

II Corinthians 3:2-11 "The Glory of the New Covenant"  
(Part 1) February 24, 2019

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to II Corinthians Chapter 3 verse 7.

So we continue our series of studies through this letter that Paul wrote, certainly the most intimate letter that he writes, the most emotional letter that he writes. I don't know what it was about the Corinthian church that so left an impact on Paul, but man, he really cared for these folks. It was a church that was borne from one of the most corrupt and perverse cities in the world, and I guess because of that, Paul saw God move just so amazingly in the hearts of the people.

This letter was prompted by a lot of different things, and we've gone over them over the weeks, but, from a summary standpoint, the church was doing well when Paul left, and somehow as all these other churches were attacked by these false teachers, heretics, who brought in works kind of righteousness. In the first century they are called Judaizers. They were kind of a mixture of Judaism and many other things. But they're typical to what we face today, and that is that people somehow believe somehow that they can work their way to Heaven; that it's all about your works. And so Paul had these men infiltrate this church that he loved. And if that wasn't bad enough, the people that were in the church began to believe some of the things they were saying about Paul and what he was teaching. So, that broke his heart. And I guess that's why you see such emotion in the things that he's written. Plus, Paul came out of that works thing. He knew what it was like to be bound to try to work your way into God's good graces, and it was impossible.

For the early church it was all about ceremony and ritual and record keeping. There are, I should say, keeping of the different feast days and all. But for us it's the same; right? We run into people all the time that are just bound to believe that they can work their way into Heaven. If you say to them, "You going to go to Heaven?" They'll start telling you what they've done.

When the Jerusalem, or actually, when the early church met in Jerusalem in Acts 15, Peter got up and began to speak about how God had saved the Gentiles without really any of these Jewish practices that they would have to engage in first, at least that was required by these Judaizers, and Peter said, "Why should we put God to the test by putting a yoke on the neck of these disciples that we couldn't keep, neither could our Fathers?" Why would we ask them to do something that we couldn't do? It's grace that saves. When Paul wrote to the Galatians in Chapter 5, he said, "Be sure that you stand fast again in the liberty with which Christ has made you free. Don't become entangled again in this yoke of bondage." And so, like I said, for the Jews at the time it was ceremony and circumcision and the new moons and the feast days and the dietary laws, and you can make the list. Even to the point where saying to the Gentiles, you have to be converted to Judaism first before you can go to Jesus.

And Paul just ached over this, because he'd seen just the opposite. The church at Corinth had a lot of challenges. I don't know if you've read I Corinthians, but it's the most messed up church in the Bible, and I think it was mostly messed up because of where it was planted. What state, what happened in Corinth stays in Corinth. And it was a terrible place. I mean, if you go and do a little outline of I Corinthians, you come up with these things: They were having a hard time putting off the old life. They were a congregation that was constantly splitting in part because of quarrels. They were spiritually immature in everything that they did. They tolerated some gross kinds of sin in their fellowship that would make an unbeliever blush. They were arrogant. They aired their dirty laundry in public. They went to court against each other, suing them. They flaunted their sexual liberties. They ate meat that was offered to idols, even though there were folks in the church that were offended by that whole consciousness thing. They turned communion into a pagan holiday. Some people were drunk by the time it was done, engorged; others left hungry and thirsty. They lorded over each other with spiritual gifts. They even began to question whether the resurrection was true. And this was the church. And yet Paul loved these guys. So what they didn't need to hear from these false teachers was, oh, by the way, work it out, rather than, come on in and let God work you out. And that was the difference.

On top of all of those things that here comes these false doctrines, and they are combined with slanderous lies about

Paul and questions about his character and his heart and his message, because they needed to get him out of the way if they were going to introduce their brand of religious foolishness. What was worst for Paul was that he believed they should have known better. They'd been taught well. They had seen God work. It wasn't like this was a surprise to them. And so Paul grieved over them. He ended in Chapter 3 by, or beginning of Chapter 3 by talking about how God has made us usable and how there's a blessing of forgiveness with Him, and how we have triumph in Jesus. But when he gets here to verse 6 and 7 and down through the end of the chapter, he goes after this whole idea of works versus grace. And he talks about the old covenant, the law, if you will; the moral law being the 10 commandments and all that that entails, and then the new covenant, the salvation that God offered through His Son by faith in Him, that He will then accomplish; the salvation that Paul was preaching and the way of life that these others were preaching.

