

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

IN THIS WORLD, WE EXPERIENCE SUFFERINGS: BUT GLORY IS COMING

SECOND CORINTHIANS

✠ II CORINTHIANS

An overview of the Book of Second Corinthians, by Given O. Blakely

Lesson # 13

COMMENTARY ON: 3:7-9

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

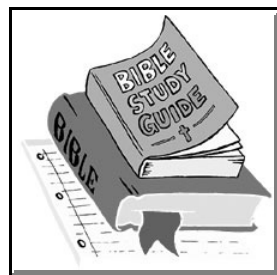
"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

CONTRASTING COVENANTS

The understanding of the nature and content of the New Covenant is essential to a proper comprehension of the Scriptures. What has occurred in Christ Jesus is so distinctive that it cannot be precisely compared with anything in nature. It is also noticeably different from the Old Covenant, wherein God maintained His relationship to Israel. This latter distinction is the focus of this passage. We will see that these two covenants – the "Old Covenant" and the "New Covenant," or the "First Covenant" and "the Second" – differ in purpose, content, nature, and effects. These differences are not slight, but are enormous in both expression and implication. Here we are provided rare insight into Paul's understanding of the things of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven"



Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Epistle of Second Corinthians

Lesson Number 13



TRANSLATION LEGEND: AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible, ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), *ESV=English Stand Version* (2001), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version, KJV=King James Version (1611), LIVING = Living Bible, MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament, NKJV=New King James Version (1982), NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster=The Webster Bible 1833, YLT=Young's Literal Translation (1862). WEYMOUTH=Weymouth's New Testament, WILLIAMS = William's New Testament.

LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG=Friberg Lexicon, UBS=UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA=Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT=Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER=Thayer's Greek Lexicon

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

CONTRASTING COVENANTS

“ 3:7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: ⁸ How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? ⁹ For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.” ^{KJV} (2 Cor 3:7-9)

INTRODUCTION

The absolute uniqueness of the New Covenant is unparalleled. It is not after the manner of the covenant God made with Israel, when He brought them out of the land of Egypt – the covenant He made with them at Sinai. It is not a covenant of commandments, or an agreement consisting of various procedures and routines. That is the kind of covenant that was made with Israel – a covenant that “stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal

ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation” (Heb 9:10). The AMPLIFIED BIBLE reads, “For [the ceremonies] deal only with clean and unclean meats and drinks and different washings, [mere] external rules and regulations for the body imposed to tide the worshipers over until the time of setting things straight [of reformation, of the complete new order when Christ, the Messiah, shall establish the reality of what these things foreshadow—a better

covenant].” That former covenant had “regulations of divine worship,”^{NASB} (Heb 9:1). It’s High Priests were ordained according to “a law of physical requirement”^{NASB} (Heb 7:16), and dealt with “the elemental things of the world”^{NASB} (Gal 4:3).

The Old Covenant did not change the people themselves. In fact, it was “weak through the flesh,” or “weakened by the flesh [the entire nature

The Old and New Covenants are Different in Purpose, Content, and Effects— by Given O. Blakely

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of man without the Holy Spirit]. ^{AMPLIFIED}
 So far as moral and spiritual change was concerned, that first covenant was no stronger than the peopole to whom it was addressed. The covenant itself relied upon the people, not the God who made the covenant. That is why it is written that **the people broke the covenant**, even though God Himself was like a husband to them. As it is written, *“Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD”* (Jer 31:32).

The old Covenant confirmed that Divine requirements cannot, of themselves, make the people good. Sin has causes a certain spiritual deformity within man. This disfigurement is so pervasive, that even the goodness of God, and His tender mercies cannot change the people. Even when they were given remarkable advantages, and the Lord was longsuffering and merciful toward them, they still broke HIS covenant. That covenant was *“weak through the flesh.”*

In our time (2004), there is a

remarkable amount of religious effort that approaches “the Christian life” in precisely the manner of the Old Covenant. Many requirements and outward ordinances are set forth. People are taught that God’s love, and the gracious gifts that He gives to them, will somehow change them, and even make them better. **But this is not the case, for if such a view was true, Israel would surely have been transformed!** Hear God cry out to wayward Israel.

- ☛ *“The LORD did not **set His love upon you**, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because **the LORD loved you**, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt”* (Deut 7:7-8).
- ☛ *“**Since thou wast precious in My sight**, thou hast been honourable, and **I have loved thee**: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life”* (Isa 43:4).
- ☛ *“**For thy Maker is thine husband**; the LORD of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall He be called”* (Isa 54:5).
- ☛ *“Thus saith the LORD; **I remember thee**, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown”* (Jer 2:2)
- ☛ *“Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for **I am married unto***

you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion” (Jer 3:14).

- ☛ *“Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and **thou becamest Mine**. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil”* (Ezek 16:8-9).

How could Israel be so obstinate, breaking the covenant made by such a merciful and loving God? **If love changes people, then why did not Divine love change those with whom God made the “First Covenant”?** If the bestowment of external blessings, Divine protection and provision, and Divine choice itself could effectively change the character of God’s *“offspring”* (Acts 17:28), then why did Israel remain obstinate, breaking the covenant made by the Almighty? Why were they described in such reprehensible words? Do you recall those descriptions?

- ☛ *“And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people”* (Exo 32:9; Deut 9:13).
- ☛ *“ . . . for thou art a stiffnecked people”* (Ex 33:3).
- ☛ *“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of*

The old Covenant confirmed that Divine requirements cannot, of themselves, make the people good. Sin has causes a certain spiritual deformity within man. This disfigurement is so pervasive, that even the goodness of God, and His tender mercies cannot change the people.

men” (Isa 29:13).

- “Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass” (Isa 48:4).
- “. . . they are a rebellious people” (Ezek 3:26).

It is certainly not that God did not

weeping prophet. “For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot. Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me? For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much

If, in fact, God can write His laws upon the heart and put them into the mind, with no consequent change of nature, then there is really nothing unique about the New Covenant.

do enough for them. He actually did place His love upon them (Deut 7:7). He effectively brought them out of Egypt with a “high hand” (Ex 14:8). The Lord brought them through the middle of the Red Sea “on dry ground” (Ex 14:16). He led them “through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint” (Deut 8:15). His tender association with them was very real. It was not theoretical. They actually did experience love, mercy, direction, and lovingkindness.

The Lord describes His care for Israel as thorough and without any deficiency whatsoever. “And He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” (Isa 5:4). Hear Him speak through Jeremiah, the

soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord GOD” (Jer 2:20-22).

These texts are revealing the manner of the Old Covenant – a covenant that was “weak through the flesh.” Although the Lord showed them “signs and wonders, great and sore” (Deut 6:22; Neh 9:10; Jer 32:20), their hearts were not toward Him. He brought them out of Egypt “with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror.” He gave them, the “land” which He “did swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; and they came in and possessed it,” according to His promise. Yet, in the very next breath Jeremiah says, “But they obeyed not Thy voice, neither walked in Thy law; they have done nothing of all that Thou commandest them to do” (Jer 32:20-23).

The Divine epitaph over all of these things is this: “**which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them**” (Jer 31:32). The Spirit’s recapitulation is given in Hebrews 8:9: “because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.” They broke God’s covenant in spite of Divine love and forbearance. In so

doing, they confirmed the manner of that covenant. It was “weak,” not being able to change the people, make them willing, or suit them for Divine fellowship.

This is **not** the manner of the New Covenant – even though such circumstances are often found within professed Christendom that are of such magnitude that it boggles the sober mind. However, these miserable conditions have nothing whatsoever to do with the New Covenant! They do not reflect life in Christ Jesus, or being led by the Spirit of God. **These are not the conditions that follow the writing of God’s law upon the heart, and the placing of it within the mind.** Those who truly “know the Lord” do not conduct themselves in an unacceptable manner. Recalcitrance, waywardness, being dull of hearing, and loving the world are all traits of the flesh.

A religious profession that is not supported by the declared realities of the New Covenant cannot be true. It seems to me that modern Christendom has not come to grips with this reality. If, in fact, God can write His laws upon the heart and put them into the mind, with no consequent change of nature, then there is really nothing unique about the New Covenant. In such a case, it is not a “better covenant,” as the Spirit affirms (Heb 8:6). If people can “know the Lord,” yet remain stiff-necked and hardhearted, then “the manner” of the New Covenant is no different than that of the Old.

With great clarity, the Lord says the New Covenant is “**not according to the covenant I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt**” (Heb 8:9). The Spirit will now expound this at length, confirming the glory of the New Covenant. He will do this in a characteristic manner – making a comparison of something that is superior with something inferior. The things that will be compared were both given and ordained by God. However, their purposes were not identical. One was intended to be temporal, the other was connected with an “eternal purpose.” One identified human flaw, the other provided and proclaimed an acceptable and effective remedy for the human condition.

THE MINISTRATION OF DEATH

^{3:7} *But if the ministration of death . . .*”

The Spirit will now confirm to us the manner of the Old Covenant – **the kind** of covenant it was. He will speak forthrightly about this matter. In fact, there is a certain abrasiveness to the way in which He speaks – at least to the flesh. He speaks in this way because of the issues that are at stake. **The redemption that is in Christ Jesus does not leave people under a system of Law.** It does not allow for men to remain in sin. There is **no** provision for “an evil heart of unbelief” (Heb 3:12), quenching the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19), grieving the Spirit (Eph 4:30), or being “carnally minded” (Rom 8:6). These things will be emphasized in a telling comparison of the Old and New Covenants.

BUT IF

“But if . . .” Other versions read, “If,” NIV “Now if,” DOUAY “If then,” GENEVA “But if,” NAU “Yet that,” LIVING and “If, however.” WEYMOUTH

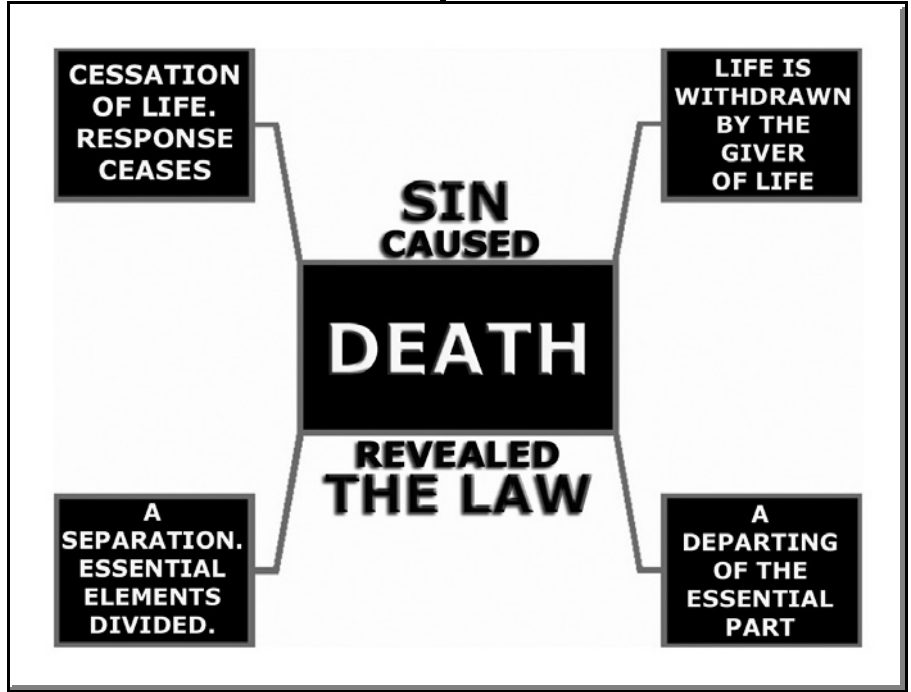
If the law of God is put into the minds of those who are in Christ Jesus (Heb 8:10), **then thinking should be one of their strong points.** For this reason, the Spirit will make a strong appeal to the mind. He will give us something to muse upon – a comparison to make, and a condition to ponder. We will be summoned to consider the nature of both covenants, and to take the resulting thoughts and put them into the mainstream of our thinking. He will show us that it is totally unreasonable to live as though we were under Law – the Old Covenant. It is utter insanity to approach life as though our association with the Living God is a distant one in which we are at variance with Him in both our thoughts and ways.

