

WE NEED GOD'S GRACE

Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*,

vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 637–641.



GENUINE & COUNTERFEIT

Wherever you find the genuine, you will find somebody promoting the counterfeit. Fake "masterpieces have fooled even art critics," and sincere publishers have purchased "valuable manuscripts," only to discover them to be forgeries. Henry Ward Beecher was right when he said, "A lie always needs a truth for a handle to it."



A COUNTERFEIT “GOSPEL”

No sooner did the Gospel of God's grace begin to spread among the Gentiles than a counterfeit "gospel" appeared, a mixture of Law and grace.

- It was carried by a zealous group of people that we have come to call “the Judaizers”.
- Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians to refute their doctrines, and you will find him referring to them several times in 2 Corinthians.



THE JUDAIZERS AND LEGALISM

Their primary emphasis was that salvation was by faith in Christ *PLUS* the keeping of the Law (see Acts 15:1ff).

- ▶ They taught that the believer is perfected in his faith by obeying the Law of Moses.



THE JUDAIZERS AND LEGALISM

- ▶ Their "gospel of legalism" was prevalent since human nature enjoys **achieving religious goals** instead of **simply trusting Christ** and **allowing the Holy Spirit to work**.
- ▶ It is much easier to measure "religion" than true righteousness.



HOW PAUL VIEWED THE JUDAIZERS

Paul looked on these false teachers

- ▶ as "peddlers" of the Word of God (see 2 Cor. 2:17, NIV)
- ▶ and "religious racketeers" who preyed on ignorant people.

He rejected their devious methods of teaching the Bible (2 Cor. 4:2) and despised their tendency to boast about their converts (2 Cor. 10:12 – 18). The Corinthians were behind in their contribution to the special offering because the Judaizers had "robbed" the church (2 Cor. 11:7 – 12, 20; 12:14).



How did Paul refute the doctrines and practices of these legalistic false teachers?

- By showing the surpassing glory of the ministry of the Gospel of the grace of God.
- In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul contrasted the ministry of the Old Covenant (Law) with the ministry of the New Covenant (grace),
- and he proved the superiority of the New Covenant ministry.



TABLETS OF STONE – HUMAN HEARTS

2 Corinthians 3:1 – 3 (NKJV)

- ¹ Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?
- ² You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;
- ³ clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.



The Judaizers boasted that they carried "letters of recommendation"

(2 Cor. 3:1, NIV) from the "important people" in the Jerusalem church, and they pointed out that Paul had no such credentials.

- It is a sad thing when a person measures his worth by what people say about him instead of by what God knows about him.
- **Paul needed no credentials from church leaders:** his life and ministry were the only recommendations needed.



THE LAW ON TABLETS OF STONE

God gave the Law and wrote it on stone tablets, which were placed in the ark of the covenant. Even if the Israelites could read the two tablets, this experience would not change their lives.

- ▶ The Law is an external thing, and people need an *internal* power if their lives are to be transformed.
- ▶ The legalist can admonish us with his "Do this!" or "Don't do that!" but he cannot give us the power to obey. If we obey, it is often not from the heart—and we end up worse than before!



GRACE CHANGES HEARTS

The ministry of grace changes the heart. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God and writes it on the heart. The Corinthians were wicked sinners when Paul came to them, but his ministry of the Gospel of God's grace completely changed their lives.



1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11 (NKJV)

⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,

¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.



CHANGED LIVES MATTER

Their experience of God's grace certainly meant more to them than the letters of commendation carried by the false teachers. The Corinthian believers were lovingly written on Paul's heart, and the Spirit of God had written the truth on their hearts, making them "living epistles of Christ."

The test of ministry is changed lives, not press releases or statistics.



BOASTFUL & LEGALISTIC JUDAIZERS

It is much easier for the legalist to boast because he can "measure" his ministry by external standards. The believer who patiently ministers by the Spirit of God must leave the results with the Lord. How tragic that the Corinthians followed the boastful Judaizers and broke the heart of the man who had rescued them from judgment.



DEATH – LIFE

2 Corinthians 3:4 – 6 (NKJV)

⁴ And we have such trust through Christ toward God.

