

The Surpassing Glory of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:12-18)

Covenant: depending on the context, it can refer to an agreement, obligation, mutual commitment, or solemn promise bound by an oath. It can be unilateral (God alone assumes all liabilities) or bilateral (the party that violates the terms will be punished).

- **Adamic Covenant** (bi-lateral): man's responsibility toward God's creation (Gen. 1:26-30), including the positive command not to eat from the tree (Gen. 2:15-17).
- **Noahic Covenant** (unilateral): God will never flood the earth again (Gen. 9).
- **Abrahamic Covenant** (unilateral): through Abram's (Abraham's) seed, he will be a blessing to the nations and will inherit the land (Gen. 12, 15, 17).
- **Mosaic Covenant** (bi-lateral): given to the nation of Israel in the context of redemption of slavery in Egypt and inheritance of the land. In obedience, they would inherit the Promised Land and dwell in safety, yet in disobedience, they will be driven out (Ex. 20:1-5; Deut. 28).
- **Davidic Covenant** (unilateral): David's lineage will last forever (2 Sam. 7:8-16).
- **New Covenant** (unilateral): God promises to write His law on the heart of His people (Jer. 31; Ezek. 11:14-21; 36: 26-27).

1. The Fading Glory of the Old Covenant (v.1-13)

- Paul uses play-on-words concerning "recommendation letters" (v.1-3), "ink" (v.3), "tablets of stone" (v.3), and "tablets of human hearts" (v.3). He contrasts the dead letter of the Old Covenant (Mosaic Law) in the envelope of flesh and sin to the life-giving properties of the Spirit in the New Covenant (v.6).
- Paul argues the temporary nature of the Mosaic Law, not only for justification but sanctification in the envelope of sin and the flesh (Gal. 3:23-25; Rom. 7:5-8:4).
 - Apart from the law, sin lies dead, i.e., unrecognizable (Rom. 7:8). The law gives sin its power (1 Cor. 15:56) and is an instrument of deception (Rom. 7:11). Through the law, there is a curse (Gal. 3:13) and the charging of sin to one's account (5:13). It reveals and defines sin (Rom. 3:20; 5:13; 7:7), increases transgressions, arouses sinful passions that bring condemnation and death (4:15; 7:5, 8-11, 13; 7:19; 2 Cor. 3:6), and unmask the actual color of sin. It demands a standard people cannot keep (Deut. 27:26; Rom. 3:20; Rom. 7:7-11) and perfects nothing (Heb. 7:9).
- The Old Covenant (Mosaic law) was always intended to be temporary, as it was subsidiary (not supplemental) to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gal. 3).
 - Paul reaffirms not only the temporary nature of the covenant but also the outcome of it: "death and condemnation" (v.7, 10).
- Paul informs the reader that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face (Ex. 34:29-35).
 - To "gaze" in Greek is to be single-minded or to understand the intent.
 - The nation could not "understand" Moses because they were hardened and stiff-necked (Isa. 6:9-10; 29:10-12; Jer. 5:21-24; Ezek. 12:2; Mk. 4:10-12; Jn. 12:39-40; Acts 28:25-27). This is due not only to Israel but also because of all mankind in Adam. The problem was not with the law but with their hearts.
- Paul also includes that Moses "put a veil over his face so the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end" (v.12).
 - Did Moses know that the glory of the covenant at Sinai (Mosaic Covenant) had an "expiration date"? Did Moses wear a veil when he was not speaking with the nation about the oracles of God? The Pentateuch is silent.

Ezekiel 36:22-38 (c.f. 11:14-21)

- The immediate context of the Book of Ezekiel is Israel forced into exile because they violated the stipulation of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28).
- YHWH promises to vindicate His name by causing people to walk in His ways.
- He will do a different cleansing (v.25), distinct and unique from the mere external washing for ceremonial cleanliness stipulated by the Mosaic law (Lev. 17:15-16; 22:6; Num. 19:19-21). YHWH likens the nation of Israel to someone who has not only touched dead people but has become dead themselves (Num. 19:18-21).