The word “**IF**” is to thinking what a fork in the road is to a traveler. In this case, it calls upon us to consider two ways, knowing that only one of them can be chosen. Enough is revealed of both ways to enable a proper choice. We will be exhorted to choose the best way.

MINISTRATION

“ . . . the ministration . . . ” Other versions read, “**ministry,**” NKJV “**dispensation,**” RSV “**operation,**” BBE

Now we will be told what purpose the Law, or the Old Covenant, served. **What did it accomplish?** What did it cause to happen? What was the needful



“**administering,**” NJB “**system,**” NLT “**religious service,**” WEYMOUTH

The word “**ministration**” means a service, or what is being ministered. THAYER It is an “**arrangement for provision,**” FRIEBERG or the means through which a certain thing is ministered or conferred. It is also a work that helps something along, LOUW-NIDA causing it to take place.

The Greek word from which “**ministration**” is translated (διακονία – dea-kon-ia) is used in reference to the distribution of food to widows (“**ministration,**” Acts 6:1), the “**ministry of the Word**” of God (Acts 6:4), serving God’s people (“**ministering,**” Rom 12:7), and a collection that was given to poor saints (“**administration,**” 2 Cor 9:12). In each of these cases, “**ministration**” refers to something that served a certain purpose, or accomplished a certain objective. It is the means by which an appointed objective is realized.

service that it performed?

DEATH

“ . . . of death . . . ” Other versions read, “**that brought death,**” NIV “**giving death,**” BBE “**led to death,**” NLT and “**that proclaims death.**” WEYMOUTH

The “**operation of the Law**” BBE brought, or caused, death. That was the work that it was assigned to do. It is true that the Law was represented as a means to life: “**Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them. I am the LORD**” (Lev 18:5). That provision, however, depended upon man, not God. Paul affirmed of the Law, “**And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death**” (Rom 7:10).

Defining Death

Although a proper understanding of the word “**death**” is essential to

spiritual understanding, the *Christian* world is not at all united in its view of this subject.

The word “*death*” comes from the Greek word *θανάτου* (than-a-too). The meaning of this word has several different views.

- **The cessation of life.** If life consists of reciprocity to one’s environment, the cessation of life is the inability to respond to the environment. In fleshly life, death would be the cessation any response to this realm – no breath, no sensation, no connection. Spiritually it would involve the absence of an ability to respond to God, and being cut off from the source of life.
- **A separation.** Man is a complex

leaves the body, departing from it (2 Cor 5:8). Rachel’s death was described in these words: “*as her soul was in departing, (for she died)*” (Gen 35:18). Spiritually, death occurs when the individual departs from the living God (Heb 3:12).

In this text, the spiritual aspect of death is addressed. The four views of death may be thus defined.

- There is no further capacity to properly respond to God. The various ministrations of God to the inner man can no longer be enjoyed: i.e. peace, joy, inner strength, etc.
- There is a separation of the person from God. This is a state of alienation from, hostility to, and variance with,

The Law made no provision for recovery, provided no strength for doing, and was merciless to the transgressor. It thundered relentlessly, “*the soul that sinneth, it shall die*” (Ezek 18:4,20). It announced to all humanity what God declared to its progenitor Adam, “*thou shalt surely die*” (Gen 2:17).

Forty times the Law mandated “*put to death*” (Ex 21:12,15,16,17,29; 22:19; 31:14,16; 35:2; Lev 19:20; 20:2,9,10, 11,12,13,15,16,27; 24:16,17,21; 27:29; Num 1:51; 3:10,38; 15:35; 18:7; 35:16,17, 18,21,30,31; Deut 13:5; 17:6; 21:22).

The above texts declare death to be the penalty for murder, stealing a man and making a slave of him, cursing father or mother, and a person whose ox had killed a person after the owner had warned that the animal was dangerous. Death was imposed upon a person who lay with a beast, sacrificed to any god but the Lord, or worked on the Sabbath day. The adulterer and fornicator had the sentence of death passed upon them. Those who offered the children to the idol Molech were condemned to death. Incest, sodomy, and bestiality were accompanied by death. Someone with a “*familiar spirit*” was sentenced to death, as well as anyone who blasphemed the Lord. A stranger, or non-Jew, who came near while the Levites were setting up the Tabernacle, was to be put to death. If such a person came near while the high priest or priests were executing their office, that person was sentenced to death. A stranger who set up camp close to the tabernacle was to be put to death. The false prophet was sentenced to death, as well as a anyone known to have worshiped other gods.

That is a “*ministration of death.*” The Law, or “*First Covenant,*” did not deliver life, but death. **Its work was not to bring men life, but to impose death upon them.** That is what it did. That is what it was designed to do.

Men blithely think themselves to be wise enough to set up procedures by which their peers can be made better – made more alive. They imagine that this is the way for improvement to be made. Indeed, on a purely earthly level, there may be some minuscule value to such thinking: i.e. diet, physical conditioning, accomplishing a complex task, etc.

The Law set before men a standard that was too aggressive for man to meet – however, it was a standard that MUST be met if men are to stand favorably and beneficially before the Lord.

being – made in the image of God. In the most detailed sense, he is comprised of spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23). The spirit and soul are the unseen part. Only the Word of God, living and active, can distinguish between the two (Heb 4:12). The body is the seen part. In the flesh, death is the separation of the unseen part from the seen part. Spiritually, death is separation from God.

- **The withdrawing of life.** In this view, death is the result of the Giver of life withdrawing it. Only He has the power to give or withdraw life. In the flesh, death occurs when the time appointed to die arrives, and our numbered days are fulfilled. Spiritually, death occurs when God withdraws from the individual.
- **A departure.** In this view, the individual is seen as fundamentally a spirit that is housed in a body. In the flesh, death occurs when the spirit

the Living God.

- Life is withdrawn from the individual by the Lord Himself: that is, the condition is the result of His judgment. Death is, in fact, imposed upon the one who is, in this sense, “*dead.*”
- There is a deliberate departure from God, like the running of Adam. The presence of God causes fear, moving the person to conduct his life without a due regard for the Lord.

This is a somewhat crude overview of the “*death*” that is ministered, or brought on, by the Law – the “*First Covenant.*” That is, it is what the “*First Covenant*” was intended to do, and it is what it effectively accomplished. **It set before men a standard that was too aggressive for man to meet – however, it was a standard that MUST be met if men are to stand favorably and beneficially before the Lord.**

However, these are not the things that are addressed in Scripture. They are not a proper **focus** regarding spiritual life, and must never be approached as though they were.

When God delivered a moral code to men, it was *“holy, and the commandment holy just and good”* (Rom 7:12). **If following a code can actually make one acceptable to God, such a Law of commandments would do so.** However, life was not the outcome of the Law. Rather, it ministered death: it was *“the ministration of death.”* If any person tended to think they were acceptable in the sight of God, the Law – the *“letter”* or the *“First Testament”* – threw that person to the ground, so to speak, and put him to death.

Conscious Death

The *“ministration of death”* does not initiate death, but confirms that it already exists. I have called this a *“conscience death,”* which appears to be a contradiction of terms. However, we are speaking of being dead toward God.

Paul provides us a personal testimony of the *“ministration of death.”* **It is in great detail, and phrased in such a way as to help us make sense of our past.**

Romans 7:7-13

⁷ What then do we conclude? Is the Law identical with sin? Certainly not! Nevertheless, if it had not been for the Law, I should not have recognized sin *or* have known its meaning. [For instance] I would not have known about covetousness [would have had no consciousness of sin or sense of guilt] if the Law had not [repeatedly] said, You shall not covet *and* have an evil desire [for one thing and another]. [Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21.]

⁸ But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment [to express itself], got a hold on me *and* aroused *and* stimulated all kinds of forbidden desires (lust, covetousness). For without the Law sin is dead [the sense of it is inactive and a lifeless thing].

⁹ Once I was alive, but quite apart from *and* unconscious of the Law. But when the commandment came, sin lived again and I died (was sentenced by the Law to death). [Ps. 73:22.]

¹⁰ And the very legal ordinance which was designed *and* intended to bring life actually proved [to mean to me] death. [Lev. 18:5.]

¹¹ For sin, seizing the opportunity *and* getting a hold on me [by taking its incentive] from the commandment, beguiled *and* entrapped *and* cheated me,

and using it [as a weapon], killed me.

¹² The Law therefore is holy, and [each] commandment is holy and just and good.

¹³ Did that which is good then prove fatal [bringing death] to me? Certainly not! It was sin, working death in me by using this good thing [as a weapon], in order that through the commandment sin might be shown up clearly to be sin, that the extreme malignity and immeasurable sinfulness of sin might plainly appear.” AMPLIFIED BIBLE

Here we have a remarkably precise and extensive commentary on *“the ministration of death.”* The following observations have become clear to me.

- It is not what man DOES that is the issue, but what he IS within. The Law identifies the aberrant nature of fallen man, and condemns it.

- The commandment *“comes”* when the truth, or reality, of it registers upon the conscience. It comes home to the sinner that he is not acceptable to God at all, but is rather under the wrath of God and condemned *“already.”*

- Even though the Law promised *“life”* to the person who perfectly executed its demands, the one whose conscience is awakened comes to realize that the Law requires the person to do things that are beyond all natural ability.

- The awareness of condemnation and the sentence of death was ministered by the Law, but it was not **caused** by

If following a code can actually make one acceptable to God, such a Law of commandments would do so. However, life was not the outcome of the Law. Rather, it ministered

- The Law ministered death by means of a defiled conscience, convicting the defilement of a sinful nature.

- “The flesh,”* or *“the natural man,”* is so corrupt that it is aroused and stimulated into activity by the holy, good, and just Law of God.

- The Law caused sin to tighten its grip upon men, releasing all manner of unlawful desires.

- Without the Law, sin does not appear to be what it really is. It is *“dead”* in the sense of not being seen for what it is, even appearing to be inactive.

- Being *“alive”* apart from the Law is not real life before God, but a condition that natural men **perceive** as being normal and good. Without the definitive ministry of the Law, men, by nature, invent their own definition of sin – a definition that allows for the condition of men living at a distance from God, satisfied with fulfilling a mere religious routine.

the Law. The ultimate agent of death was sin that worked death within.

- Thus sin, so easily glossed by the one enslaved by it, comes to be seen for what it really is – *“exceedingly sinful.”* That is, sin did not actually become worse, but our perception of it became more keen. We were brought to recognize its real nature.

The *“First Covenant,”* or *“the letter,”* delivered, or served up, death. It caused those who paid attention to it to know what sin had done in them, and how the need of a Savior was urgent. It was in this sense that the Law was our *“Schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ”* (Gal 3:24). It made us aware that we were dead and needed life; we were alienated and need to be reconciled; we were hostile and needed to be at peace; we were guilty and needed to be forgiven.

We ought to note the bane of the psychological approaches that have become so dominant in our time.

Extensive efforts are being expended to explain sin rather than get rid of it. **The professing church has adopted a posture that refuses to acknowledge the presence of death, alienation, and outright hostility against God.** Concurrently, it has become enamored of a procedural religion, and has become rule-oriented, all the while blissfully unaware that the First Covenant confirmed the absolute futility of such an

approach.

This is not a minor or insignificant departure from the truth. Rather, it is a subtle return to the ministration of the Old Covenant, and death is the result. The lack of response to God that pervades the churches is the direct result of what is being taught. It reflects the thrust of the theology that is extant in the land. The theologians have

planted a tree that resembles the “*First Testament*,” yet is vastly inferior to it. This subtle attempt to regulate wayward flesh is not bringing men to Christ, as the Law was designed to do. It does not smite the conscience, as the holy commandment did. It does not bring the soul to an acute awareness of sin within, as the holy Law did. This new fabrication is providing a convenient explanation for sin that leaves the wayward soul comfortable in iniquity.

