THE NEW COVENANT AND THE LORD’S GLORY

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Key Verse: 3:18

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Thank God for the new covenant sealed in the blood of Christ and for raising minsters of the new covenant of the Spirit. The life of the new covenant people is to live in his marvelous grace of forgiveness of sin through repentance and to live by the Spirit with full trust in God, never relying on human effort, which puts us under God’s curse. How precious the ministers of the new covenant of the Spirit are, that truly saves people! May we keep his calling as ministers of the new covenant with competence that comes from God. In today’s passage, we can think of the glory of the new covenant and why the ministry of the new covenant is more glorious than the ministry of Moses, which was evidently glorious to the Israelites, and our transformation in the Lord’s glory.

**First, the glory of the ministry of the new covenant (7-11).** Paul says in verses 7 and 8, “Now if the ministry that brough death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?” Here, Paul compares the ministry of death and the ministry of life, which is the ministry of the Spirit. The old covenant puts man to death, because no one can keep the entire law. Romans 3:20 says, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.” And as we studied, the Spirit gives life. The law was given through Moses. The purpose of the law was to help people realize their sin and come to the gospel. Yet the Law itself bring death to man, for the Law does not give the ability to keep it. Paul says in Romans 7:9, “Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandments came, sin sprang to life and I died.”

In verse 7, Paul says that the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory. How? We know that God is invisible. But God would make himself visible by manifesting the glory of his nature in light. Psalm 104:2 says, “The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment” or “You are dressed in a robe of light” (NLT). Exodus 24:15-17 says, “When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai…To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.” At the end of the book of Exodus, when the tabernacle was completed, the cloud covered the Tent of the Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34). The cloud representing the glory of God, the cloud of great shining light came down and settled at the place of the tabernacle. When God manifested himself, he manifested his spiritual presence by reducing all of his attributes to visible light. So in Revelation 4:3, John described the throne in heaven this way, “And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian.”

In a miraculous way, God manifested himself thusly to Moses. Exodus 34:29-31 say, “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke them.” Moses’ face was radiant, like an incandescent light bulb.  He was lit up, shining brightly. Certainly, the radiance of his face was the reflection of God’s glory. So, Paul wrote here, “…came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was.”

Paul’s claim is “If so, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?” We can say that the nation was great and glorious because of the law. Moses said in Deuteronomy 4:8, “And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?” The ministry of the Spirit is the ministry of the new covenant, the gospel. An individual, a church or a nation that has the gospel will be truly great and glorious, because it brings life that is eternal.

Paul continues the comparison in verse 9, “If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!” The comparison is between the ministry of condemnation and the ministry of righteousness. Condemnation is hard to bear. There is the devil behind the condemnation under the Law, leading the condemned souls to eternal punishment. Jesus said in John 3:17, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Righteousness and salvation go together. God says in Isaiah 46:13, “I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion...” Isaiah 61:10 says, “I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness…” Righteousness and salvation are one set of blessing. And Romans 1:17 says, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith…” This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe (3:21). It is also written in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” And 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” What an interesting development of righteousness! From a righteousness from God, that righteousness being in Christ Jesus, so Jesus’ becoming our righteousness and finally we becoming the righteousness of God. In short, a righteous of God, the righteousness of Jesus, and our righteousness. This is the transferring of righteousness from God, to Jesus and finally to us. And it is through the route of faith. This is truly a perfect righteousness. The righteousness of God is perfect, for it makes unrighteous sinners righteous through his Son Jesus Christ, as his holiness makes unholy sinners holy. So, if the ministry of condemnation is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry of righteousness!

Paul further develops the comparison in verse 10, “For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.” Now the surpassing glory of the gospel denies the first or the former glory of the old covenant or the law. And then Paul says in verse 11, “And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!” Who can compare the fading glory and the lasting glory? Ridiculous! Absurd! So, the ministry of the new covenant is absolutely glorious. In verses 7-11, the word “glory” or “glorious” is written 10 times, leading to the greater glory of the new covenant. The final comparison can be the glory on the face of Moses and the glory on the face of the transfigured Jesus. Matthew 17:2 says, “There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.” This glory on the face of Jesus is from inside of God in origin, while the glory on the face of Moses is the reflection of such a glory. It can be the comparison of the glory of the sun and the glory of the moon. The glory of the ministry of the old covenant, Moses or the law, is the deadly, condemning, and fading glory, but the glory of the ministry of the new covenant, the gospel or Jesus, is the life-giving, righteousness-endowing and lasting glory.