- They need to be sprinkled and cleansed from the inside (Jn. 3:5). This includes removing the heart of stone (cold, lifeless) that the law is unable to change and replacing it with a heart of flesh (life-giving nature of the Holy Spirit). The Spirit is the impulse that drives and regulates a man's desires/thoughts/conducts and is a sign of the Messianic age (Isa. 42:1; 59:21; Joel 2:28).

Jeremiah 31:31-34:

- The New Covenant does not renew the first (Mosaic) but renders it obsolete (Lk. 22:20; Heb. 8:8-13; 10:15-17). Jesus, along with the writer of Hebrews, affirms that the New Covenant has been inaugurated through the accomplishments of Jesus Christ on the cross (Matt. 26:28; Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8; 9:15 cf. Ex. 24:8). It continues to have implications for the future gathering of ethnic Israel.
- The Spirit is none other than the Holy Spirit (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8; Jn. 14:16-18, 23; 16:7-15). It is a better covenant (Heb. 7:22), better hope (7:19), better promises (8:6), better sacrifice (Heb. 9:23; 12:24), better possession (Heb. 10:34), better country (11:16), better resurrection (11:35), infallible and faultless (8:7), everlasting and eternal (13:20) and a better provision (11:40). It is monergistic and unilateral.

2. The Surpassing Glory of the New Covenant (v.12-18)

- The New Covenant is new in content and ability, not in substance. It includes principles and new positive laws that, in many ways, are identical in essence to the Old Covenant (Mosaic Law) since the Old Covenant essentially reflects natural law; it doesn't define it.
- Paul's hope (v.12) is the absolute certainty of promises and guarantees associated with God's monergistic and unilateral (New) covenant as His Spirit inscribes the transcultural principled law in the believer's hearts (Rom. 8:2-4; 2 Cor. 3:3-6; Gal. 5:16-18, 22-23; 6:2). The new covenant law is not the law of Moses (Jer. 31:31) but instead, in many ways, the law of faith (Rom. 3:27), the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2), the law of liberty (Jas. 2:12) and the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).
- The Old and New cannot be mixed (Matt. 9:17; Mk. 2:21; Lk. 5:36-38). The new commandment of love is based on Christ's love (Jn. 13:34; 1 Jn. 2:7-8; 2 Jn. 1:5). Those who enter the New Covenant are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) who have died to the condemning envelope of the law in the sphere of sin and the flesh (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3; Heb. 10:16).
- In the New Covenant, "batteries are included" to fulfill the law of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who is implanted within the believer. In tandem with progressive revelation through the teaching of Jesus and New Testament apostles, God not only dwells with the new creature but also provides the willingness and ability to love the Lord and obey Him with a willing Spirit (Lev. 19:18, Lk. 10:27).

To this day, a veil remains over unbelieving Israel (v.12-18):

- The Jews rejected the Messiah, relied on the works of the law, and claimed Moses as their mediator (Jn. 5:39-47; Acts 21). Scripture speaks of this veil as due to God (Deut. 29:4; Rom. 11:7-8), Satan (2 Cor. 4:4), and/or the man himself (Heb. 3:8).
- The ministry of the Spirit/walking by the Spirit is one in which people are motivated and enabled by the Spirit to overcome their sinful tendencies and live a life pleasing to God. The law cannot produce willing obedience. According to Romans, those in Adam, under the Old Covenant:
 - are condemned (Rom. 8:1), are enslaved to the law of sin and death (8:2-5), are weak in the flesh (8:3), merit death (8:6), and are hostile to the truth (8:7).
 - Those in whom the Spirit dwells experience no condemnation (8:1), freedom (8:2), the potency of God (8:3), an existence determined by the things of the Spirit (8:4-5), and life and peace (8:6).
- Under the new covenant, a salvation-historical shift has occurred in the ministry of the Old Covenant which was given to the nation of Israel under a theocracy (2 Cor. 3:5-4:6). A New Covenant believer does not belong to the old age (Old Covenant/Mosaic covenant) for he has been delivered from that domain and transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13).