WRITTEN AND ENGRAVEN ON STONES

^{7b} . . . *written and engraven in stones . . .*”

The Spirit will remove all ground for speculation on this matter. He will not point us to the ceremonial law, or the ordinances promulgated because of the nature of the Old Covenant. Rather, He will take us straight to the heart of the matter. He will affirm precisely what it was that caused “*death*” to become apparent.

accomplished by God, not Moses. The writing was accomplished two times.

The First Time

Of the first it is written that God said to Moses, “*And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to Me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them*” (Ex 24:12). Again it is said, “*And He gave unto Moses, when He had*

frolicking in iniquity. Of that occasion it is written, “*And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount*” (Ex 32:19). At the end of Moses’ life, he reminded Israel of what he had done: “*And I took the two tables, and cast them out of my two hands, and brake them before your eyes*” (Deut 9:17).

The Spirit will remove all ground for speculation on this matter. He will not point us to the ceremonial law, or the ordinances promulgated because of the nature of the Old Covenant. Rather, He will take us straight to the heart of the matter.

The next time God wrote, **Moses** had to hew out the tables himself. Of that occasion it is written, “*And the LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest*” (Ex 34:1). Moses recounted this at the end of his life, providing some details. “*At that time the LORD said unto me, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto Me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood. And I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark. And I made an ark of shittim wood, and hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and went up into the mount, having the two tables in mine hand. And He wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the LORD spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly: and the LORD gave them unto me. And I turned myself and came down from the mount, and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and there they be, as the LORD*

WRITTEN AND ENGRAVEN

“ . . . written and engraven . . . ”

Other versions read, “*written and engraved,*” ^{NKJV} “*letters engraved,*” ^{NASB} “*engraved in letters,*” ^{NIV} “*chiseled in letters,*” ^{NRSV} “*carved in letters,*” ^{RSV} “*recorded in letters,*” ^{BBE} and “*etched in stone.*” ^{NLT}

The obvious reference is to the “*Ten Commandments*” themselves, which were the “*words of the covenant*” (Ex 34:28). The writing itself was

made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God” (Ex 31:18). Again it is written of that first inscribing, “*And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables*” (Ex 32:16).

The Second Time

The second writing of these tables took place because Moses broke the first tables when he saw the Israelites

commanded me” (Deut 10:1-5).

The Emphasis Is On the Writing

Note that the focus is on the writing itself, not the language in which they were written. It was the ORIGIN of the commandments that was the point. In order to remove the tendency of human interpretation, these commandments were not only spoken (Ex 20:18-19; Heb 2:2), they were also written.

IN STONES

“... in stones...” Other versions read, “on stones,”^{NKJV} “on stone tablets,”^{NRSV} “on stone,”^{BBE} and “in stones.”^{DARBY}

Moses wrote the statutes and ordinances of the Law, as well as the commandments themselves, in a “book” (Ex 17:14; Deut 17:18; 31:24). The high priest wore a plate of gold upon his forehead upon which the words were written, “**HOLINESS TO THE LORD**,” or “**HOLY TO THE LORD**”^{NASB} (Ex 28:36). The curses to be pronounced by the priests were also written “in a book” (Num 5:23). The princes of the tribes wrote their names on their wooden rods (Num 17:2-3). The words the Lord commanded to Israel were to be written on “the doorposts” of their houses, and on their “gates” as well (Deut 6:9). Before

A covenant written upon stones is unalterable. There are no updates to it, and no taking away of something it has declared. Not only are the demands fixed, so are the judgments it renders, and the penalties it announces.

Moses died, he was command to write the song given to him, and teach it to the children of Israel (Deut 31:19). **But none of these writings were “in stone.”**

There were two different sets of stones upon which the Law of God was written. The Law was first written in the **tables of the covenant** – and they were written by God. The tables were filled with the words, being written on both sides – the front and the back (Ex 32:15). The second set of stones was **the altar of burnt offerings**. Of that altar it is written, “*Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones: and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God: and thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before the LORD thy God. And thou shalt write upon the stones all*

the words of this law very plainly” (Deu 27:6-8).

A covenant written upon stones is unalterable. There are no updates to it, and no taking away of something it has declared. Not only are the demands fixed, so are the judgments it renders, and the penalties it announces. Once the covenant is broken, the promises of blessing that attended it (Deut 28:3-14) are all rendered impossible, and all of its curses (Deut 28:15-68) are at once applicable.

It is not possible for “life” to be realized by means of a covenant that has been broken. Once broken, that covenant can only confer death, and that it does. It is “*the ministration of death.*”

IT WAS GLORIOUS

“*... was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance ...*”

There was a certain glory – Divine glory – that attended the First Covenant: “*the ministration of death.*” That “glory” was at its **beginning**, not its ending. The glory no longer was seen after that covenant was broken. Notwithstanding, the Spirit now focuses our attention on that initial glory. His intention is to confirm the more excellent glory, or nature, of the New Covenant over which Jesus presides.

GLORIOUS

“... was glorious...” Other versions read, “came with glory,”^{NASB}

“came in glory,”^{NRSV} “came with such splendor,”^{RSV} “came with glory,”^{ASV} “began with glory,”^{DARBY} “came with such glory,”^{ESV} “was so glorious,”^{NAB} “occurred in such glory,”^{NJB} “began with such glory,”^{NLT} and “was introduced with a splendor so great.”^{WILLIAMS}

We are now brought to consider the manner in which the Old Covenant was given – **how it was initiated**. The consideration here is not on the entirety or duration of that covenant, but upon **WHEN** it was given.

The words “*WAS glorious,*” therefore, points us to the beginning of the Old Covenant, when its glory was at its apex. We are not asked to consider that covenant during the time of the

Tabernacle (Ex 40:34), when the glory of the Lord filled that mobile sanctuary, or at the dedication of the Temple, when the glory of the Lord again filled the house (1 Kgs 8:11). During both of those occasions, the covenant had already been broken, and its glory was greatly diminished.

For a proper comparison to be made with the New Covenant, we must consider it at the peak of its glory, otherwise the comparison will be of no profit. **It is the Lord’s manner to make such comparisons.** For example, when considering man in his natural condition, David was inspired to say, “*Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah*” (Psa

39:5). Again, when pondering the Divine view of man's natural condition Isaiah wrote, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa 64:6). The man after God's own heart looked at himself and confessed to God, "my goodness extendeth not to Thee" (Psa 16:2).

Now, in keeping with this Divine manner, the Old, or First, Covenant will be viewed in its best possible light. The purpose of this view is not to assess the Law, critiquing it, so to speak. Rather, it is to substantiate that the covenant in which salvation is realized is, in fact, the better covenant.

A Point to Be Made

Right here there is a point that ought to be made about spiritual reasoning. It is the tendency of modern theologians to consider holy men of Scripture during their worst times, then use them as a sort of justification for the miserable conditions that exist among professed believers today. Thus they draw men's attention to the occasions when Abraham said Sarah was his sister (Gen 12:13,19; 20:2-12), when Isaac said Rebekah was his sister (Gen 26:7-9), when Jacob deceived Isaac (Gen 27:19), and when David committed adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2-5). Their purpose in appealing to these occasions is not the same as the Spirit's intention in revealing them. **In those cases, as well as others like them, there is a certain commentary on the frailty of the man's affiliation with God apart from Jesus, the Savior and Intercessor.**

When comparing saints living in inferior times with those living under the New Covenant, proper understanding will constrain the comparison to be made with those saints in their best posture – when the light was the clearest, and God was most obvious to them. Otherwise, the comparison is of no value.

There is another thing that is pertinent to this discussion. It will be developed at length in this passage, so some introductory words are all that is necessary at this point. **What is inferior cannot maintain the glory that it**

had in its beginning. What is superior will conclude in glory, as well as begin in glory. This reasoning can be applied to such notables as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, etc. In every case, their end was glorious.

Now, we will consider the glory of the First Testament – of its nature, and of its consequent duration.

THE FACE OF MOSES



“. . . so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance. . . ”

Other versions read, "could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance,"^{NKJV} "could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face,"^{NASB} "could not gaze at Moses' face,"^{NRSV} "could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness,"^{RSV} "so that the eyes of the children of Israel had to be turned away from the face of Moses because of its glory,"^{BBE} "could not fix their eyes on the face of Moses, on account of the glory of his face,"^{DARBY} "could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God,"^{NLT} and "could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God."^{WILLIAMS}

During the giving of the Law, Moses was exposed to the glory of the Lord. Moses had hewed out two tables of stone upon which the Lord would rewrite "the words of the covenant, the ten commandments." He "went up unto

mount Sinai, as the Lord commanded him," with the tables in his name (Ex 34:4). It was then that the Lord "descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord" (Ex 34:5). This was in answer to Moses' petition, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory" (Ex 33:18). The Lord had consented to do this, saying there was a place by Him, in which He would place Moses. The Lord said He would then pass by Him in glory, shielding Moses with His hand, lest he die. After the Lord's glory had past by, He would remove His hand, and Moses would see His "back" only – or the afterglow – lest he die (Ex 33:22-23). Moses then spent forty days in the presence of the Lord, during which he did not eat bread or drink water (Ex 34:28).

Following this revelation Moses "came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony" in his hand. However, he was not aware that the glory of the Lord had caused the skin of his face to shine. As it is written, "Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while He talked with him" (Ex 34:29). The record tells us that when Aaron and the children of Israel saw Moses' face, "they were afraid to come nigh him" – and he was only reflecting Divine glory! Once apprised of the situation, Moses veiled his face. As it is written, "And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face" (Ex 34:33).

Later, Moses "went in before the Lord" again, to speak with Him. During this time, "he took the veil off, until he came out." When he again confronted the people, the skin of his face was still aglow, so "Moses put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him [the Lord]." (Ex 34:34-35). **Although the details and precise time are not specified, Moses' face eventually ceased to shine with the brilliance of God's reflected glory.** Later, forgetful of that magnificent glory they once beheld, Israel would fearlessly murmur against Moses, of whom they were afraid at the holy mount (Num 14:2, 36; 16:41; 20:3).

The occasion when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the tables of the Law is the time to which this text refers. It was precisely at that time that Moses spoke out the covenant to the

people (Ex 35:1-35ff). The Covenant was made with attending glory, even though it was hidden from the people by veiling the face of Moses. This was, then, a “glorious” covenant: that is, **it was initially accompanied with a glory that had**

its source with God Himself. The glory was veiled, yet real. Here, it is attributed to the covenant itself.

The people could not fix their gaze upon Moses’ face. They could not look

steadfastly upon him. Their eyes were not suited for the glory that was reflected on the skin of his face. It was too bright for them. **That glory was extremely limited, yet far exceeded the ability of their vision.**

SOMETHING TO BE “DONE AWAY”

“*7d . . . which glory was to be done away.*”

It is not possible for “eternal

The spiritual precision of this statement is remarkable. Elsewhere the Spirit refers to Jesus being “*the end of the Law for righteousness*” (Rom 10:4).

It is not possible for “eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 5:10) to be attributed to something temporal. Therefore, the duration of a thing can be determined by the glory by which it is characterized.

glory” (2 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 5:10) to be attributed to something temporal. **Therefore, the duration of a thing can be determined by the glory by which it is characterized.** Moved by the Holy Spirit, Paul will reason with us concerning the inferiority of the Old Covenant, and the superiority of the New Covenant. He will draw his argument from the nature of the circumstances that attended the giving of covenant at Sinai. **Those circumstances reflected the nature of that First Covenant.** It was one that had a fading glory. In other words, it was characterized by the same nature as the death that it ministered – it declined.

WHICH GLORY

“*. . . which glory . . .*” Other versions read, “*a glory,*”^{BBE} “*this glory,*”^{NJB} “*the brightness,*”^{NLT} and “*the splendor.*”^{WILLIAMS}

This refers to the glory that attended the giving of the Old Covenant – the glory that was seen in Moses’ face.

