

## **2 Cor 3:7-18 The Surpassing Glory of the New Covenant**

### **Part 1—vss. 7-11**

If you are like me, you have a bunch of old technology lying around the house that has been replaced by newer technology. I have old phones, old computers, old stereo gear, all of which has been replaced with newer, faster, better technology. I still have some of the old stuff, and some of it still works. It was wonderful while it was up to date, but now it's been superseded by something far better. Old technology fades into insignificance in comparison to new technology.

That can also be true in a theological sense—the new replaces the old. Paul's main point in this section is that the NC has replaced the OC. The OC was glorious, but the NC is far more glorious.

The Bible presents us with two major ages in history: OT and NT. Everything up until the death and resurrection of Jesus is covered by the OT. Everything after Jesus' death and resurrection, especially after the founding of the church, is covered by the NT. These two covenants mark a significant difference between the OT people of Israel and the NT church.

One whole book of the Bible—Hebrews—is devoted to explaining the surpassing value of the NC over the OC.

In the previous section (3:6), Paul brought up the topic of the New Covenant. He calls himself and his colleagues “ministers of the new covenant.” Since we today operate under the NC, it's important for us to value and understand that position.

In today's passage, Paul presents for us the surpassing glory of the New Covenant. Why is the NC so much better than the OC?

There are two major sections in this passage—vss. 7-11, then 12-18. Today we'll consider the first part of this, vss. 7-11.

I. The New Covenant is more glorious than the Old Covenant. .7-11

The historical context to this passage is the account of Moses receiving the Law on Mt. Sinai (Ex 34). When he came down from the mountain after receiving the law, his face glowed, and he eventually put a veil over his face.

Read Ex 34:29-35.

Paul refers to this in vss. 7, 13, 15, 18.

A. What are the weaknesses of the Old Covenant?

1. .7a It was a “ministry of death”

Cf. 3:6 “the letter kills.” The law brings the knowledge of sin. No one can satisfy the demands of the law, and because of that, we are condemned.

Galatians 3:10 *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”*

.7 This “ministry of death” was “written and engraved on stone” – this refers to the giving of the law by God on Mt. Sinai. God himself wrote the 10 Commandments on stone—written by the finger of God (Ex 31:18). Even though God wrote it, it’s still “the ministry of death” because it condemns those who fail to keep it.

It’s a remarkable thing for Paul to describe the OT law as a “ministry of death.” ....

2. .7b It had a lesser glory.

a) It certainly “was glorious,” lit. “came in glory” (ἐγενήθη ἐν δόξῃ). The OT law certainly came in glory. Cf. Ex 19:10-22 describes the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai; that was a glorious event.

b) Vs. 10 it “had no glory ... because of the glory that excels.” In other words, the glory of the OT fades substantially in light of the glory of the NT.

3. .9 It was a “ministry of condemnation”

a) Why would Paul describe the OT law as a “ministry of condemnation”? Because anyone who fails to obey the law is condemned as a sinner.

Deuteronomy 27:26 *‘Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.’...*

The OT law brings a curse; it condemns those who fail to keep it.

And speaking of curses...

**Illus.:** Archaeologists working at Mt. Ebal in Israel recently discovered a tiny “curse tablet,” a lead sheet barely larger than a postage stamp, inscribed with ancient letters in an early form of Hebrew. The tablet likely contains the earliest-known Hebrew text, and the earliest known to contain the Hebrew name of God.<sup>1</sup>

The inscription reads: “Cursed, cursed, cursed — cursed by the God Yahweh.”

You may remember that the Jews, once they came into Canaan, gathered to read blessings and cursings on Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal (Duet 11:29). This little tablet could date from that occasion.

The law certainly was a “ministry of condemnation” because it brings a curse on anyone who does not keep it.

- b) .7 That law “had glory,” (“was glorious”) in the sense that God gave it and it was necessary for the people of that day.
  - c) But no one could keep the law. It brought condemnation and a curse to one and all.
4. .11 “what is passing away”—the glory of Moses’ face was temporary; it faded away. And that is a picture of the OC system passing away. The OT law was never intended to be permanent; it was not a permanent solution to man’s sin problem.

In fact, the AH argues that if the OC could have permanently taken away sin, there would have been no need for a NC. Remember that the AH tells us that “the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin” (Heb 10:4). The OT sacrificial system was a temporary solution that pointed to the final sacrifice of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.livescience.com/ancient-curse-tablet-early-hebrew>

**Trans:** The OC was good and valuable for the era in which it was intended. But with the coming of Christ, and especially with his death and resurrection, the stipulations of the OC pass away.

B. What are the benefits of the New Covenant?

1. .8 It's a "ministry of the Spirit"—a new age has dawned with the ministry of Christ; we are not governed by the letter of the law, but by the Spirit of God.

Cf. vs. 6 "not the letter but the Spirit...the Spirit gives life."

