

2 Cor 3:7-18 The Surpassing Glory of the New Covenant, part 2

In our modern age, we often replace old things with new things. Every so often, we upgrade to newer and better things. New phones replace old ones, new TVs and computers replace old ones, new products and services replace old ones.

That can also be true in a theological sense—the new takes the place of 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.

In today’s passage, Paul presents for us the surpassing glory of the New Covenant. Last time, we looked at the first part of this passage (.7-11), in which Paul’s main point is that The New Covenant is more glorious than the Old Covenant.

Now we can go on to the next part of this passage: vss. 12-18

I. The experience of church age believers is better than the experience of Moses.
.12-18

.12 This confidence in the value of the NC should give us great boldness. The word “boldness” (KJV “plainness”) ($\pi\alpha\rho\rho\eta\sigma\acute{\alpha}$) means “fearlessness, forthrightness, frankness, freedom to speak one’s mind.” Paul never feared to proclaim his message; he was bold and unapologetic in his teaching.

Like Paul, we should be courageous and bold in our proclamation of the Gospel message. The unsaved world is very bold in its claims; there are many bold, fearless spokesmen for the unbiblical messages we hear in the media, the government, education, entertainment, and almost all other parts of the culture. There is no lack of bold spokesmen for anti-Christian ideas.

We should be confident and bold in our proclamation of Christian ideas. We should have “great boldness.” As long as we still have freedom of speech, we should use it boldly and fearlessly. We should stand up confidently and forthrightly for the Xn message and for Xn values.

In vss. 13f, Paul tells us why the experience of the church age believer is better than the experience of Moses.

A. The Jews have certain hindrances to belief. Why do the Jews not believe in Jesus?

1. .13-14 They have a veil over their minds.

The allusion/reference here is to Ex 34:34, where Moses would take down his veil when he went into the tabernacle to talk to God.

Just like Moses had that veil over his face, the Jews have a sort of veil over their minds.

2. .14a Their minds are blind.

The word “blinded” ($\pi\omega\rho\omega$) means “to cover with a thick skin, to be callused over.” It refers to something that has grown hard or dull. It refers to something that is insensitive or that causes blindness.

Likewise, the Jews are insensitive and blind to the claims of the Gospel. They don’t see it; it doesn’t make sense to them.

Remember that Moses frequently accused the Israelites of being “stiffnecked” and rebellious (Ex 32-34); they were unresponsive to God and his commandments.

3. .14 And this hardness/blindness pertains to their “minds” ($\nu\omega\eta\mu\alpha$), i.e., their thoughts, their understanding. This veil prevented them from grasping the significance of the Gospel.

4. .15 A “veil lies on their heart.”

“when Moses is read” – i.e., when they read the OT, especially the books of Moses (the Pentateuch—the law). Jews would read the Law of Moses when they attended the synagogue.

They can read the OT, but they don’t understand how it points to Christ. I.e., their understanding is covered; they did not understand that the OC was temporary. They failed to see how the NC was inaugurated by Christ.

The OT is full of types, pictures, shadows, and prophecies about the coming Messiah. All of these are fulfilled in Christ; but in order to understand that, God has to remove the veil. Even Jesus’ own disciples didn’t understand how the OT pointed to him until Jesus himself explained it to them and “opened their understanding” (Luke 24:45).

Quote: Those Israelites did not grasp the glory of the Old Covenant because of their unbelief. As a result, the meaning of the Old Covenant was obscure to them.¹

In many cases, it still is. The Jewish people as a whole have not turned to Jesus in faith. They failed to see how Jesus was their Messiah.

Illus.: Some of you are familiar with the work of Ben Shapiro. He's a conservative political commentator and author, and I appreciate much of what he has to say. He's also Jewish. I recently listened to one of his speeches in which he explains his rejection of Jesus' claims to be the Messiah. I know that Shapiro has been exposed to the Gospel on many occasions. I know he had an interview with John MacArthur. Yet he persists in his rejection of Christ. Why? There may be many reasons, but one of those reasons is that a veil lies over his heart and his eyes are blind. He's very sharp in many ways, but he cannot see that Jesus is the fulfillment of all those OT prophecies.

Lack of belief is a spiritual problem, not an intellectual one. Conversion to Christ is not merely arguing someone into submission. A spiritual transformation must happen; "ye must be born again."

B. .16 NT believers have this veil taken away.

1. This veil is taken away when someone "turns to the Lord." The implication in this word "turn" (*ἐπιστρέψῃ*) is turning in repentance and faith.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 ... *you turned (ἐπεστρέψατε) to God from idols to serve the living and true God,*

In fact, this expression "turn to the Lord" is basically synonymous with salvation (cf. Acts 9:35, 11:21, 14:15, etc.).

Implicit in this word "turn" is repentance; to be saved, one must turn from sin and turn to Christ in faith.

2. .14end "the veil is taken away in Christ." The only way to truly understand the OT is through Christ. Jesus gives us the right interpretation of the OT.

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 2 Co 3:14.

Christians believe that Jesus fulfills all those OT shadows, types, and prophecies. All the mysteries of the OT are cleared up by Jesus.

If you don't believe in Jesus, the veil remains in place. Those types, shadows, and prophecies are unfulfilled. The lack of understanding remains as long as the veil remains in place.

3. When you go before the Lord, the veil is taken away. The veil is lifted when you turn to Christ in faith. Jews in particular need to see that Christ is the end/fulfillment of the law (Rom 10:4).

Illus.: Someone like Ben Shapiro is quite familiar with the claims of Christ. No doubt he has been challenged to accept the Gospel many times. But no human argument is going to make him become a believer in Jesus. The Spirit of God has to do that work. Cf. Rom 1:16. We should pray for his salvation.