⁵ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

⁶ who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.



PAUL GAVE THE GLORY TO GOD

Paul was quick to give the glory to God and not to himself.

- His confidence ("trust") was in God, and his sufficiency came from God.
- Paul was a brilliant and well-educated man, yet he did not depend on his adequacy.
- He depended on the Lord.



PAUL BOASTED IN GOD

The legalists told people that any person could obey the Law and become spiritual. A legalistic ministry has a way of inflating the egos of people. When you emphasize the grace of God, you must tell people that they are lost sinners who cannot save themselves. Paul's testimony was, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).



**No one is sufficient of
himself to minister to the
hearts of people.
That sufficiency can only
come from God.**



DIFFERENT NAMES

As you read this chapter (and Bible study), note Paul's different names for the Old Covenant and the New Covenant as he contrasted them.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6, **"the letter" refers to the Old Covenant Law, while "the spirit" refers to the New Covenant message of grace.**

- ▶ Paul was not contrasting two approaches to the Bible, a "literal interpretation" and a "spiritual interpretation".
- ▶ He was reminding his readers that the Old Covenant Law could not give life; it was a ministry of death.



Galatians 3:21 (NKJV)

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.



The Gospel gives life
to those who believe because of
the work of Jesus Christ
on the cross.



THE LAW WAS NOT A MISTAKE

Paul was not suggesting that the Law was a mistake or that its ministry was unimportant. Far from it!

- ▶ Paul knew that the lost sinner must be slain by the Law and left helplessly condemned before God's grace could save him.
- ▶ John the Baptist came with a message of judgment, preparing the way for Jesus and His message of saving grace.



LEGALISTIC MINISTRIES

- ▶ A legalistic ministry brings death. Preachers who major in rules and regulations keep their congregations under a dark cloud of guilt, which kills their joy, power, and effective witness for Christ.
- ▶ Christians who are constantly measuring each other, comparing "results," and competing with each other soon discover that they depend on the flesh and not the power of the Spirit.



GRACE & THE HOLY SPIRIT

There never was a standard that could transform a person's life, including the Ten Commandments. Only the grace of God, ministered by the Spirit of God, can transform lost sinners into living epistles that glorify Jesus Christ.



Paul's doctrine of the New Covenant was not something that he invented for the occasion.

- ▶ As a profound student of the Scriptures, Paul certainly had read Jeremiah 31:27 – 34 and Ezekiel 11:14 – 21.
- ▶ Hebrews 8 – 10 is the key passage to study in the New Testament.
- ▶ The Old Covenant Law, with its emphasis on external obedience, was preparation for the New Covenant message of grace and the emphasis on internal transformation of the heart.



FADING GLORY — INCREASING GLORY

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2 Corinthians 3:7 – 11 (NKJV)

⁷ But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away,

⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?

⁹ For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.

¹⁰ For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels.

¹¹ For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.



THE GLORY OF THE OLD & NEW COVENANTS

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This paragraph is the heart of the chapter, and it should be studied in connection with Exodus 34:29 – 35.

- ▶ Paul did not deny the glory of the Old Covenant Law because, in the giving of the Law and the maintaining of the tabernacle and temple services, there certainly was glory.
- ▶ However, he affirmed that the glory of the New Covenant of grace was far superior, and he gave several reasons to support his affirmation.



THE NEW COVENANT GLORY MEANS SPIRITUAL LIFE, NOT DEATH (vv. 7 – 8)

When Moses descended from the mountain after conversing with God, his face shone with the glory of God (Exodus 34:29).

- This was a part of the glory of the giving of the Law, and it certainly impressed the people.
- Paul then argued from the lesser to the greater: if there was glory in giving a Law that brought death, how much more glory is there in a ministry that brings life!



