

**The Greater Glory of Paul's Ministry**

**2 Corinthians 3:9-11**

**Part 2**

The Mosaic Law is the Law given by God to Israel through Moses and consists of the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

So let me ask you a question. Is the Mosaic Law, including “The Ten Commandments,” still binding on us or is it not? Or is only a part of the Law binding upon us? Or is the Mosaic Law not binding upon us in even the smallest way? What is the answer?

The answer to that question is this: the Mosaic Law is not binding upon us at all. We are totally free from all of its demands.

I am not saying that the Law is not instructive, informative or descriptive, nor am I saying that the Law is not profitable for us to study, and neither am I saying that we are no longer under any law at all.

We, as Christians, are under law but we are not under the Mosaic Law, and neither are we therefore under the old covenant. We are under a different law, not written on tablets of stone as they were written under the old covenant but rather we are under the law that is written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit under the new covenant, a covenant that is not only superior to the old, but which is superceded the old thus making it possible for us not to encounter God without fear of destruction and eternal damnation but rather with confidence and the certain hope of glory.

Hopefully all this concerning the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant will become even more clear to us as we return back to our study of **2 Corinthians 3:7-11**.

Paul, in these verses, is seeking to highlight for his readers how their ministry, as servants of the new covenant, was far more glorious than their opponent's ministry, which apparently was rooted not in the new covenant but rather in the old covenant. So how did Paul highlight the greater glory of the new covenant ministry over against the old covenant ministry?

Paul, in order to highlight the greater glory of Paul's ministry of the new covenant in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, provides us with three different comparisons between the new and the old covenants. So, what is the first comparison?

1. The ministry of death compared to the ministry of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:7-8) Paul referred to the Law, “**letters engraved on stones,**” as “**the ministry of death**” in **verse 7**. Paul referred to the Law in this way not because the law was designed to kill, but because it did kill by exposing sin and pronouncing the judgment of death upon it.

But even though the Law was instrumental in bringing about death by exposing sin and pronouncing the judgment of death upon it, we should not make the mistake of thinking that the Law came from God without glory. It did and Paul stated this very clearly in **verse 7** and illustrated his point by reminding his readers how the people of Israel were unable to look at the face of Moses after he had descended from Mount Sinai with the Law because of that glory.

And why did the glory emanating from the face of Moses render them unable to look at his face? It rendered them unable to look at his face, based on **Exodus 32-34**, because of fear. And why were they so fearful? They were fearful because the Law had exposed them as sinners and had condemned them to death and they were well aware that the glory or the visible manifestation of God's presence on the face of Moses could very easily result in their destruction.

So, what did Moses do in order to protect the people of Israel from this very real threat? Moses, in seeking to protect the people of Israel, veiled his face. This veiling of his face is detailed for us in **Exodus 34:29-35** and is alluded to in **2 Corinthians 3:7** by the phrase, “**fading as it was.**”

The word translated “**fading as it was**” (**KATERGEO**) when it is used by Paul meant, “**to make of no effect**” “**to make powerless.**” In other words, the glory on Moses' face was continually being brought to an end or cut off in regard to its effect by the veil that Moses was continually putting over his face. This veiling, on the part of Moses, should be viewed as an act of mercy on his part toward the people of Israel.

And what was Paul's point in highlighting the glory that came with the Law, or in other words the glory that came with **"the ministry of death"** that exposed sin and pronounced the judgment of death upon it? Paul's point is made clear in the next verse in **2 Corinthians 3:8**. So let me now read this verse for you. **"How will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?"**

So, what was Paul's point in highlighting the glory that came with **"the ministry of death"** in **2 Corinthians 3:7**? It was to contrast that glory with the even greater glory of **"the ministry of the Spirit"** that Paul introduced in **2 Corinthians 3:8**.

And what is **"the ministry of the Spirit?"** The ministry of the Spirit is clearly referring to the new covenant, the covenant that was promised in the Old Testament that would provide the children of Israel with a new heart upon which the Spirit of the living God would write His laws. A covenant that was ratified with the blood of Christ according to **1 Corinthians 11:25** and whose benefits are appropriated by faith in Him as spelled out for us in His gospel. So which covenant has the greater glory?

The new covenant has the greater glory. Paul will now support this by introducing a second comparison in **2 Corinthians 3:9-10** and then a third comparison in **2 Corinthians 3:11**.

My hope for this message as we consider these two additional comparisons is that we might be moved as servants of that covenant to give God praise and to commit ourselves to the faithful proclamation of the gospel of Christ through which the benefits and blessings of the new covenant are received.

We are now ready to continue on in our study and consider the second comparison between the old and new covenants. And what was this second comparison?

2. The ministry of condemnation compared to the ministry of righteousness (2 Corinthians 3:9) Let us now read **2 Corinthians 3:9-10** and consider this second comparison between the old covenant and the new. **"For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory."**

So, what is this second comparison that Paul offers to support his premise in **verses 7-8** that the new covenant has the greater glory? It is a comparison between **“the ministry of condemnation”** and **“the ministry of righteousness.”**

So which of these descriptive phrases describe the old covenant and which of these descriptive phrases describe the new covenant? **“The ministry of condemnation”** describes the old covenant and **“the ministry of righteousness”** describes the new.

So let us, first of all, look at **“the ministry of condemnation”** which describes the old covenant ministry and ask this question: Why did Paul describe the Law, or the ministry of the old covenant, as **“the ministry of condemnation”** in **verse 9** rather than as **“the ministry of death”** as he had in **verse 7**?

Paul wanted his readers to understand that those who had chosen to live under the Law had chosen death because the Law will condemn those who had chosen to live under it.

