shut our mouths.

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(Law Reality #3) - The O.T. Law was given to Moses . **3:7c**

The O.T. Law came by Moses, but the developing of N.T. grace came through Paul. John was very clear to point out that the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Now by Paul saying this, he is implying that the condemnatory Law was not given to him; the doctrine of life-giving grace was given to Him.

(Law Reality #4) - The O.T. Law was glorious . **3:7d**

Since the O.T. Law comes from God, it must be glorious. The O.T. Law had a glorious entrance into the world. Moses went up on the mountain and he came down with tablets and his face shined with the glory of God. Think about that. The people could not gaze on the face of Moses, but then think they can gaze on the O.T. Law that is far more glorious than Moses and be right with God. The O.T. Law will kill you. John Calvin said it takes real arrogance to directly look at the Law and think you have measured up to the righteousness of God (*Ibid.*, p. 179). **The problem was not with the glory of the Law; the problem was with the sinfulness of the people.**

(Law Reality #5) - The O.T. Law is a ministry of condemnation . **3:9a**

The O.T. Law demands that people meet all of God's standards and give Him His due. It is the duty of people to hear the Law and obey it, every bit of it. The problem is no person and no nation has ever completely obeyed everything. Israel did not get this point and still does not get this point and neither do most people in this world. The Law shows we are condemned.

When Moses gave Israel the commandments of God he said, "I have set before you today life and death" (Deut. 30:15). Paul would later say that very law turned out to be a death sentence for Paul (Rom. 7:10).

When you go before some people, they think you are great. When you appear before certain people they think you are a wonderful person, just fine. But when you appear before the Law of God we are all guilty and stand condemned.

(Law Reality #6) - The O.T. Law has faded away. **3:11a**

The word "fade" (*καταργεω*) is one that means the Law is no longer active, no longer valid. It has been abolished (Smith, p. 238). The passive voice means God has abolished the Law system. We had nothing to do with the action at all. Do you grasp this point? The Law has faded and is gone. In other words, no one can ever be right with God by keeping the Law because the Law system has been replaced by God. Paul said "For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4).

THEOLOGICAL POINT #3 – The N.T. Spirit of N.T. grace has surpassing glory to the O.T. Law. **3:8-11**

There are five new grace covenant realities to see here:

(New Covenant Reality #1) - The New Grace Covenant is a Covenant of life. **3:6**

Just as the Law is a covenant of death, so the new covenant is one of life.

(New Covenant Reality #2) - The New Grace Covenant is more glorious than the Old Law. **3:8**

If you remain looking at the Law you are cursed (Gal. 3:10). But if you look one time to Jesus Christ you are forever saved (Gal. 3:13). What system is more glorious—law or grace?

(New Covenant Reality #3) - The New Grace Covenant is a ministry of righteousness. **3:9**

The righteousness of God is that righteousness of God that God's righteousness requires Him to have and require. Because He is God, He must have a righteousness that satisfies Him. The problem with us is we do not have righteousness at that level. We do not have a righteousness that could ever satisfy God. So how do we get it? We must gain righteousness from another. In fact, Paul would say that this righteousness of God comes by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-22).

This is an amazing testimony because Paul had, at one time, been a Pharisee of Pharisees. Yet, he came to realize he needed a righteousness he did not have to be right with God. Faith in Jesus Christ is the new covenant that gives that righteousness.

(New Covenant Reality #4) - The New Grace Covenant has surpassing glory. **3:10**

The new grace covenant has surpassed the Law. In fact, John Calvin said that when you compare the O.T. Law to grace it has no glory because grace shines forth the Gospel which manifests the glory of Jesus Christ (*Ibid.*, p. 179).

(New Covenant Reality #5) - The New Grace Covenant has remaining glory. **3:11**

The new covenant is not death-dealing, it is life-giving. The new covenant is not simply glorious, it is exceedingly glorious. The new covenant is permanent, not temporary.

Don't miss this point; the Law faded, grace will never fade. Jesus Christ has come into this world and offers salvation to any sinner who will believe on Him. That grace message will never disappear and if you will believe on Him, you will be saved forever.