This blindness is true of the Jews, but what about other unbelievers? Is a veil over their minds, too?

Note vs 16—"whenever one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." The grammar here (*ἥνικα δὲ ἐπιστρέψῃ*) refers to anybody, whoever. So it seems that this blindness is universal; all lost people are blind and dead in sin before they turn to Christ in faith.

App: As we witness to people, we should remember that they won't understand unless the veil is taken away. God has to grant spiritual understanding. We don't argue people into salvation; we merely present the Gospel and urge people to accept it. We urge people to "turn to the Lord." Only the Spirit of God can convince someone of the truth and remove the veil.

I wonder if the veil has been removed for you? Can you say "I once was blind, but now I see"? Only when you turn to the Lord will that veil be removed. Only through repentance of sin and faith in Jesus will your blindness be turned to sight.

C. .17-18 NT believers enjoy the work of the Spirit.

.17 "the Lord is the Spirit" – the same Lord from the OT is the Spirit who is now working through the NC. It's the same Lord, but now the NC is in operation, not the OC.

Remember that the NC is the era of the Spirit, not the law. So when a person accepts Christ, he enjoys a new sense of freedom.

1. .17b The Spirit produces “liberty.”

a) Christianity is well known for having a robust set of restrictions—limitations, laws, rules. So in what sense does God give us liberty/freedom?

(1) Believers are free from the veil that caused blindness and lack of understanding. The “veil” is taken away in Christ; that veil is no longer blinding us from understanding the NT teaching about Jesus.

(2) Believers are free from the OC. Paul describes the OC as “the ministry of death” (vs. 8). We are not under the stipulations of the OT law; we are free from its death and condemnation.

In Gal 4, Paul teaches that those under the OC were slaves in a sense, while those under the NC are free. Faith in Christ sets us free from subservience to the OT law.

(3) We also have freedom of access to God, just like Moses had when he talked with God on the mountain or in the tabernacle—face to face. There is no veil, nothing getting in the way of our direct communication with God.

1 Tim 2:5 *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;*

(4) We are also free from the dominion of sin. The OC was the ministry of death and condemnation. But now, Rom 8:1—“no condemnation...”

So Christians are free in many ways.

What he’s *not* talking about is freedom from moral constraints or laws. We are free from the stipulations of the OT law, but not from the law of Christ and not from God’s moral law.

A common claim people have today is that, since we are not under the condemnation of the OT law, we are free from law altogether. We are no longer under the letter of the law; now we have the freedom of the Spirit. Thus, they say, we don't have to worry about rules and regulations; we are free to live however we want.

That, obviously, is a wrong understanding of this freedom. We are under the law—not the OT law, not the law of Moses, but the law of Christ. We are still under the moral expectations of the NT. We are *not* free from God's moral law.

2. .18 The Spirit produces transformation.
 - a) The Spirit produces *progressive* transformation.
 - (1) .18 The Spirit of the Lord is working to change us “from glory to glory.” The OT has glory, and religious life under the OC was good. But the NT has a greater glory; life under the NC is far better than life under the OC.
 - (a) The word “transformed” ($\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\mu\sigma\varphi\omega$) is the basis of the word “metamorphosis.” Christianity produces a radical transformation in the life of believers.
 - (b) The “image” here is Christ. We are being transformed to be more Christ-like. God is working in our lives to conform us more closely to that image.
 - (2) The Spirit of God converts us to Christ, frees us from the bondage of the OT law, and transforms us to be more Christ-like. All Christians ought to be experiencing that process.

If you are *not* experiencing transformation, there is something wrong. Either you are not saved, or you are living disobediently, or you are failing to use the resources that God provides. All Christians ought to be experiencing transformation.

Quote: This glory is the experience of salvation available in the New Covenant and mediated by the Spirit who leads Christians from justification through sanctification to glorification.²

3. The Spirit produces *final* transformation.

Ultimately, we will be like Christ. Cf. 1 John 3:2—when we shall see him, we shall be like him. Our final state will be glorification. We will be with Christ in glory. That's our final destiny. We won't experience that on this side of heaven, but we will get there eventually.

.18end And how does all of this happen? “just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

The OC was a set of external laws that no one could keep. The NC is internal, written on the heart. All believers have the power to obey God because of the work of the Spirit within us.

How does this transformation happen? Through the means of grace—the word of God, prayer, worship, instruction, fellowship, evangelism, and service. As we yield ourselves to God, he changes us by his Spirit.

This whole section is a long contrast and comparison between two ministries, two covenants, and two persons. On the one hand, we have the OC given by God to Moses. That covenant had glory and it was appropriate for a certain place and time. But Jesus initiated the NC with his death and resurrection. The glory of the NC far exceeds the glory of the OC. That's Paul's main point in this passage.

The Jews, unfortunately, still are veiled and blinded to the truth of the NC. All unbelievers are similarly blind. Christians, on the other hand, see the glory of God through Christ; the veil is removed. As Christians look on Christ, they are transformed progressively throughout this life, and ultimately will be glorified at the resurrection when Jesus returns.

If you are a Christian, the veil is removed. You ought to be experiencing transformation to be more Christ-like.

If you are not a Christian, your understanding is veiled. The solution to that problem is faith in Christ. You must turn to the Lord to have the veil removed. Repent of your sin and trust in Christ to save you.

² David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 562.

2Co 3:12 *Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech* — because we believe that God can remove the veil, we proclaim the Gospel boldly. Only when people turn to the Lord is the veil removed, and so it's our great privilege to proclaim the Gospel with “great boldness of speech.”