Look, for the next two weeks I'd like to just get to the end of Chapter 3, and I know I'm going to drag you through the basics of Christianity 101. I'm sure everything I say you're going to go, "Yeah, I know that already," but I want you to know it. You should know it. It's a theology class, but you got to know it, because it all comes down to this: How do you get to Heaven? What has God done? It'll change the way you minister to people. It'll change your message to them. It's a unique gospel. What makes you different from every religion in the world is you're willing to claim that God can change a heart, whereas all the religions in the world say if you buckle down, you can change your heart. And it was same thing in the first century. So I want to give you this morning down through verse 11 three things that the new covenant does that the Old Testament, or the old covenant, does not, and then next week, because verse 12 begins with the word "therefore," I want to look at the consequences of believing those things down through verse 18.

So let's start with reading through what we are going to look at this morning. Paul ended up by saying in verse 6 last week, "God has made us sufficient as ministers of this new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; the letter will kill, the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? And if this ministry of condemnation had

glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels it. For if what is passing away is glorious, how much more that which would remain would be even more glorious." That's his comparison between the two.

But he says this, and we'll start with this in verse 6: The new covenant can give you life. Paul last week said in verse 6, God has made me servant, a minister, of this new covenant. But I want you to notice what he says about the old covenant, the law. He says in verse 6 it kills. He says in verse 7 it's a ministry of death. He writes in verse 9 it's a ministry of condemnation. He says in verse 7 and verse 11 it has a glory that is passing away. By contrast, the gospel that we know, the gospel of Jesus, is a work of God's Spirit, verse 6, that gives life; is a ministry of righteousness in verse 9; it can change the way you live and it is a glory that excels and that will remain.

Look, the things that Paul faced and that you and I face if we go out to the world to try to share our faith is the same. It is a misrepresentation in many ways of the law, the law itself. Like these false teachers who'd been teaching that the law was the way of salvation, you should know that the law's purpose was never intended to save you, ever. In fact, it says in Romans Chapter 3 verse 20, "By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." In other words, God gives to us His law, the old covenant, with the express purpose of convincing you and I that we haven't got what it takes. It is designed to show us our flaws, to shine the light upon our failures. If you can learn that to be so, the way that you approach the world in terms of witnessing changes considerably. The world operates along the lines of that understanding in one sense or another. The doing of good is somehow, the effort made, is our best hope of one day getting to Heaven. We function like that in everything that we do. If you're a kid in school and you get good grades, you get a bonus. You get a reward. You've succeeded. If you do good at your job, you're promoted. If you're the troublemaker, you don't. We think in terms of reward in everything that we accomplish. It's in our mind. If you do good, you get; if you don't, you're not going to get. And so when we come to our relationship with God, we bring that same concept to bear. I'm going to work my way in.

When I started witnessing to my dad, I was 19 years old when

I got saved, and my dad was a religious guy. But I began to tell him about the grace of God and how he needs to get saved, and this what he said to me, and I'll never forget the conversation. He said, "You mean to tell me --" he named some guy from, news who wasn't doing very good. "If this guy gives his life to Jesus, he's going to Heaven, while me, who has done nothing wrong, will go to hell?" And I go, "You got it, Dad." And he said, "You're an idiot." And we did this for 11 years, and then he got saved. We work on, the world operates by, the religious man is driven by, the Judaizer was propelled by that thought; that you could work your way in, that somehow it lies within you to accomplish what God wanted so that you could end up living with God one day. If you say to somebody, "Why do you think you're going to go to Heaven?" Invariably they're going to tell you, if they believe in Heaven at all, they're going to tell you what they've done or haven't done, and they believe God will grade on the curve and, as long as you're in the top 51 percent, you're going to make it. But that's not the way it works.

God's purpose in giving us the law was to highlight our sinfulness. That's the purpose. Here's the rulebook. And when you find out that you're utterly incapable of keeping it, and you can't live up to the divine standard, then come and see me and I'll direct you to someone who can help you. That's the purpose of the law. It should drive you to your knees. It should make you sorrowful, not prideful. You can't be, I did it all. No, I failed everywhere.

When Paul wrote to the Galatians in Chapter 3, he said, "Then so what is the purpose then of the law? It was added because of our transgression, until the Seed," speaking of Jesus, "should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed by the angels by the hand of a mediator. . .for if there had been a law that could make me righteous or give me life, then righteousness could come by the law. But the scriptures have concluded that we are all under sin, so that the promise of faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith that would afterward be revealed. Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith comes, we're no longer in need of a tutor," because we are now sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. That's the purpose of the law. So those folks sitting in power in Corinth were lying to the congregation, were deceiving the population, and were misleading them entirely when it came to the law of God. And unfortunately, that's not true just of the first century,

that's true in most churches today that don't teach the Bible.