That is, He has terminated the **Law as a means to the appropriation of righteousness.** In another place, referring to the Law as a Schoolmaster designed “*to bring us unto Christ,*” it is affirmed, “*But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster*” (Gal 3:25). Again, confirming the powerful effects of Christ’s death, it is written, “*Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace*” (Eph 2:15). Speaking in the same manner Colossians reads “*Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross*” (Col 2:14).

All of the above have to do with the cessation of the Law **as a covenant.** Righteousness can never be realized by keeping a code – even a God-ordained one. Jesus ended that approach. Once we have been brought to Christ, we are finished

with all means of getting us to Christ. Now we are under His tutelage, which is broader than the scope of Law, and thoroughly effectual. Jesus Himself now teaches us (Eph 4:20-21). The covenant that was encapsulated in commandments and implemented by means of “*carnal ordinances*” (Heb 9:10) has been removed by means of Christ’s death. This is powerfully revealed in the verses just cited.

However, in our text, the Spirit goes more to the heart of the matter. **The Old Covenant could rise no higher than the glory that attended it.** It could bring to men no more than the extent of the glory of God that accompanied it when it was given. **For that matter, nothing that is revealed can, in its effects, exceed the glory of God that is in it.** Therefore nature, which has some glory in it, making known God’s “*power and Godhead,*” is limited in what it can effect. Nature does not reveal so much as one weightless mote of God’s love, mercy, patience, longsuffering, gentleness, or goodness. It shines no light on His grace, gives no hint of His great salvation, and does not elucidate upon His eternal purpose.

The Law made more known of God, but nothing to be compared with what is made known in Christ Jesus, and under the New Covenant. It can be said of neither nature nor the Old Covenant that they are “*full of grace of truth.*” That can only be said of the Mediator of the New Covenant: “*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14).

A covenant cannot remain in force when its glory has been done

away. That is the reality that the Spirit is not establishing.

TO BE DONE AWAY

“... was to be done away.” Other versions read, “was passing away,”^{NKJV} “fading as it was,”^{NASB} “now set aside,”^{NRSV} “which was only for as time,”^{BBE} “which is annulled,”^{DARBY} “which is made void,”^{DOUAY} “which was being brought to an end,”^{ESV} “that was going to fade,”^{NAB} “transitory,”^{NJB} “already fading away,”^{NLT} “was to be done away,”^{WEB} “which was being made useless,”^{YLT} “a glory even then fading,”^{WILLIAMS} “a vanishing brightness,”^{WEYMOUTH} and “that was to fade and pass away.”^{AMPLIFIED}

Notice how this is stated. It is not simply that the glory faded. **Rather, it was that it could not remain. It was the kind of glory that could not last, even though that fact was not at all apparent as the people caught a glimpse of Moses’ face.** By Divine purpose, that glory “was to be done away.” The moment it was made known, it began to fade, for it was not intended to last. After a time, there was no evidence of the glory.

From its very beginning the Old Covenant was intended to be temporary. It was by nature a temporary covenant, appointed for the discovery and conviction of sin. The Spirit says of it, “Wherefore then serveth the law? **It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a Mediator**” (Gal 3:19). Stated another way, “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: **that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God**” (Rom 3:19).

However, the purpose of God was not simply to deal with anomalous behavior, discovering and penalizing it. His ultimate aim was to fulfill His promise to Abraham – the promise of blessing. That would come through a “Seed,” not a Law or moral code! This is WHY the glory attending the giving of the Law faded – it was intended to do so, for it was not at the heart of God’s “eternal purpose.” God sought more than simply teaching toddlers to walk and not to stumble. His aim was to bring a people to Himself to think like Him and work with Him. **The Old Covenant was not designed to do this. That is why its glory faded.** God meant for that glory to fade, for it did not

Through the years, I have noted the diminishing glory of anything that either originates with man, or is centered in man. I saw this during my years in the manufacturing world. Men were continually coming up with business techniques and procedures that were energetically received at the first. However, with the passing of time, these things lost their luster and effectiveness. It was not long until we needed a new stimulus, a fresh way of doing things. This trend did not change during my thirty-five years in the manufacturing world, over twenty of which were spent in upper management.

It is not surprising that such

The glory of the Old Covenant was like the moon that shines brightly in the night. Yet, when the sun is at its zenith, the light of the moon can no longer be seen, by reason of a greater glory.

contain enough of Himself to save and sanctify men.

The glory of the Old Covenant was like the moon that shines brightly in the night. Yet, when the sun is at its zenith, the light of the moon can no longer be seen, by reason of a greater glory.

Something to Note

There is a critical principle seen here that is worthy of note. **A religion that tends to diminish in its power and effectiveness is not associated with Jesus Christ.** This is the precise point that is being established in this passage, and it is a weighty one, indeed!

things are found in the world, whether it be the business, educational, domestic, or governmental sectors. **However, when such trends are found within the church, we have fallen upon hard times – times that are “perilous.”** A fading glory was found at Sinai, but it had better not be found within the church, which is being builded together “for a habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:22). **Let us have done with any form of religion that is characterized by a fading glory, diminishing effects, or a cooling of affection!** Such has no connection with Jesus, who has been “crowned with glory and honor” (Heb 2:9).

THE MINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT

“^{sa} **How shall not the ministration of the Spirit...**”

It should be observed that all religious and moral corruption grows out

of a failure to comprehend the nature of the New Covenant. This is precisely why Paul is engaged in this extensive reasoning. **The Corinthians had been sucked into the whirlpool of**

carnality, and had lost their grasp on reality. This is why divisions had risen within them. It is why immorality was found among them, and was not considered to be serious. It is why they

conducted themselves in an unbecoming manner at the table of the Lord. The inconsiderate confusion that had erupted in their assemblies was traceable to their ignorance of the manner of the covenant into which they had been called.

THE CONTRASTING "HOW"

"How shall not . . ." Other versions read, *"how will . . . not,"* ^{NKJV} *"will not,"* ^{NIV} *"how much more,"* ^{NRSV} *"Shouldn't we expect,"* ^{NLT} *"Shall we not expect,"* ^{LIVING} and *"Why should not."* ^{WILLIAMS}

The reason for speaking of the fading glory of the Old Covenant, was to prepare us to consider the exceeding glory of the New Covenant. The description of the nature of the Old Covenant was not an end of itself. It was not an academic exercise to increase the borders of human knowledge.

There is a certain manner of

reasoning. This is too apparent to require any further observation.

One of the characteristics of kingdom reasoning is that of comparison. The prophets challenged the people to find something with which God could be compared (Isa 40:18; 46:5). The idea was that such an effort would make it obvious that God was unique. When Jesus taught concerning the Kingdom, He asked, *"Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?"* (Mark 4:30). This is the kind of reasoning Paul is now placing before us. **He is comparing the glory of the Old Covenant with that of the New.**

The first comparison has to do with the effects of the both covenants. The First Covenant, we are appraised, ministered death – it was *"the ministration of death."* How does that compare with the New Covenant?

certain requirements – even though there are requirements that are to be met. **Life is the result of the Holy Spirit's ministry.** That is why the New Covenant is called *"the ministration of the Spirit."*

The *"Spirit"* refers to the Person of the Holy Spirit, who is especially active within the perimeter of the New Covenant. From the standpoint of the focus of the Holy Spirit, He generates life. He is *"the Spirit of life"* (Rom 8:2); for He *"quickens,"* or gives life (John 6:63). It is categorically stated, *"the Spirit IS life"* (Rom 8:10). The Savior Himself is said to have been *"put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] by the Spirit"* (1 Pet 3:18). Ultimately, it is *"of the Spirit"* that we *"reap everlasting life"* (Gal 6:8).

The Holy Spirit was not especially active under the Old Covenant. He did move *"holy men"* – the prophets – to speak (2 Pet 1:21). However, such movings were not a part of the Old Covenant itself. Within that ancient Covenant, or the words which were chiseled into stone, there was nothing said of the Holy Spirit – either His Person or His work. There was no promise of the Spirit within that Covenant. He brought no assistance to the people who were under that Covenant – no strength, no insight, no ability to recover. It was the *"ministration of death,"* which is the antithesis of *"the Spirit."*

How gloriously different is the New Covenant! **It is a Covenant in which the Holy Spirit is promised.** He is the One who made what was promised to Abraham a *"blessing."* As it is written, *"That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"* (Gal 3:14). Those who are in Christ are said to be *"sealed,"* or marked as God's own, by the indwelling Spirit: *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise"* (Eph 1:13). When Peter told those convinced of their sin to *"repent,"* and *"be baptized"* *"in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,"* he affirmed they would *"receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38). He elaborated by saying of that *"gift,"* *"For*

However, unlike the Old Covenant, "life" is not offered through a system. It does not come through a code or a routine. "Life" is not the result of meeting certain requirements – even though there are requirements that are to be met. Life is the result of the Holy Spirit's ministry.

reasoning experienced in Christ Jesus. As ought to be obvious, it is not the manner of reason adopted by the world. If it is true that *"the carnal mind is enmity against God,"* then effective thought is not realized by that kind of mind. By its very nature, *"spiritual understanding"* is transcendent to natural understanding, which is *"darkened"* because unregenerate men are *"alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them"* (Eph 4:18).

Human reasoning tends toward speculation and philosophy. This is confirmed by the various "theories" that have arisen in every field, from natural science to theology. Within the professed church, all manner of division has broke forth because of human

MINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT

" . . . the ministration of the spirit . . ." Other versions read, *"ministry of the Spirit,"* ^{NKJV} *"dispensation of the Spirit,"* ^{RSV} *"operation of the Spirit,"* ^{BBE} *"the Holy Spirit is giving life,"* ^{NLT} *"this spiritual service,"* ^{WILLIAMS} *"the service of the Spirit,"* ^{WEYMOUTH} *"the Spirit's ministry,"* ^{ISV} and *" the dispensation of the Spirit [this spiritual ministry whose task it is to cause men to obtain and be governed by the Holy Spirit]."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

From a human point of view, the proper comparison to *"the ministration of death,"* would be *"the ministration of life."* However, unlike the Old Covenant, *"life"* is not offered through a system. It does not come through a code or a routine. *"Life"* is not the result of meeting

the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:39). **He was speaking of “the ministration of the Spirit.”**

In a great invitation, on the day of the great feast, Jesus cried out, *“If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water”* (John 7:37-38). The Spirit explained the meaning of that saying. *“(But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)”* (John 7:39). **He was speaking of the “ministration of the Spirit.”**

In his delineation of the various gifts that have been placed within the church, Paul declared, *“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit . . . But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal”* (1 Cor 12:4,7). The various gifts are given *“by the Spirit”* (1 Cor 12:8-10). All *“spiritual gifts”* are the work of the Holy Spirit, who gives and manages them. As it is written, *“But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will”* (1 Cor 12:11). **He was speaking of “the ministration of the Spirit.”**

What Is Life?

What is the *“life”* that is being ministered by the Holy Spirit? What is the *“life”* that characterizes the New Covenant? This is the *“life”* that Jesus came to give. He said, *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10). Because the conferment of this life requires an exalted Savior, Jesus is called *“the Prince of life”* (Acts 3:15). Because it involves partaking of Christ Himself, He is called *“the Bread of life”* (John 6:35). Because there is illumination and

understanding realized in this life, the Savior is said to confer *“the light of life”* (John 8:12). Because of its freshness and continued increase, this life is called *“the newness of life”* (Rom 6:4). The Word that speaks of this inestimable life is referred to as *“the Word of life”* (Phil 2:16). Because Jesus Himself is the environ in which this life is realized, it is said to be the *“life which is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Tim 1:1).

The life that is ministered by the Holy Spirit is abundant – ever increasing and characterized by spiritual growth and progress. The Lord Jesus is the center and focus of this life. Nothing about this life diminishes, grows old, or deteriorates – and the Word of God is vital to its sustenance.

is the Person charged with the responsibility of changing us (2 Cor 3:18), which change is the result and evidence of the newness of life. This change has to do with character not with fleshly sensation of bodily discipline.