And we are to know that the light of the new covenant is the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (4:4) and the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (4:6). While the light on the face of Moses was visible, but the light of the new covenant is invisible, yet life-saving. We are also reminded of what Peter said in 1 Peter 1:24-25, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the filed; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.” Surely, the new covenant stands forever. We praise God for the glory of the ministry of the new covenant, of the gospel, the of the Spirit. What a blessing it is to serve the ministry of the new covenant!

**Second, the removing of a veil on the heart (12-17).** Paul says in verse 12, “Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. Who can be truly bold? Those who have hope. Then what is this boldness? He continues, “We are like Moses…” What a bold speech! Moses was the admiration of all the Jews. Most certainly all the Israelites wanted to be like Moses. Paul says continually, “…who put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.” It can be sad story. When the Israelites gazed at the veiled face of Moses, they would think that his face was shining continually, not knowing that in fact the radiance was fading away. Moses himself knew this. And then Paul says, “But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read.” Here we see the change in the usage of the word “veil”, from Moses’ veil to the veil on the minds of the Israelites with the same meaning of not being able to see the reality.

Paul continues in verse 14, “It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.” Here we see the tragedy of human hearts and minds with a veil covering them. It is not an intellectual problem but a veil problem, however great their minds and hearts are. There is nothing wrong with the old covenant, but with the veiled heart, the unwillingness to be broken, acknowledging sin and being repentant. Psalm 51:17 says, “…a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:3), and “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Here “dull” is in other translations, “hardened” or “blinded.” The veil is related to a spiritual blindness. In John 9 Jesus opened the eyes of man born blind and the Pharisees persecuted him, denying the work of Jesus. Then Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into the world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind” (9:39) At this some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?” Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt reminds” (9:41). On another occasion Jesus said, “Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good your whole body also is full of light. But when your eyes are bad, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness” (Lk 11:34-35; Mt 6:22-23).

Paul says here in verse 16, “But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” It is not also the matter of time. At the moment one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed from the heart. Definitely, this is not the work of man, but the work of God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:21, “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” This is the reason the ministers of the new covenant are to boldly preach the gospel though the people of the world think it foolish, so that God may take away the veil of some people at his time and in his way.

**Third, the transformation in the Lord’s glory (17-18).** Paul says in verse 17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” The law restricts people, but the Spirit of the Lord liberates their souls regardless of their human conditions. All people want freedom, not knowing where true freedom is. It says where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. One Sabbath in the synagogue, Jesus read the words of Isaiah 61:1-2, concerning himself, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind…” (Luke 4:18). The Lord Jesus came to proclaim the freedom. Again where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Freedom is not the matter of outward circumstances, but the matter of the Spirit indwelling the heart and soul.

And Paul says in Galatians 5:1 says, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” He continues in 5:13, “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.” And what a blessing it is to serve God freely, as Luke 1:74, 75 says, “to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him in all our days.”

Now verse 18 says, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” In the previous part, Paul talked about one person Moses’ reflecting the glory of God. Now he says, “we all reflect the Lord’s glory.” “We with unveiled faces reflect the Lord’s glory.” Wow! What a statement! It is because of the new covenant in Christ Jesus, and it is as we serve the ministry of the new covenant, participating in the suffering of our Lord Jesus big or small, and serving his flock of sheep. 1 Peter 4:13 says, “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

And those who are in Christ Jesus are being transformed into his likeness. God’s ultimate purpose for us is to be like his Son Jesus. Romans 8:29 says, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be firstborn among many brothers.” What a purpose and what a goal! When we live by faith, all the troubles and conflicts in life become ingredients for this transformation. So often we see that parts of pieces in a puzzle game do not seem to match and we are greatly troubled. But there will be a time to see that all the pieces completely match. What a joy and excitement it will be! In the process, we are being transformed into the likeness of God’s Son Christ Jesus. This is a wonder and mystery of living by faith. And this is the reason Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” When Jesus comes again, we will be like Jesus. 1 John 3:3 says, “…we know that when he appears, we shall be like him…”And Paul continues, “…with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” What a difference between the ever-decreasing glory and the ever-increasing glory! This ever-increasing glory comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. It is to make sure that the increasing-glory is not physical but spiritual. It is invisible but the spiritual reality. This is truly amazing reality with the assured glory. Paul said in Romans 8:18, “I consider that our present suffering are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” So we have enough reason to live by faith here and now.

Thank God for the glory of the new covenant. What a grace it is that in Christ Jesus we reflect the Lord’s glory and are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory. In this blessing of God in Christ Jesus, may we serve the glorious ministry of the new covenant, participating in the suffering of Christ.