THE DEFICIENCIES OF THE LAW

Legalists, like the Judaizers, magnify the glory of the Law and minimize its weaknesses. In Paul's letter to the Galatian churches, he pointed out the deficiencies of the Law:

- ▶ The Law cannot justify the lost sinner (Gal. 2:16),
- ▶ The Law cannot give a sinner righteousness (Gal. 2:21),
- ▶ The Law does not give the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:2),
- ▶ The Law does not give an inheritance (Gal. 3:18),
- ▶ The Law does not give life (Gal. 3:21), and
- ▶ The Law does not give freedom (Gal. 4:8 – 10).

The glory of the Law is the glory of a ministry of death.



WHAT THE LAW PRODUCES

(vv. 9 – 10)

The Law was not given for salvation, for there is no salvation through obedience to the Law. The Law produces condemnation and is the mirror that reveals how dirty our faces are. But we cannot wash our faces in the mirror.



WHAT THE NEW COVENANT PRODUCES (vv. 9 – 10)

The ministry of the New Covenant produces righteousness and changes lives to the glory of God. Man's greatest need is righteousness, and God's greatest gift is righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ.



**"For if righteousness
[comes] by the Law, then
Christ is dead in vain".**

Galatians 2:21



LIVING UNDER THE LAW VS. BY FAITH IN GOD'S GRACE

- ▶ The person who tries to live under the Law will find himself feeling more and more guilty, which can produce a feeling of **hopelessness and rejection.**
- ▶ When we trust Christ and live by faith in God's grace, we experience **acceptance and joy.**



THE LAW VS. GOD'S GRACE

Second Corinthians 3:10 states that the Law really "lost its glory" when compared to the surpassing glory of the ministry of God's grace. There is no comparison. Sad to say, some people cannot "feel spiritual" unless they carry a weight of guilt.



THE NEW COVENANT GLORY MEANS RIGHTEOUSNESS, NOT CONDEMNATION (vv. 9 – 10)

The Law produces guilt and condemnation, for it is like

- a bond of indebtedness (Col. 2:14),
- a guardian who disciplines us (Gal. 4:1–5),
- and a yoke too heavy to bear (Gal. 5:1; Acts 15:10).



THE NEW COVENANT GLORY IS PERMANENT, NOT TEMPORARY (v. 11)

The tense of the verb here is imperative: "that which is passing away." Paul wrote at a period in history when the ages were overlapping.

- ▶ The New Covenant of grace had come in, but the temple services were still being carried on, and the nation of Israel was still living under Law.
- ▶ In A.D. 70, the city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans, marking the end of the Jewish religious system.



THE GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT

The Judaizers wanted the Corinthian believers to go back under the Law, to "mix" the two Covenants. "Why go back to that which is temporary and fading away?" Paul asked. "Live in the glory of the New Covenant, which is getting greater and greater."

- ▶ The glory of the Law is but the glory of past history, while the glory of the New Covenant is the glory of present experience.
- ▶ As believers, we can be "changed ... from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18), something the Law can never accomplish.



THE FADING GLORY OF THE LAW

The glory of the Law was fading in Paul's day, and today that glory is found only in the records in the Bible. The nation of Israel has no temple or priesthood. If they did build a temple, there would be no Shekinah glory dwelling in the holy of holies. The Law of Moses is a religion with a most glorious past, but it has no glory today. The light is gone; all that remain are shadows (Col. 2:16 – 17).



THE MINISTRY OF GRACE

Paul has pointed out that the ministry of grace

- ▶ is internal (2 Cor. 3:1 – 3),
- ▶ it brings life (2 Cor. 3:4 – 6),
- ▶ and it involves increasing glory (2 Cor. 3:7 – 11).

He presented one final contrast to prove the superiority of the New Covenant ministry of grace.



CONCEALMENT – OPENNESS

2 Corinthians 3:12 – 18 (NKJV)

¹² Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—

¹³ unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.

¹⁴ But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.

¹⁵ But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.

¹⁶ Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.



A PICTURE BOOK

- ▶ The Bible is a "picture book" because it uses symbols, similes, metaphors, and other literary devices to get its message across.
- ▶ In this paragraph, Paul used the experience of Moses and his veil to illustrate the glorious freedom and openness of the Christian life under grace. Paul saw in Moses' experience a deeper spiritual meaning than you, and I would have seen as we read Exodus 34:29 – 35.