True Life Is in the Spirit, Not in the Body

Where the Holy Spirit is, in fact, present, *“the body is dead because of sin”* (Rom 8:10). **That is, the body of our flesh has no part or lot in spiritual life.** It is the locus of sin, and is dead by consignment. The truth of the matter is that we must receive a new body to be truly whole (1 Cor 15:53). Our present body is therefore appropriately called *“the body of this death”* (Rom 7:24).

For this reason, *“the body”* – the

THE OLD COVENANT	THE NEW COVENANT
Written in tables of stone	Written in fleshly tables of the heart
The letter	The Spirit
Kills	Makes alive
Ministration of death	Ministration of the Spirit
Written and engraved on stones	Put in the inward parts, written on the heart
Could not behold	Behold with “open face”
A fading glory	Rather glorious
Glory done away	Exceed in glory
Ministration of condemnation	Ministration of righteousness

There is sensitivity, response, and perception in this life. Insensitivity, slowness of heart, and ignorance have no part in it. Hardness of heart, dullness of hearing, and resisting the Holy Spirit are **not** found among those to whom the Holy Spirit is ministering. These are all traits of the flesh, the fallen and sinful nature. They are things from which we are delivered, or saved. **Wherever these characteristics are found, the Holy Spirit is not ministering, and the benefits of the New Covenant are not being realized!**

The Holy Spirit is not a subject to be debated, but a benefit to be enjoyed. He

body of our flesh – is not the center of Divine attention, **nor is it the place where the confirmation of our affiliation with the Lord is realized.** The primary and incontrovertible evidence of the Spirit is not found in our body, even though a considerable number of religious bodies affirm that it is. That kind of evidence is of the order of the Old Covenant, not the New! In the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit bears *“witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”* (Rom 8:16) – **not with our body!** Our body is the weakest part of our constitution. The New Covenant is truly *“the ministration of the Spirit”* – the Holy Spirit! How marvelously refreshing to know that this is so!

RATHER GLORIOUS

“^{8b} . . . be rather glorious?”

Having established that the Old Covenant did have glory, yet ministered

death to its constituents, we will now behold the type of glory that is found in

the New Covenant. If it is a superior glory, it will be followed by superior effects, **for it is the glory of a thing that determines the nature and extent of its effects.**

RATHER

“ . . . be rather . . . ” Other versions read, “be more,”^{NKJV} “be even more,”^{NASB} “much more,”^{NRSV} “greater,”^{RSV} “much greater,”^{BBE} “far greater,”^{NLT} and “far more.”^{WEYMOUTH}

This is the language of comparison. We are being drawn away from the flesh and into the Spirit. **In such an experience, more is required of our minds.** We are not only to behold the two covenants, but to see the distinctions between them, and then arrive at a proper conclusion. **Keep in mind, we are being asked to consider two covenants that were made by God Himself.**

There are several expressions in

We are being drawn away from the flesh and into the Spirit. In such an experience, more is required of our minds. We are not only to behold the two covenants, but to see the distinctions between them, and then arrive at a proper conclusion. Keep in mind, we are being asked to consider two covenants

Scripture that focus on the superiority of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It is good to consider them.

- **“Better.”** There are comparisons made in Scripture that accentuate the preference of what is “better.” For example, it is “better” to depart the body and be with Christ, than to remain in it (Phil 1:23). The things that “accompany salvation” are “better,” making for spiritual growth and stability (Heb 6:9). Our hope is “better” (Heb 7:19). Jesus is the “Surety,” or guarantee, of a “better covenant” (Heb 7:22). He is the Mediator of a “better covenant that is established upon better

promises” (Heb 8:6). Those in Christ have a “better” sacrifice (Heb 9:23), desire a “better country” (Heb 11:16), will obtain a “better resurrection” (Heb 11:35), and enjoy the benefits of “the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:24).

- **“Much more.”** Being justified by the blood of Christ, “much more” we will be “saved from wrath through Him” (Rom 5:9). Having been reconciled “much more” we “shall be saved by His intercessory life” (Rom 5:10). The grace of God has abounded “much more” than the offence of Adam that brought judgment upon all men (Rom 5:15). Those who receive an abundance of grace will reign in life “much more” than death reined through one man’s offense (Rom 5:17). Where sin abounded, grace abounded “much more” (Rom 5:20). The blood of sacrificial animals cleansed the

flesh, but “much more” the blood of Christ purges “the conscience from dead works” (Heb 9:14).

- **“Greater.”** Jesus is “greater” than John the Baptist (Matt 11:11), the Temple (Matt 12:6), Jonah (Matt 12:41), and Solomon (Matt 12:42). In Him, we are called to “greater works” (John 14:12). Jesus is presently ministering in a “greater and more perfect tabernacle” (Heb 9:11). The “reproaches of Christ” are “of greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Heb 11:26). He that is in us is “greater than He that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). The “witness of God” is “greater” than “the witness

of men” (1 John 5:9).

- **“Best.”** We are called to seek after “the best gifts” (1 Cor 12:31).
- **“Rather.”** We are called to obey God “rather than men” (Acts 5:29). We are to avoid the foolish use of our mouths, choosing to “rather” give thanks (Eph 5:4). We are admonished to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph 5:11). Servants of God are exhorted to come away from things that cause confusion, choosing “rather” to edify (1 Tim 1:4).
- **“Exceeding.”** There is an “eternal weight of glory” that far exceeds the sufferings through which we go (2 Cor 4:17). There is a joy that is “exceeding” (2 Cor 7:4). The grace of God can be “exceeding” within us (2 Cor 9:14). The power that God has directed toward those in Christ is “exceeding great” (Eph 1:19). The grace of God is characterized by “exceeding greatness” (Eph 2:7). God is able to “do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think” (Eph 3:20). Faith can grow “exceedingly” (2 Thess 1:3). The promises that are in Christ Jesus are “exceeding great and precious” (2 Pet 1:4).
- **“Abundant.”** The grace of God is “abundant” (Rom 5:17). Joy can be in “abundance” (2 Cor 8:2). God can work in ways that are more “abundant” that we are capable of asking (Eph 3:20). The grace of God was “abundant” with faith and love (1 Tim 1:14). God has shed His Spirit upon in Christ “abundantly” (Tit 3:6). God is willing to “more abundantly” show us the “immutability of His counsel” (Heb 6:17). We have been begotten again according to God’s “abundant mercy” (1 Pet 1:3). In the end, the saints will realize ministering of an “abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:11).

Here, the word “rather” accentuates the superiority that is found in Christ and the New Covenant that He

is mediating – a covenant He has ratified with His own blood. **However, this is more than a mere intellectual comparison.** Things that are “better” are to be chosen, and things that are inferior are to be forsaken in preference for those “better things.”

There is a certain moral responsibility that accompanies the disclosure of the superior, and the revelation of the ascendant. It is a transgression of unspeakable magnitude to choose what is least, when the best is offered. The person who gravitates to the lesser, when the greater is brought within his reach, have moved closer to hell.

We are responsible for choosing the better thing – like Mary did. When Martha asked Jesus to release Mary to assist her, Jesus replied, “*But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her*” (Luke 10:42). Ordinarily, serving was a good thing, and people were commended for such activity. **However, when the Lord Jesus is in the house, better things are available.** Mary saw it, and chose “*that good part*.” Jesus said it would not be taken from her. That is, He would not allow it to be taken from her.

In my lifetime, I have witnessed many a poor soul who chose the inferior, settling for the lesser. I have witnessed the rise of inferior religion that declares a subjacent message, and embraces a nether cause. **With a salvation filled with abundance and superiority within their reach, they choose fun, entertainment, empty form, and the fading baubles of this present evil world.** It is a tragedy of remarkable

proportions.

Why do men fail to choose the good thing? Why do they settle for the inferior, the lesser, and secondary? It is because they have not considered the “good thing,” or compared the benefits in Christ with the paltry offerings of this

read, “with glory,”^{NASB} “splendor,”^{RSV} and “splendid glory.”^{AMPLIFIED}

When the Old Covenant was given, there was a lot of glory – so much, that Israel could not bear to look at the mere reflection of that glory. But what is that former glory in comparison with the glory

have witnessed the rise of inferior religion that declares a subjacent message, and embraces a nether cause. With a salvation filled with abundance and superiority within their reach, they choose fun, entertainment, empty form, and the fading baubles of this present evil world.

present evil world. This is precisely why Paul is comparing the New and the Old Covenants. He is leading people to the place where thought, consideration, and contemplation are being encouraged. **He knows that if men do not think about the things of the Lord, they will not be drawn toward them.** If our religion does not get into our hearts and minds, so that it dominates our thinking, it will **not** assist us in being conformed to the image of God’s Son.

Inferior lives are produced by inferior choices. Fruitless lives are the direct result of fruitless choices – when men do not get into the “*rather*” mode!

GLORIOUS

“... *glorious?*” *Other versions*

that constantly attends the New Covenant? Here we see a glory that is “*rather*.” It is a glory that excels, exceeds, transcends, and outshines. It is greater, better, excellent, and abundant.

But what does all of this mean? How is it that the New Covenant is “*rather glorious?*” It is because there is more of God in it! More of His love is in it. His mercy is more prominent in it. This is a covenant that reveals more of His person and His purpose. There is more of His grace in it, and His power is more prevalent in it. This is a covenant that displays more of God’s wisdom. **It reveals to what a marvelous extent He has gone to reconcile the world to Himself. It is, in every sense, “rather glorious.”**

THE MINISTRATION OF CONDEMNATION

“^{9a} For if the ministration of condemnation be glory . . . ”

Now Paul takes hold of the Old Covenant, and turns it so we can catch another view of it. We ought to expect something given by God to be multifaceted. **If, in fact, the New Covenant is superior, it will be**

superior in many ways. This is because sin has greatly complicated the situation. Iniquity is not merely on the surface. It has penetrated the depths of humanity, and pervaded every aspect of his personality. It has defiled the intellect, emotion, and will, leaving no part uncorrupted. The Old Covenant, of which the Ten Commandments were the

“words” (Ex 34:29) will bring out all of these areas.

MINISTRATION OF CONDEMNATION

“For if the ministration of condemnation . . . ” Other versions read, “ministry of condemnation,”^{NKJV} “ministry that condemns,”^{NIV}

“dispensation of condemnation,”^{RSV} “operation of the Law,”^{BBE} “administer condemnation,”^{NJB} “which brings condemnation,”^{NLT} “plan that leads to doom,”^{LIVING} “service which pronounces doom,”^{WEYMOUTH} “the service connected with condemnation,”^{WILLIAMS} and “the service that condemns [the ministration of doom].”^{AMPLIFIED}

To condemn is to assess the individual, find fault, and impose the due penalty. Thus, under the Law, when the judges discovered guilt, they also imposed the penalty for the deed

κατακρίσεως (kata-kris-ee-os). This is an action, as compared to a state – that is, it is something the Law delivered. It announced the condition that sin caused, nailing it solidly in the conscience of the individual who took that Law seriously. It refers to punishment and doom.^{UBS} Condemnation involves judging someone and finding them guilty, and thus subject to punishment. **It is the verdict of a discerning judge: GUILTY AS CHARGED!**^{LOUW-NIDA}

Elsewhere, the Spirit spells out this ministry of “condemnation.” This is

when they do not think like God, and are fundamentally unlike Him in their ways – they are condemned! The Law ministers that to those who will hear its verdict, then nails it into their conscience! Sin is a real condition, involving the deliberate breaking of a very real Law. Its presence requires a real discovery, and the imposition of a real judgment. That is the ministration of the Law. **It takes “wrong” out of the domain of opinion.** It removes all excuses for sin, revealing its very real nature and the unavoidable guilt that comes when it is committed.

Those who say the Law, or Ten Commandments, were “only for the Jews” could not possibly be more wrong! In the sense of a covenant, they were for the Jews. However, as a “law,” they applied to “every mouth” and “all the world.”

The Scriptures teach us that this is required if we are to be brought to Christ. **If we are to be justified, our sinful condition must be discovered, and a sense of condemnation must envelop the soul.** As it is written, “*But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*” (Gal 3:22-24).

committed (Ex 22:9).