The old covenant, or in other words the Law, certainly could prepare people for salvation but it is a ministry of condemnation and of death and therefore it could not provide salvation. And this is the point that Paul is seeking to drive home by describing the ministry of the old covenant in these two different but similar ways.

But now let us look at **“the ministry of righteousness”** which describes the new covenant ministry and ask this question: Why did Paul describe the new covenant ministry as **“the ministry of righteousness”** in **verse 9** rather than as **“the ministry of the Spirit”** in **verse 8**?

People choosing to live their lives under the new covenant, which was described by Paul as “the ministry of the Spirit,” would be destroyed if the new covenant could not also be described as “the ministry of righteousness.” Isn't that we learned from **Exodus 32-34**?

The people of Israel, whose sin had been exposed by the Law and had been condemned by the Law, could not expect to escape the judgment of God when His presence became manifested to them on the face of Moses. This is

why Israel was fearful when God manifested His presence on the face of Moses and this is why Moses covered his face.

So let me ask you this question. If Moses had to cover his face so that the people Israel would not come under judgment when subjected to the visible manifestation of God's presence, how are we going to be protected when the Spirit of God gives us a new heart and writes the laws of God upon it? We are protected by the righteousness that is supplied to us through the new covenant.

So, what righteousness does the new covenant supply us that will make it possible for us to enjoy the ministry of the Spirit without being destroyed? The righteousness, supplied to us through the new covenant, that makes it possible for us to enjoy the ministry of the Spirit without being destroyed is the imputed righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 5:21**. **“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”** Christ took our sin and paid the debt of our sin on the cross of Calvary, and when we exercise faith in Him we receive His righteousness.

And how, when we exercise faith, do we receive His righteousness? We receive His righteousness when we, through the baptizing work of the Spirit of God, are placed into the body of Christ according **1 Corinthians 12:13**. And because we have received His righteousness by faith in Him through the baptizing work of the Spirit, the Spirit's work in providing us a new heart and writing the laws of God upon our hearts so that we might walk with and fellowship with God will not destroy us.

So which covenant has the greater glory? The old covenant, which Paul described as “the ministry of death” and of “condemnation” or the new covenant that Paul described as “the ministry of the Spirit” and of “Righteousness?” The answer is obvious. The new covenant has the greater glory, which Paul will once again seek to drive home for us as we continue to read **verse 9**.

**“For if the ministry of condemnation [or in other words, the ministry of the old covenant] has glory, much more does the ministry of**

**righteousness** [or in other words, the ministry of the new covenant] **abound in glory.**”

So once again we see Paul attempting to get his readers attention concerning the greater glory of the new covenant ministry in comparison to the old covenant ministry.

Did the old covenant have a certain glory associated with it? Absolutely! The old covenant described by Paul as the ministry of death and condemnation revealed the holiness and justice of God, but the new covenant described by Paul as the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness not only displayed God as holy and just but also loving, merciful, gracious, and forgiving. So in this sense clearly the new covenant is far more glorious than the old.

And the more glorious nature of the new covenant in comparison to the old has a significant implication that is brought out for us in the third and final comparison.

3. The passing glory of the old covenant compared to the enduring glory of the new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:10-11). Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 3:10-11. “For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. (11) For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.”**

So let me ask you a question. In light of this context, what was Paul referring to when he referred to that which **“had glory?”** When Paul referred to that which “had glory,” he was referring to the old covenant. And what did Paul mean when he said that the old covenant presently “has no glory?”

When Paul said that the old covenant that “had glory” presently has “no glory,” he was saying exactly that. The old covenant dispensation, which was formerly God’s vehicle to display Himself, had come to an end.

So if the old covenant ministry or dispensation is no longer the means by which God is choosing to display Himself, then what is? It is the new covenant ministry.

Once the new covenant ministry arrived, with its primary purpose of granting new life in the Spirit through faith in Christ, the old covenant ministry, whose primary purpose was condemnation, was over.

The manifested glory of God's presence on the face of Moses that he continually brought to an end by the repeated veiling of his face in order to protect the nation of Israel from judgment symbolized the impermanence of the old covenant. This is why in **verse 11** Paul speaks of the old covenant as coming "**with glory**" but the new covenant as coming "**in glory.**"

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 3:11**. "**For if that which fades away** [or in other words, the old covenant] **was with glory** [and it was with glory as manifested on the face of Moses], **much more that which remains** [or in other words, the new covenant] **is in glory.**"

What an incredible comfort to know that the new covenant came not "**with glory**" as was the case with the old covenant when it was accompanied by the visible manifestation of God's presence that was repeatedly veiled by Moses, symbolizing its future passing, but "**in glory**" which spoke of its ongoing and permanent presence making it an everlasting covenant according to **Hebrews 13:20**.

Israel was given the Mosaic Law, and under the old covenant they were required to obey it. But even before Moses descended with the Law, written with the finger of God on tablets of stone, Israel had already broken the Law, a Law that they could never keep, thus making it impossible for them to enjoy communion with God without the fear of judgment and ultimate destruction.

But God promised a new covenant to Israel in **Jeremiah 31:31-31** where His laws would not be written on stone but on human hearts by the Holy Spirit. This covenant was ratified with the blood of Christ when He gave up His life to pay the debt of our sin.

This covenant is not only superior to the old covenant but it made the old covenant in its entirety obsolete.

And how do we appropriate the benefits of this covenant thus making it possible for us to commune with God in this life and the life to come

without fear of judgment but a certain hope of glory? We appropriate the benefits and blessings of the new covenant by exercising faith in Christ and in Christ alone for our salvation, thus embracing Him as our Savior and our Lord and it is this message of hope that we as the servants of the new covenant are to proclaim.

May God glorify Himself through our faithful proclamation of the gospel of Christ as servants of the new covenant.