It isn't that the law is not good. It was great. It is an accurate reflection of God's will and of His best, but the problem is with us. And the Corinthians were being taught, kind of like what Paul was like of old; right? He was all about trying to keep the law rather than allowing the law to show him his inability. It drove him to keep all these rituals in hopes that they became his salvation. The sacraments, if you will, were no longer a symbol of God's work, but a means to them, and they were embraced. So distorting the law's true purpose leaves the legalist with a bunch of external practices devoid of any power to bring life. It can just tell you, you're no good. It's not exactly the great place to park.

When Paul wrote to the Romans in Chapter 8, he said, "The law of the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do because of the weakness of my flesh, God was able to do by sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and because of my sin: And He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the law," what God wants me to be like, "could be fulfilled in me not through my flesh, but through my walk by faith in Christ." The new covenant brings life. Realizing that you're a sinner and under the condemnation of the law should produce repentance. It's the biggest hurdle that people have to jump over. If they can get from I'm a sinner and need some help, getting to Jesus is much easier. The big hurdle is I'm a sinner. My pop, I'm not a sinner. Well, he would say he was a sinner, but not at all like those people, whoever "those people" were. But apparently there were a lot of them. He saw himself as more righteous than most. That's the hurdle.

Maybe the best example of that is the Luke 18 passage that Jesus tells of the tax collector and of the Pharisee who comes to the temple to pray, and the Pharisee or the scribe stands by himself away from everyone else, and he says to God in his prayer, "I thank you, Lord, that I'm not like all of these other sinners. I tithe, I do good works, I give, and I serve." And the Lord said, "He left the synagogue or the temple praying with himself." In other words, his prayer never got to God. He was just so busy patting himself on the back. I thank God that I'm not like everyone else. Then there was a tax collector, a man well aware of his sin. He wouldn't go to the front of the temple. He stood in the back. He wouldn't look up, he looked down. He smashed himself in

the chest, he beat his breast, and this is what came out of his mouth, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." And Jesus said, "Now, that man went home justified." The word justified in Hebrew means this: Just as if I'd never sinned. Forgiveness was provided. That's the function of the law.

The new life, the new covenant I should say, gives life. The old can only kill. It can bring forth death. It can condemn. Just look at the verses here. That's what the Old Testament is meant to do. That's what the law of God is meant to do. That's what those moral laws, the 10 commandments, is meant to leave you with. I am in big trouble.

Second of all, the new covenant will produce righteousness. Now, the word "righteous" means that which God accepts, or that which God would give you a thumbs up. It speaks about behavior, attitude, outlook. In other words, your life not only can be saved, given life, through the new covenant, but your life can be changed. God will move into your life to change your life. Paul was oftentimes accused by his enemies of breaking the law. In fact, when he showed up at James' church in Jerusalem in Acts 21 at the end of his third missionary journey, Paul laid out for them all that God had done in saving the Gentiles, and then they went, yeah, praise the Lord. Oh, by the way, we have a lot of people here in our church that are zealous not for the Lord, but for the law, and they hear from everyone else that you go to these Gentiles' places and you preach against the law of Moses, and you tell people not to circumcise their children, and not to follow the law. Well, Paul just taught the gospel. And the gospel was, all of those things were meant to convict us so that we could turn to a savior. The types were there, but they pointed to a person.

Paul, unlike his legalistic opponents, viewed the old covenant in a proper perspective. Notice he called it in verse 7 a ministry of death. You don't want to get on that train. Hi, here's the ministry of death. Oh, I'd like to have me a copy. And in verse 9, here's the ministry of condemnation. And in verse 6, here's the letter that will kill you. Oh, good. And in verse 10, it's the one that's fading away. It's written on disappearing ink. Oh, my goodness.

Paul affirmed here that the law was filled with the glory of God, reflected perfectly His righteousness. The 10 commandments are the heart of God, but no one can keep them. It can at best point out that you can't do it.

You can say this: The law is the greatest mass murderer in history. It'll kill everyone who reads it. If you're honest with yourself, oh, I can't do it. Now, you might go to one of the commandments, "thou shalt not kill," and be proud of yourself, say "I've never killed anybody." All right. Let's just run with that. The ninth and 10th commandment talked about coveting. Coveting is not an action, it's an attitude. It says don't covet your neighbor's goods, don't covet his wife, don't covet his reputation, don't covet. Don't want what you don't have. Most folks fall by the time they get there.