The Law justified the righteous and condemned the guilty (Deut 25:1): that is, it exonerated the person who had **not** committed a specific trespass, and imposed the due penalty on the guilty party (Deut 25:1). **The Law taught men that condemnation was not merely theoretical.** It was not the voicing of a bare human opinion. It was as real as the guilt, which was as real as the deed committed.

The Law ministered death, severing the cord between man and God. But that is not all it did. It also condemned, consigning men to “doom.” Elsewhere Paul referred to this condition as men being “*children of wrath*” (Eph 2:3). Jesus referred to it as men being “*condemned already*” (John 3:18), and being under “*the wrath of God*” (John 3:36). The Law, Old Covenant, or First Testament, ministered this reality. **It did not cause the condemnation, but announced it.**

The word “condemnation” is translated from the Greek word

one of the fundamental purposes of the Law, of the Old Covenant. “*Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God*” (Rom 3:19). Those who say the Law, or Ten Commandments, were “*only for the Jews*” could not possibly be more wrong! **In the sense of a covenant, they were for the Jews. However, as a “law,” they applied to “every mouth” and “all the world.”** The Law rendered the verdict: “*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*” (Rom 3:23). The immediate penalty was also announced: “*having no hope, and without God in the world*” (Eph 2:12). The “*ministration of condemnation*” involves making men aware that by nature they are “*children of wrath*” (Eph 2:3). They are “*enemies*” (Rom 5:10), “*alienated*” (Col 1:21; Eph 4:18), and “*servants of sin*” (Rom 6:20). God’s thoughts were not their thoughts, and His ways were not their ways – and they were condemned because of it (Isa 55:8-9).

Let me be clear about this. When men are not like God – that is,

Those who diminish the enormity of sin, and make provision for guilt to be lessened in those who commit it, are the enemies of men. They are also opposing the Law of God, as well as God Himself. When they call sin a disease, a weakness, a generational curse, or an addiction, they have lied. They are like those whom the prophets condemned: “*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*” (Isa 5:20).

Further, those who replace the Law of God with psychoanalysis, and the pretentious probing of the psychiatrist, have “*taken away the key of knowledge,*” and “*hindered*” those would otherwise have entered into the vestibule of truth (Lk 11:52). Such efforts cannot be dignified by making them religiously professional! **It is the business of the Law to discover guilt. It is the business of the Savior to take that guilt away.** When men take it upon them selves to accomplish these things, they have only attempted to barge into an

area that is unlawful for them to occupy.

BE GLORY

“ . . . *be glory*” Other versions read, “*had glory*,”^{NKJV} “*has glory*,”^{NASB} “*is glorious*,”^{NIV} “*was glory*,”^{NRSV} “*was splendor*,”^{RSV} “*had its glory*,”^{BBE} “*was glorious*,”^{NAB} and “*had such splendor*.”^{WILLIAMS}

The idea here is that Divine glory was seen in the condemnation of humanity. **That is, there were Divine qualities that became more apparent in this ministration.** A brief review of some of these qualities will confirm that the “*ministration of condemnation*” was “*glorious*.”

HOLINESS. “*Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?*” (Ex 15:11). “*For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth*” (Lev 11:44).

RIGHTEOUSNESS. “*The LORD is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked*” (Psa 129:4). “*The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity*” (Lam 1:18). “*And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?*” (Deut 4:8).

PURITY. “*The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times*” (Psa 12:6). “*The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes*” (Psa 19:8). “*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?*” (Hab 1:13).

AVERSION TO SIN. “*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is His*

delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD: but He loveth him that followeth after righteousness” (Prov 15:8-9).

WILL NOT ACQUIT THE GUILTY.

“*Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation*” (Ex 34:7). “*The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet*” (Nah 1:3).

JUDGMENT. “*He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He*” (Deut 32:4).

JEALOUSY. “*For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God*” (Ex 34:14). “*And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add*

and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you” (Deu 11:16-17).

ANGER. “*And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and His anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp*” (Num 11:1). “*When thou shalt beget children, and children’s children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke Him to anger*” (Deut 4:25).

CONSUMING FIRE. “*And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel*” (Ex 24:17). “*For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God*” (Deut 4:24).

GREATLY TO BE FEARED. “*That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee,*

The idea here is that Divine glory was seen in the condemnation of humanity. That is, there were Divine qualities that became more apparent in this ministration.

drunkenness to thirst: The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven” (Deu 29:19-20).

WRATH. “*Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD’S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain,*

thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged” (Deut 6:2). “*God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him*” (Psa 89:7).

These aspects of God, and more, were seen in the giving of the Law. This is the “*glory*” to which our text refers – a glory that revealed certain qualities of God that sin awakened. That is, the condition of the people caused these traits to rise into a placed of prominence.

THE MINISTRATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“^{9b} . . . much more doth the ministration of righteousness . . .”

Divine glory is revealed in three different ways – the inferior being first,



We come again to this fresh manner of Divine comparison. **Everything that God gives is not of equal glory and value.** This is particularly made known in the two covenants – the “Old,” or “First” Covenant, and the “New,” or “Second” Covenant. These covenants are not of equal value! One was weak, the other is strong (Rom 8:3; Heb 7:18). One was broken by men, the other is firm and stable (Jer 31:32; Heb 6:17). One ministered death, the other ministers life (2 Cor 3:7-8). One had high priests that died, the other has a High Priest that is “alive for evermore” (Heb 7:23-25). One did not cleanse the conscience, the other does (Heb 10:2; 9:14). **Both came from God. Both were effective in the purpose for which they were given. Both dealt with truth.** Yet, one was

and love have nearly become extinct in the church. This is particularly reprehensible because **the body of Christ is intended to be the sphere in which faith, hope, and love are nourished and flourish.**

This will become very apparent as we deal with the phrase, “*ministration of righteousness.*” The average American church member does not have the faintest notion concerning the meaning or significance of these words. The reason for this condition can be traced back to the agenda and message of the modern church. **It has rendered the people spiritually obtuse, so that the Scriptures cannot be either desired or understood.** Because this is such a serious condition, this text is of particular importance. At some point, the pervasive light that emanates from it must fall upon the hearts and minds of the people. If this does not occur, there is really no hope of being saved, for this is precisely what constitutes the salvation of God.

THE MINISTRATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“ . . . doth the ministration of righteousness . . .” Other versions read, “*the ministry of righteousness,*”^{NKJV} “*the ministry that brings righteousness,*”^{NIV} “*the ministry of justification,*”^{NRSV} “*the dispensation of righteousness,*”^{RSV} “*the operation of the Spirit causing righteousness,*”^{BBE} “*the new covenant which makes us right with God,*”^{NLT} “*the plan that makes men right with God,*”^{LIVING} “*the ministry that makes a person right with God,*”^{IE} “*the service which tells of righteousness,*”^{WEYMOUTH} and “*the service that makes righteous [the ministry that produces and fosters righteous living and right standing with God]!*”^{AMPLIFIED}

The Real Issue

The real issue between God and man centers in righteousness. Whether or not a person is accepted by God depends upon whether or not they are righteous. This is made clear by the Word of the Lord: “*the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Cor 6:9). At the appointed time, and without any

and the superior being last. **In nature,** the “*power and Godhead,*” or Divinity, of God is made known. That is our most limited exposure to the nature of the Living God. **In the First Covenant,** or Old Covenant, the righteousness of God was revealed, particularly regarding His posture toward the sinner. **In the Second,** or New, Covenant, the graciousness of God is revealed – His love, mercy, and eternal purpose to save mankind.

lesser in glory, while the other was greater, revealing more of God, and bringing more to men.

What was described as “*rather,*” is now said to be “*much more.*” It is “*much more*” in glory, in what is made known, and particularly in what is given to men. It is this latter point that is now made known.

An Observation

One of the great weaknesses of modern preaching is its failure to delineate what is provided for men in God’s “*great salvation.*” This has occurred because of two primary factors. First, the primary subjective purpose has become the resolution of human difficulties rather than the experience of “*newness of life.*” Second, institutionalism has been pushed to the forefront of religion, thereby obscuring the “*purpose*” for which men are saved. The combination of these two malignancies has given a false direction to religion. It has opened the door for all manner of religious marketing and profiteering that has brought no real benefits to men. As a result of this misdirection, faith, hope,

It is this greater manifestation of glory that is now considered. **The New Covenant is characterized by a greater glory – a greater exposure to the character and purpose of God.** It reveals more of God, and opens up His great eternal purpose,” through which reconciliation is realized.

MUCH MORE

“ . . . much more . . .” Other versions read, “*much rather,*”^{ASV} “*how much greater,*”^{BBE} “*must,*”^{ESV} “*will abound,*”^{NAB} “*far more,*”^{WEYMOUTH} “*will surely,*”^{WILLIAMS} and “*how infinitely more abounding.*”^{AMPLIFIED}

The Old and New Covenants are Different in Purpose, Content, and Effects– by Given O. Blakely

equivocation whatsoever, *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness”* Rom 1:18).

God is righteous, and thus cannot have fellowship with anyone who is unrighteous. As it is written, *“what fellowship hath righteousness”* (2 Cor 6:14). This is particularly relevant, for it is also written, *“There is none righteous, no, not one”* (Rom 3:10). Everyone has *“sinned, and comes short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23). Solomon well observed, *“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not”* (Eccl 7:20). If men choose to argue with such affirmations, the Law will *“stop”* their mouths, and issue the solemn edict, *“GUILTY”* (Rom 3:19).

There is no chance that an unrighteous or ungodly person will forever dwell in the presence of the Lord! It simply will not happen. The destiny of such people is *“judgment and perdition”* [judgment and destruction] ^{NASB} (2 Pet 3:7). **There must be an effectual rescue from unrighteousness, and a consequent reception of genuine righteousness in order to avoid the ultimate wrath of God.**

The Law, if duly heeded, will lead a person to this conclusion. One of the marks of a false religion is that it does not lead people to this conclusion – that is why they do not seek first *“the kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Matt 6:33). They simply do not believe they need God’s **righteousness**. Wherever such a conclusion is reached, whether it is verbalized or not, the individual’s religion is totally useless and vain. Unless that circumstance is corrected, their religion will actually become the cause of their condemnation!

How Does A Person Become Righteous?

This is the subject of much of the Apostolic writings – particularly those of Paul. How does a person become righteous? This is not an area for speculation because it deals with man’s acceptance by God and eternal destiny.

Does a person become righteous by correcting their behavior – or at least

attempting to do so? Does such a person enter into a sort of reform program, designed to take him from an unacceptable condition to an acceptable one? Is that really the way men become righteous – by changing their life style?

Or, is it possible to become righteous by keeping a moral code, or following a set of rules? Is there really a specific routine or procedure through which an unrighteous person can be made

There is no chance that an unrighteous or ungodly person will forever dwell in the presence of the Lord! It simply will not happen . . . There must be an effectual rescue from unrighteousness, and a consequent reception of genuine righteousness in order to avoid the ultimate wrath of God.

righteous? Can righteousness be pushed into the inner part of man from the outside – for that is where righteousness must be found is it is to be received? It must be found within – from which motives and objectives proceed.

If either of these postulates is true, then righteousness can actually be realized through the Law – the Old Covenant. **It was a covenant that put the matter into the hands of the people.** If they could do everything God demanded of them, they would live: *“Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD”* (Lev 18:5). However, we have already seen that the Law actually ministered death and condemnation, not life and righteousness!

Discerning people know this to be true, for it is *“evident.”* As it is written, *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them”* (Gal 3:10-12).

Ministered

Our text affirms that righteousness is ministered to men, not achieved by them! It is accomplished in man, not realized through his own efforts. The New Covenant is *“the ministration of righteousness”* – the appointed means through which righteousness is realized.

Made Righteous

The truth of the matter is that

men are *“made righteous.”* The cause of that righteousness is not found in their obedience, but in the obedience of Christ Himself. As it is written, *“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous”* (Rom 5:19).