If the giving of the law/OC was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry of the Spirit? The NC is more glorious than the old.

2. .9b It's a "ministry of righteousness" – the NC provides righteousness for all that come under it. The OC was a way of life for the Israelites, but a person could be under the OC system without being righteous/saved. No one achieved righteousness through the keeping of the law; obedience never saved anybody. No one, other than Jesus, ever kept the entire law.

*Gal 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.—i.e., made righteous.*

The great question that all of us need to answer is, "How can a sinner be found righteous in God's eyes?" And the answer to that is found throughout the Bible—we are justified by faith. When we repent of sin and trust in Christ, God credits us with the righteousness of Christ—that's justification.

Righteousness comes to us by faith, not by the deeds of the law.

3. .8end It's "more glorious," .9end "exceeds much more in glory" – if the ministry of death and condemnation brought glory, how much more glorious is the "ministry of righteousness" (vs. 9)? It most certainly is more glorious; it's far better.  
.10 "the glory that excels/surpasses"

The glory of the NC far exceeds/surpasses the glory of the OC. What once held great splendor/glory is not so glorious anymore. The glory of the new supersedes the glory of the old. The new outshines the old.

**Quote:** Christ as the Sun of Righteousness has thrown Moses in the shade.<sup>2</sup>

When the sun is up, you don't notice the moon. When we look at Jesus and his ministry, the giving of the law under Moses doesn't look all that appealing.

4. .11 It is permanent – “what remains” – the OC has passed away; it has been permanently replaced by the NC; it is superior to the OC and supersedes it. The OC was a temporary solution to man's sin problem, while the NC is the permanent solution to that problem. One has passed away while the other remains.

The AH calls the NC an “everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20). It will remain in force until the new heavens/earth.

C. What do we learn from this comparison? Two main things:

1. We are not under the OT law. That law was a ministry of death and a ministry of condemnation. It had glory for its intended time and purpose, but now that glory has faded away and it is no longer in operation.

That doesn't mean that the OT has no value. The OT is inspired Scripture, and it is profitable for us. It was written for our admonition and we find many examples there to follow or to avoid.

The OT law is also valuable in that it points out sin. If you are trying to show a person his need for salvation from sin, a good place to start is with the OT law, especially the 10 Commandments. The OT law condemns and curses, and unsaved people need to know that they are under God's condemnation.

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<sup>2</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 2 Co 3:10.

However, the OT is no longer our guidebook for life. The NT is our final authority. We live in the church age, not under the dictates of the OT.

Unfortunately, various religious groups, like the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists, try to burden NT believers with OT requirements. But that is not legitimate. We are not under the stipulations of the OT law. The glory of the OC has passed away and is no longer in operation—that’s the main point Paul is making here.

Paul’s point here is that the OT law was transient and has faded away; the NC is permanent and remains. We are not obligated to practice the OT law. We are obligated to obey the law of Christ, as given to us in the NT.

You may recall that the church gathered to discuss this very issue. In Acts 15, we see that the church determined not to obligate the Gentiles with keeping the OT law. Even the Jews admitted that the law was a burden they could not bear. We are not under the stipulations of the OT law.

2. Life under the NC is far better than life under the OC. The OC provided laws but no enablement to keep those laws. The OC was written on stone and on tablets—vs. 7 “written and engraved on stones.” But the NC is internal; it’s written by the Spirit on the hearts of believers. The value of the NC exceeds the value of the OC. Vs. 11 “what remains is much more glorious.” The NC is a far better system to be under.

**Quote:** The old covenant and its ministry belonged to a vanishing order, an economy that began to fade immediately after its inception, as was typified by the divine glory reflected on Moses’ face—a glory that began to fade as soon as he left the divine presence. On the other hand, the new covenant and its ministry began in splendor and will always be invested with glory, for it constitutes God’s final word to humankind.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 291.

So this passage shows us that the NC is more glorious than the OC. The OC was glorious, but the NC is far more glorious. The OC has passed away, and what remains now is the NC.

Although some still today seek to apply OT regulations to NT saints, we should not do so.

We live in the church age, not under the law of Moses. The “ministry of the Spirit” has replaced the “ministry of death.”

We should have a deep appreciation for the fact that we approach God under the NC, not under the old. Jesus is “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” His final sacrifice and his resurrection fulfilled and concluded the operation of the OC. We should understand that, and we should be glad that we function under NC, the ministry of the Spirit, the ministry of righteousness, that does not fade away.

Unlike the OC, you have to be saved to be under the NC. You can’t just obey the rules and think that you are under the NC. Jesus is the mediator of the NC, and the only way to enjoy the privileges of the NC is to trust in Jesus to save you from your sin. The law condemns, and the solution to that condemnation is the righteousness that Jesus provides for those who repent of their sin and trust in Him to save them.