In fact, Paul when writing to the Romans said, I was alive once without the law. In other words, before I understood it, I didn't see sin at all. But when the commandment came and I saw the law, then sin revived, I died. And I wouldn't have known that I shouldn't covet except the law said I shouldn't covet. I did covet. I realized the position that I found myself in. He couldn't change himself. He couldn't alter the way that he lived. The law sets a standard that we can't follow so that we'll be in a position to ask for help.

Jesus in talking to the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, especially Chapter 5 of Matthew, ended in verse 48 by saying, if you want to go this route, working your way to Heaven by the law, be perfect as your Heavenly Father is. There you go. Just don't mess up. Yeah, Lord, I don't think I can do that. Well, then, we'll have to go with Plan B. You'll have to come to the cross.

The law was not intended to be a means by which you can be saved, any more than anyone you talk to, they'll start telling you what they've done to get to Heaven. Know this: From God's standpoint, performance is not the way in. There's no grace, there's no mercy, there's no forgiveness, there's no power. There's just this ministry of death. It's ministry to kill you. Read the law, and you go, I can't do it. Good, you're dead to you now. Any hope that you had in you is about died. Every condemnation in there is directed at your life. I can't do it, this is a horrible book. I don't want to read it anymore. It is glorious, though, because it is necessary to turn you to Jesus.

Paul uses this familiar picture that the Jews would certainly have understood well of Israel arriving at Mount Sinai, where the Lord gave to them the law, Exodus 32, 33, 34. When Moses goes up to get the law and he returned first time - right? he broke the commandments. He broke these two

tablets. He saw the people worshipping an idol. He went back up and got a second set, but the Lord gave him an addendum. The book got bigger. He gave him all the sacrifices to cover the sins of the people, that when they read this, they would realize they couldn't do it. And those commandments for sacrifice and blood were always aimed at looking to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who would come and give His life for the sins of the world. But when Moses came back the second time, because he had been in God's presence, his face was aglow, and the people told him to cover it up. Why did they want to cover it up? Well, for one thing, it was a light that shined upon their lives to say, your way of life was sinful. You've been in God's presence. We're sinful. That's a function of the law. But more than that, Exodus 34 said that Moses had to cover his face because that glow was fading. It wasn't getting brighter, it was going away. Now, Paul uses that to say to us, that's how the law functions. It shines its light on your sin, but then it is to go away. It's not supposed to continue or somehow be embraced as the way that you get to Heaven. It was a fading glory. And notice that Paul makes a comparison between the two. Hey, if the fading glory of the law is glorious, and it was, how much more glory are you going to find when you meet Jesus, who can come and actually change your life? His face, like the law, declared God's holiness and their sinfulness, and it also reflects the fact that this law was never supposed to be permanent. It was a schoolmaster to bring you to Jesus, and once it did, its work is done. Then God has to begin to work within your life. Not an external pressure, but an internal work.

The law is glorious. It reduces all of us to crying out for help. But the New Testament is even more glorious, because there you find God's mercy, God's grace, God's love, God's deliverance, God's solution, God's compassion. Make the list. You find them all at the cross.

The Old Testament, which was dependent upon man's obedience, demanded or commanded righteousness. The New Testament hands it to you. The Old Testament says here do this and live, and you go, I can't do that. All right. Then let Me give you the power to do it. Come to Me and I'll give you life. That's what He said. If the Old Testament was that which made people hearers of the truth, the New Testament in Christ makes them and enables them to be doers of the truth.

Paul learned that fairly quickly. He had tried so hard to do it on his own. He writes to the Philippians in Chapter

3 and he says, "Everything I've ever done, it's dung." And the word "dung" there is dung. A big pile of dung. Pretty much a cleaned-up version in the New King James. The death of works righteousness, the law kills, it condemns, it brings to death, it doesn't last. It has a certain work to do, and once it's done, it's done. So the new covenant, this relationship that we have with Jesus, the invitation to be born again, that's the way of life. And it's also the way of righteousness. God changes us by the work of His Spirit.

And finally, verse 10 and 11, it says that it is permanent; right? The glory faded on Moses' face, but this one that lasts and that, verse 11, remains is the most glorious of all. The Old Testament prescribes what you are to do; it can't enable you to do it. Here's what the Old Testament gives you: Damnation, not salvation. It gives you condemnation, not justification. It gives you moral culpability, but no moral purity. It can't change the heart.