Imputed

Righteousness is *“imputed,”* accredited to, or reckoned. As it is written, *“Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all . . . And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead”* (Rom 4:16-24).

The Righteousness That Is Required

There is only one righteousness that is acceptable before God, and that is His own righteousness. **There must be provision for us to obtain that very righteousness.** The Gospel, which is the message of the New Covenant, announces this righteousness. As it is written, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just*

Paul explains the failure of Israel to appropriate righteousness in these words: *“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God”* (Rom 10:3).

In a telling declaration of the objective of the salvation of God, Paul announces the involvements of reconciliation to God. *“For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*

versions read, *“with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness,”*^{NASB} *“with your heart you believe and are justified,”*^{NIV} *“one believes with the heart, and so is justified,”*^{NRSV} *“with the heart man has faith to get righteousness,”*^{BBE} and *“For with the heart a person believes (adheres to, trusts in, and relies on Christ) and so is justified (declared righteous, acceptable to God).”*^{AMPLIFIED}

This parallels a statement Paul made in his extensive defense before Jews. *“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses”* (Acts 13:38-39). To be *“justified from all things”* is equivalent to being *“made righteous.”* From yet another view, this is becoming *“dead”* to sin, and *“alive unto God”* (Rom 6:11).

In the words of our text, this is the *“ministration of righteousness”* that is accomplished by the New Covenant. This is a covenant that **does** what *“the Law could not do”* because it was *“weak through the flesh”* (Rom 8:3).

Remembering the Covenant

Lest we get lost in the maze of blessing, let us recall the accomplishments of the New Covenant. These are not the goals of the Covenant, but the covenant itself.

- ☛ God puts His Law in our inward parts. *“I will put My law in their inward parts”* (Jer 31:33a).
- ☛ God writes His Law upon our hearts. *“... and write it on their hearts”* (Jer 31:33b).
- ☛ God becomes our God. *“I will be their God”* (Jer 31:33c).
- ☛ We become His people. *“... and they shall be My people”* (Jer 31:33d).
- ☛ Everyone knows the Lord from the least to the greatest. *“And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD”* (Jer 31:34a).

In both of these texts, the Source of righteousness, as well as its kind, is the point. It comes from God, and it is His righteousness. Seeing this, Paul abandoned all competing pursuits in order to appropriate this righteousness – “the righteousness which is from God by faith”

shall live by faith” (Rom 1:16-17). Again it is written, *“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference”* (Rom 3:22).

In both of these texts, the Source of righteousness, as well as its kind, is the point. It comes from God, and it is **His** righteousness. Seeing this, Paul abandoned all competing pursuits in order to appropriate this righteousness – *“the righteousness which is from God by faith”*^{NKJV} (Phil 3:9). That is, the source of the righteousness is *“from God,”* and the means by which it is appropriated is *“by faith.”*

The Lord solemnly tells us, *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”* (Matt 6:33). He also pronounced a blessing on those who hungered and thirsted *“after righteousness”* (Matt 5:6). You do not hear much of this these days.

[Jesus]” (2 Cor 5:21). Just as surely as Jesus was *“made sin,”* so those who have *“received the atonement”* (Rom 5:11), are *“made the righteousness of God.”*

Christ Is Made Our Righteousness

In a poignant bit of spiritual reasoning Paul affirms, *“But of Him [God the Father] are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption”* (1 Cor 1:30). This is another view of righteousness being *“imputed”* to us, or of us being *“made righteous.”* Righteousness is realized in Christ Jesus. Those who are *“in Christ”* have been **made** righteous. They possess God’s own righteousness. This is an aspect of being made *“partakers of Christ”* (Heb 3:14), or of being *“made partakers of the Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4).

Believing Unto Righteousness

There is yet another aspect of being made righteous. This accentuates the fact that righteousness is appropriated by faith. It is written, *“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness”* (Rom 10:10). Other

- Iniquity is forgiven by God. “. . . for I will forgive their iniquity,” (Jer 31:34b)
- God remembers our sins no more. “. . . and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:34).

These, then, are the details of being made righteous! It involves thinking

like God – having His Law put into our minds. It involves a deep love for what God has said, and being in fundamental agreement with Him – having His Law written upon our heart. It involves having an acquaintance with the Lord, knowing His ways, delighting in them, and not being confused by them – knowing the Lord. The one who is made righteous has experienced the remission of sins, including the cleansing of the conscience

– I will forgive their iniquity. There is a reconciliation to God, with the wall of separation being removed – He remembers their sin no more.

These are the unwavering and consistent realities that are ministered by the New Covenant. **Where these are not found, the New Covenant is not being enjoyed, and its benefits are not being realized.**

EXCEED IN GLORY

“^{9c} . . . exceed in glory.”

Paul labors to establish the superiority of the New Covenant, and the absurdity of attempting to approach God on any other basis.

One might wonder how such an emphasis could be missed, and other erroneous accentuations embraced and promulgated. The answer is found in the nature of God’s communication with men. The Word of God addressed primarily to **the heart, and secondarily to the mind**. In order for the heart to hear, it must be given ears – a special spiritual adaptation that enables one to recognize and receive what the Lord has said. Thus recalcitrant Israel was told, *“Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day”* (Deut 29:4). The Gospels record eight times when Jesus charged if any man has *“ears to hear, let him hear”* (Matt 11:15; 13:9,43; Mk 4:9,23; 7:16; Lk 8:8;14:35). Eight times the book of Revelation admonishes, *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”* (Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9). Solomon declared that God has made *“the hearing ear”* as well as the *“seeing eye”* (Prov 20:12).

There is such a thing as having NO capacity to hear or understand what the Lord declares. Moved by the Spirit, John declares this to be the case, then tells us why it is so. *“Even though He had done so many miracles before them (right before their eyes), yet they still did not trust in Him*

and failed to believe in Him—So that what Isaiah the prophet said was fulfilled: Lord, who has believed our report and our message? And to whom has the arm (the power) of the Lord been shown (unveiled and revealed)? [Isa. 53:1.] Therefore they could not believe [they were unable to believe]. For Isaiah has also said, He has blinded their eyes and hardened and benumbed their [callous, degenerated] hearts [He has made their minds dull], to

8:32,34). Thus passages like the one before us are glossed because they are not seen as important. This causes Jesus to cease to work, and Satan begins to work.

Therefore, a covenant that is designed to minister righteousness to the individual, becomes ineffective in those who do not believe. Thus it is written, *“For unto us*

The truth of the matter is that there is an approach to religion that causes one to become spiritually blind – just like the Israelites of old. That is, because people are pointed in the wrong direction, God will not allow them to see the truth that frees from the encumbrances of ignorance

keep them from seeing with their eyes and understanding with their hearts and minds and repenting and turning to Me to heal them. Isaiah said this because he saw His glory and spoke of Him. [Isa. 6:9, 10.]”^{AMPLIFIED} (John 12:37-41).

The truth of the matter is that there is an approach to religion that causes one to become spiritually blind – just like the Israelites of old. That is, because people are pointed in the wrong direction, God will not allow them to see the truth that frees from the encumbrances of ignorance (John

was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Heb 4:2).

EXCEED

“ . . . exceed . . . ” Other versions read, *“exceeds much more,”* ^{NKJV} *“abound,”* ^{NASB} *“much more,”* ^{NIV} *“far exceed,”* ^{RSV} *“much greater,”* ^{BBE} *“far richer,”* ^{NJB} *“far more,”* ^{WEYMOUTH} *“overwhelming,”* ^{ISV} *“radiant,”* ^{MONTGOMERY} and *“far surpass.”* ^{WILLIAMS}

The Spirit has already affirmed

that “*the Spirit gives life,*” and “*the ministration of the Spirit is rather glorious.*” Now He declares that the glory of the “*ministration of righteousness*” “*exceeds.*” That is, it is in the “*much more*” category. It falls under the heading of “*abundant,*” and is properly classified as “*greater.*” **This is a covenant associated with growth, enlargement, and increase. This is compared with the glory of the Old Covenant which waned, diminished, and decreased.**

Since Jesus has been exalted, any

man’s consistent and obedient response. If man did everything he was told to do, and refrained from everything he was commanded not to avoid, he would live. If he deviated from the commandments of that covenant at all – even one single time – the covenant cursed him, and he was cut off from God. Those few saints who maintained a favorable association with God, such as David and the holy prophets, did so through their faith, not through the Old Covenant.

Furthermore, the glory of the Old

Since Jesus has been exalted, any approach to salvation that lends itself to spiritual deterioration cannot be from God. It is false to the core, and has no substance to it. Men may prop up such approaches with Scriptural texts, and say a lot of seemingly good things. But if their primary message does not produce life and consistent growth, it is not true.

approach to salvation that lends itself to spiritual deterioration cannot be from God. It is false to the core, and has no substance to it. Men may prop up such approaches with Scriptural texts, and say a lot of seemingly good things. But if their primary message does not produce life and consistent growth, it is not true. It is nothing more than a fabrication of the devil, when he takes upon himself the appearance of “*an angel of light*” (2 Cor 11:14).

The magnitude of unbelief is seen in the exceeding glory that is resident in the New Covenant – a glory that unbelief hides to the individual.

IN GLORY

“ . . . *in glory.*” *Other versions read, “glorious,”^{NIV} “in splendor,”^{RSV}*

The New Covenant has a surpassing or transcendent glory. It outshines the First Covenant, which is the only other covenant that dealt with man’s relationship to God. **That First Covenant was based solely upon**

Covenant was revealed at its beginning – when the Law was given from Sinai. However, that glory straightway began to fade, and soon the people forgot Sinai, the manner of the covenant, and the God who gave it.

Clearer and Clearer

Now we are told that the glory of the New Covenant, which is nothing less than the “*ministration of righteousness*” “*exceeds*” in glory. **Instead of waning, it becomes more vivid.** Instead of diminishing, it “*shineth more and more unto the perfect day*” (Prov 4:18). That is to say, within this “*better covenant,*” God’s nature, purpose, and “*great salvation*” become clearer and clearer.

Closer and Closer

From another point of view, the believer comes closer and closer to God, drawing nearer and nearer (Heb 10:22). When the Old Covenant was inaugurated, the people drew back, hiding themselves from its glory, and pleading that God speak no more with them (Ex 20:19). But that is not the manner of the New

Covenant. When the heart takes hold of the message of the Gospel, the individual presses in, coming closer and seeking more. This is confirmed in the recorded responses of those who believed the Gospel.

- ☛ **PENTECOST.** “*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*” (Acts 2:37). They were coming closer!
- ☛ **ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH.** “*And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*” (Acts 8:36). He was coming closer!
- ☛ **SAUL OF TARSUS.** “*And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do?*” (Acts 9:6). He was coming closer!
- ☛ **PHILIPPIAN JAILOR.** “*Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16:29-30). He was coming closer!

In each of the above cases, there was an immediate response to the word delivered to them. Those on the day of Pentecost, “*gladly received the word, and were baptized*” (Acts 2:41). Upon hearing Philip’s words, the Ethiopian eunuch “*commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him*” (Acts 8:38). Responding to the word of Ananias, it is said of Saul of Tarsus, “*And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized*” (Acts 9:18). When the Philippian jailor heard Paul’s preaching, “*And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway*” (Acts 16:33). The covenant that exceeding in glory produced exceeding responses.

Not The Results of a Technique

These wonderful responses were not the result of a technique that had been adopted by Peter, Philip, Ananias, and Paul. **These were the results of a covenant that had exceeding glory!** It is the manner of the New Covenant to deliver such results, and to do so in a consistent and ongoing manner. It is that kind of covenant!

When men attempt to develop and hawk “evangelistic methods,” they only betray their abysmal ignorance of the New Covenant. The New Covenant, and the message of the Gospel that opens the door to its benefits, are designed to accomplish “*what the Law could not do*” (Rom 8:3). Once a person comes into covenant with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s puts His law into their minds and writes in their hearts. He becomes their God, and they become His people. There is no longer any need to urge the people to know the Lord, for they all do, in fact, know Him, from the least of them to the greatest. God is merciful to their unrighteousness, forgiving them of all their trespasses, and purging their conscience from the defilement of their dead works. He does not remember their sins any more – period! That IS the New Covenant. That is what it consistently accomplishes (Heb 8:10-12).

If you have been in Christ for any length of time, you already know that the churches of our country are filled with people who lack the realities realized in the New Covenant. It is obvious that many of their minds are not in synch with what the Lord has said. Nor, indeed, do they have a preference and hunger for the Word of the Lord. A close relationship with God is not at all apparent, and the evidence of defiled and condemning consciences abounds. **Such characteristics belong to the Old Covenant, not the New.** No amount of explanation can lead us to any other conclusion.

Some Conclusions

A covenant that exceeds in glory cannot produce inferior results! A covenant that ministers life through the Holy Spirit cannot produce spiritual deadness and unresponsiveness! A covenant that ministers righteousness cannot foster or condone ungodliness or aberrant behavior.

Where such traits are found, a condition that is most serious exists. It is not something that can be ignored, and men cannot pretend as though it does not exist. This is precisely why Paul is writing letter. It is why he is shining the light on the New Covenant, declaring its absolute superiority, and the benefits that are realized through it. These matters were not at all apparent to the Corinthian brethren. They had gone backward, becoming carnal. **They had adopted a religion of fading glory.** That is why division, inconsideration, fornication,

experienced.

The New Covenant Does Not Adapt to Human Weakness

One might suppose that, since the people could not bear the glory that attended the First Covenant, the next Covenant God made would have, by necessity, a lesser glory. That would not drive the people away, and would permit them to come closer. That is what someone would do who accommodated himself to the people. **But that is not what the Lord did.** He did not deliver a

Carnality among professed believers always follows theological diversion. When that diversion occurs, all access to the changing agent – the glory of God – is lost.

legal suits, and unacceptable conduct at the Lord’s table was occurring among them. **Carnality among professed believers always follows theological diversion.** When that diversion occurs, all access to the changing agent – the glory of God – is lost. The reason for this is quite apparent. If “*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God*” is seen “*in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Cor 4:6), then it is obscured when we are **not** “*looking to Jesus*” (Heb 12:2). What is more, it simply is not possible for the changes wrought by that glory to be realized independently of gazing steadfastly upon Christ.

If men are not like Jesus, it is because they are looking elsewhere. If they are **not** being changed, it is because they are **not** being subjected to the glory of God! If they are **not** being subjected to the glory of God, either they are hearing a flawed message, or are hearing the Gospel without believing it. There really are no other acceptable explanations. The sooner the professing church gets back to the Gospel, and a proper focus upon the Son of God, the sooner needed renewal will be

New Covenant that adapted to the weakness of men. He did not ratchet the glory down so as **not** to drive men away. Instead, He turned it up so that the glory exceeded! **The New Covenant has more glory than the Old – exceedingly more.** Not only that, it is continuing to increase, and will never wane or ebb. **Unlike much of the religion of our day, the New Covenant is not like a mighty tide that sweeps across the shore, only to recede once again to the deep.** There is a lot of that sort of thing in our time, but it is not from God!

When men begin to go backward, it is always because “*an evil heart of unbelief*” has entered into them, constraining them to “*depart from the living God*” (Heb 3:12). What is more, those who do, in fact, “*draw back,*” retreating from the Lord, are drawing back “*to perdition,*” or destruction (Heb 10:39). I understand that this has some rather alarming implications. However, do not shun to take them into your heart and mind and ponder them. There is a sanctifying power to be found in them.

Transforming Power

The truth of the matter is that God's glory has a transforming power – just as when the afterglow of Divine glory caused the face of Moses to shine brightly.

The closer people get to this glory, the more radically they are changed. What is more, one of the functions of the New Covenant is to provide a means for man to draw close to God, for if he does not come close, he cannot be changed – and if he is not changed, he cannot dwell in the house of the Lord forever! This is precisely what is taught in the last verse of this marvelous chapter. *“But we all,*

them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor 4:4). **Note, unbelief does not proceed from blindness, but blindness from unbelief!** Satan cannot blind the minds of those who believe *“the record God has given of His Son”* (1 John 5:10-11). Their belief makes them impervious to his blinding power. It does so because it connects them with the Lord Jesus Himself, who is able to keep them from falling (Jude 1:24). It is true, *“by faith ye stand”* (2 Cor 1:24).

Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him” (Mark 6:3). Jesus responded by saying, *“A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house”* (Mark 6:4).

The Spirit then adds this remarkable explanation. *“And He could there do no mighty work, save that he laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief. And He went round about the villages, teaching”* (Mark 6:5-6).

It is not possible to fail to believe the Gospel without Satan proceeding to blind the mind, so the person “cannot see” the glory that is resident in Christ’s face. The result of that blinding is that transformation becomes impossible – because transformation is the result of beholding the glory!

Behold the environment created by unbelief! Satan so blinded the minds of these people that they could see nothing more in Jesus than a familiar neighbor and fellow-citizen. The effect of this was that Jesus *“was not able to do even one work of power there, except that He laid His hands on a few sickly people [and] cured them.”* ^{AMPLIFIED} **As soon as the people thought of Jesus “after the flesh,” they stepped outside the perimeter of blessing!** He was really a “carpenter,” just as they said. He really was the “son of Mary.” It was also true that His four half-brothers were among the people: James, Joses, Judah, and Simeon. **But that was reality according to the flesh, not the Spirit.** Who Jesus really was transcended that lowly view. The blessing He came to give did not come because He was a “carpenter.” It did not come because He was “the son of Mary.” Nor, indeed, was any blessing conferred by Him because His brothers were James, Joses, Judah, and Simeon. **That view of Jesus produces no moral or spiritual change!**

with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). I will devote more time to this subject when dealing with that text.

The Manner of Spiritual Blindness

I say these things because there is no other explanation for a glory that excels being summarily ignored. **Only a blind man can stand in the blazing light of the sun risen to its zenith, and ask if it is day or night.** Now, Paul will affirm that the day has, indeed, come, and the *“Sun of righteousness”* (Mal 4:2) is brightly shining. The “New” and “Better” covenant is in place, and its benefits are now being realized. **However, if this is not perceived, it will bring no benefits to the soul.** In this case, ignorance is certainly not bliss!

Later in this Epistle, Paul will powerfully confront the issue of men not seeing the glory now being expounded. *“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of*

However, when a person chooses NOT to believe – that is, when they refuse to *“receive the love of the truth”* (2 Thess 2:10) – Satan blinds their minds *“so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”* ^{NIV} **It is not possible to fail to believe the Gospel without Satan proceeding to blind the mind, so the person “cannot see” the glory that is resident in Christ’s face.** The result of that blinding is that transformation becomes impossible – **because transformation is the result of beholding the glory!**

An Example of the Effect of Unbelief

The exceeding glory of this Gospel, therefore, **does not** batter down unbelief. So far as experience is concerned, Divine power is neutralized by unbelief. We are given a glimpse of this circumstance in the record of Jesus’ earthly ministry. When he came into his own country, the people did not see Him for who He was. As He taught in the synagogue, they marveled at what He said and did, saying *“Is not this the carpenter, the son of*

Jesus Must Be Correctly Perceived

If men are going to be changed by viewing Jesus, they must see Him as He really is. This is why it is written, *“Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more”* (2 Cor 5:16). That view is promoted by the Gospel, and is realized when, working through that Gospel, the Father shows us the Son. This is why Jesus said, *“No man can come to Me, except the Father which*

Ultimately, the greater glory of the New Covenant is traced to the Lord Jesus Himself, who is the Mediator of that “better covenant.” It is His transforming glory that fulfills Divine objectives, and transforms men

hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44,65). It is why, when Peter confessed Jesus was “*the Christ, the Son of the living God,*” Jesus responded, “*Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven*” (Mat 16:17). That was a precise statement of the case.

Ultimately, the greater glory of the New Covenant is traced to the Lord Jesus Himself, who is the Mediator of that “better covenant.” It is His transforming glory that fulfills Divine objectives, and transforms men so they can walk in the light, fellowship with Jesus, and enjoy an “*eternal inheritance.*” The glory of God is exclusively beheld “in

the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6). This is why we “*run the race with patience that is set before us, looking unto Jesus*” (Heb 12:2). The glory that emanates from Him clarifies everything that needs to be known to run acceptable and obtain the prize. Absolutely no clearness can be generated by the flesh – even in its most refined and educated stance. Jesus is “*the Light of the world*” (John 8:12). It is only as we see Him clearly that anything else can be comprehended.

However, should the individual choose to **not** look directly to Christ Jesus, moral and spiritual change become **impossible**, and the righteousness that comes from God **cannot** be realized. This glory is essential to our required change.

CONCLUSION

Where there is a marked tendency to degeneracy, and where religion tends to fade and diminish, the New Covenant is not being experienced. Such an environment confirms that God has **not** put His Law into the minds of the people, nor written it upon their hearts. There is **not** a relationship between the people and God that is described as “*I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people*” (Heb 8:10). Such people do **not** “*know the Lord,*” and God has **not** been merciful to their unrighteousness, remembering their sins and iniquities no more.

Some will remonstrate at this observation, saying that it is too strong. Surely this cannot be said of “our churches,” they cry. However, if this is not true, **then we must conclude that a person can be saved independently of the New Covenant** – which is the “*ministration of the Spirit*” and the “*ministration of righteousness.*” If a person can be “*in Christ,*” yet have the same traits as the Israelites, who remained hardhearted and fundamentally unlike God, **then the New Covenant is not characterized by an exceeding glory.** If this Covenant does not produce better people, then it **cannot possibly** be a “*better covenant.*” If a real “New Testament church” is not “*alive unto*

God,” the New Covenant **cannot be** “*the ministration of the Spirit,*” who produces such a life. If a genuine “New Testament Christian” is not righteous, then the New Covenant **cannot be** “*the ministration of righteousness.*” **If what men have does not make them better, it is because that possession is not itself better – for only what is really “better” can cause men to be “better.”**

Bless God, in Christ Jesus we DO have a “*better covenant, which is established upon better promises.*” **It produces better results because it is better.** This is a Covenant in which genuine spiritual life is realized: it is “*the ministration of the Spirit*” – the life-giving Spirit! This is a covenant in which men really do become righteous in the eyes of the Lord: it is “*the ministration of righteousness*” – the righteousness that

God Himself requires and gives. It is written, “*Therefore if any person is [ingrafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition] has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!*”^{AMPLIFIED} (2 Cor 5:17). This is so because the New Covenant is precisely what our text has declared it to be.

- The Ministration of the Spirit
- Rather glorious.
- The Ministration of righteousness
- Exceeds in glory

Let us have done with any and every form of religion that yields results that contradict these realities. Whatever

If what men have does not make them better, it is because that possession is not itself better – for only what is really “better” can cause men to be “better.”

does not contribute to or blend with our change from glory unto glory is to be abandoned and considered but “*dung*” (Phil 3:8). **If what we have does not produce the effects God requires, then what we have did not come from God!** Although this is not an acceptable way of thinking in the nominal church, it is still true.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 11/12/2004. In this session, we continue our current series of lessons on the Epistle of Second Corinthians. The fourteenth lesson will cover verses ten through fourteen of the third chapter: **“A FADING GLORY.”** Here the Spirit elaborates on the nature of the Old Covenant – a covenant of law that addressed an alienated people, yet made no provision for their change. Unlike the New Covenant, it was a covenant that diminished in glory, growing old with time, and finally passing away. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

*The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, Jonathan, and Eva
406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801*

A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)

ADAH's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/adah.htm> -- EVA's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/Eva.htm>

Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)
Jason Hutchcraft (hcchurch@interlink-cafe.com)

WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

WORD OF TRUTH FELLOWSHIP Website: <http://wotruth.com/wotf/wotindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>

COMMENTARY on Daniel: <http://wotruth.com/Daniel.htm>

COMMENTARY on Colossians: <http://wotruth.com/Colossians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Second Corinthians: <http://wotruth.com/2Corinthians.htm>