Now, the fact that those things are true and you should know them well, you should add to it the fact that God always intended to send us His Spirit within to change us. When Jeremiah in Chapter 31 wrote to a nation that was on the brinks of disaster through their disobedient lifestyles, the Lord said through him in Chapter 31:31, I think it is, "Behold, the days are coming, sayeth the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the old covenant I made with them and their fathers, which they weren't able to do, when I took their hand to lead them out through the wilderness, which they wouldn't follow, though I was a husband to them, sayeth the Lord. But this is the covenant I'll make with the house of Israel in those days. I will put My law in their minds. I will write them upon their heart; I'll be their God, they'll be My people. No one will have to teach his neighbor to walk with the Lord or say it to Him themselves. They will all know Me from the least to the greatest." And then He said, "I'll forgive their sin. I'll remember their sin no more."

There's coming a day when the new covenant becomes permanent. You get saved, and now God begins to enable you to keep the law. The moral law; right? Now you may hate, but you go, Lord, I don't want to hate. I want to love like You love. And you may covet, but your desire is to overcome those things, and things in the proper perspective. God begins to enable you to do what is good, the law. But it is no longer you that can take credit, or you that have attempted it in your flesh. That's fading. But this work of God in the

heart is permanent. You're going to go to Heaven one day, and you're going to be welcomed there, because God began this work and he's going to complete it. That glory is just going to get better. You think you're looking good now, wait till we'll see you later; right? From the day you got saved till the day that He calls you home, you're just improving. And when you fail, God's Son's blood shed covers you, forgives you, washes you, and gives you a new start. It's a permanent work.

And really, that's the message you have to preach. When you talk to people, they may not want you to quote 100 verses to them, but you can certainly say, God's standard for you getting to Heaven is not your goodness. Tell me how good you are, and tell me where it's good enough. Where is that line? And what about this guy that does this or doesn't do that? Is that guy going to make it? Well, here's what the Bible says: None of them guys make it, the guy up here, the guy down there.

I remember a fellow one time, I forgot who it was but I've heard it more than once, saying, "If all of us were told that our salvation, that we can gain our salvation by running off the Huntington Beach pier as hard as we can and then jumping, and if we land on Catalina, we're saved." And he goes, "Some people will run and they'll go like 2 feet, and some sprinter guy will go 50 feet. They're all going to get wet." That's the difference between the permanence of God's work and the inability of our flesh to be able to accomplish what God wants.

So the old covenant fades away when its function is complete, when you've been brought to your knees and were looking up for help; and the new covenant begins the moment you open your heart to Jesus, and He moves in by His Spirit and He begins to do in you what the law demands of you that you couldn't do of yourself. Except now He gets the credit, and He gets the honor, and He's going to finish the work that He started. Its pretty good news. Paul will write to the Hebrews in Chapter 11, "For this reason He's the mediator of a new covenant, by means of His death, for the redemption of the transgressions of those under the first covenant, that He may call those who receive eternal inheritance, a promise of eternal inheritance." That's all God wants to do.

The gospel is very simple, but you can't miss it. Because the problem today for people not wanting to get saved is they really believe they can get to Heaven. And what they have

to do is get over the hurdle that says, you're a sinner. That's the hardest thing, I have sinned. That's the hardest thing out of anybody's mouth. You say I have sinned, help me is much easier. Forgive me is much easier. If there's a promise of redemption, now I want it. But getting out of my mouth I've sinned, rather than, hey, you're worse than I am, or if God's going to punish me, hell's going to be full of people, because I'm pretty good. Or the cavalier, I can't wait to go to hell and meet all of my friends.

Notice verse 12 says, "therefore." In other words, if you've got this right, that the New Testament gives life, produces righteousness or changes a behavior of life, and is a permanent fixture, a permanent work that won't fade, then there's a "therefore." And verses 12 through 18 are the therefore. And you're going to read next week therefore we'll have hope, therefore life will be clear as far as God's will, therefore we will live a Christ-centered life, therefore we will rely upon the work of the Holy Spirit, therefore our life will be transformed. Therefore. Hinged upon these other verses.

All right. I just gave you the outline for next week. If you don't show up, I'm coming to your house. You can't cheat. You'll get no grade. I'll look at you in the camera. All right? Aren't you glad you're in Jesus? One of the testaments is powerless to save, it's temporary, it is fading; the other one is powerful in life and lasting and shining and glorious and eternal. Aren't you glad you're saved? Don't you wish everyone was?