

**02/15/26 The Glory of the New Covenant
2 Corinthians 3:5–11**

Welcome...

Most of us understand the difference between knowing the rules and having the power to live them out. A law can tell you what is right—but it cannot make you righteous. A command can expose what is wrong—but it cannot fix what is broken. A standard can define perfection—but it cannot produce it in us.

That tension is exactly what the apostle Paul addresses in our text this morning in 2 Corinthians.

In Corinth, false teachers were pressing believers in the church to measure spiritual legitimacy by credentials, heritage, outward conformity, and adherence to the Mosaic law. They were subtly suggesting that faith in Christ was good—but insufficient. You needed something more. You needed law. You needed tradition. You needed ritual. You needed visible religious performance.

Paul responds—not by defending his own religious résumé—but by pointing to something far greater: the surpassing glory of the new covenant.

Let's read 2 Corinthians 3:6-11 (we will start with verse 5)...

I read this week an article written by a man who owns a treadmill. Not just any treadmill—a very serious treadmill. It had programs, heart-rate monitors, incline settings that looked like they were designed for climbing Mount Everest. The manual was thick enough to qualify as light reading for a theology student.

It came with instructions for everything. Where to stand. How fast to go. What not to eat. How long to run. What heart rate zone this man should be in if he wants to live to see his grandchildren.

The treadmill had very clear commands.

What it did not have was the ability to make this man want to run.

It could tell him what to do. It could even measure how badly he was failing to do it. But it could not supply motivation, energy, or desire. In fact, some days it mostly supplied guilt.

That's a small picture of what Paul is describing in 2 Corinthians 3:6–11. The old covenant law is not bad. It's clear. It's precise. It reveals what righteousness looks like. But it cannot supply the power to become righteous. It can command—but it cannot create life.

The new covenant does what the treadmill never could. It doesn't just tell us to run—it gives us new legs. It doesn't just measure our failure—it changes our hearts. It doesn't just post the standard—it produces righteousness within us.

And that is a glory that far surpasses anything else.

Main Point: 2 Corinthians 3:6–11 reveals three defining characteristics of the new covenant, showing how its surpassing glory brings transformation to our lives.

The New Covenant Gives Life (verse 6)

The New Covenant Produces Righteousness (verses 7–9)

The New Covenant Possesses Surpassing and Enduring Glory (verses 10–11)

My prayer this morning is simple: that we would not merely understand these truths intellectually, but that we would live in the freedom, joy, and confidence of the surpassing glory of the new covenant in Jesus Christ.

I. The New Covenant Gives Life

Verse 6...

Paul's confidence was founded not on human resources but on divine ones. He was confident in the Corinthians because the Holy Spirit had worked in them. Their faith rested on God's power (1 Corinthians 2:1–5). Likewise, his own sufficiency and competence in the ministry was derived wholly from God (1 Timothy 1:12).

Paul's emphasis on the New Covenant implies that his opponents were ministers of the Old Covenant. Notice that Paul refers Moses several times in our text and the fading glory that was in Moses face.

If we look at verse 14, we can see that the old covenant that Paul is referring to is the Mosaic covenant where God gave His commandments.

The Mosaic Covenant was centered around God's giving His divine law to Moses on Mount Sinai. In understanding the different covenants in the Bible and their relationship with one another, it is important to understand that the Mosaic Covenant differs significantly from the Abrahamic Covenant or Davidic Covenant because it is conditional in that the blessings that God promises are directly related to Israel's obedience to the Mosaic Law. If Israel is obedient, then God will bless them, but if they disobey, then God will punish them.

In the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 24:7–8) God said that all covenant blessing in His kingdom is for the righteous—and the standard is perfect obedience to His commandments, His law.

In the Abrahamic Covenant, God gave the Jews the title deed to the Promised Land (Gen. 12:3; 13:14–18), but Israel's possession and enjoyment of that land depended on their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant.

The problem is that no one can keep that standard! So how are people to be saved, blessed, and enter the glorious kingdom? The new covenant has the answer. It alone provides the conditions for blessing, salvation, and eternal life.

In Jeremiah 31:31–33 written 700 years before the birth of Christ the prophet Jeremiah predicted the new covenant. “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. . . . This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people’”

The New Covenant is also mentioned in Ezekiel 36:26–27, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

Ezekiel lists several aspects of the new covenant here: a new heart, a new spirit, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and true holiness. The Mosaic Law could provide none of these things. (see Romans 3:20).

The old covenant required blood sacrifices, but it could not provide a final sacrifice for sin. The old covenant required repeated, daily sacrifices of animals as a reminder of the people's sin. But, as Hebrews 10:4 says, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

Hebrews 7:22 says Jesus came to establish a "better covenant," a "new covenant" in His own blood. John 1:29 says Jesus shed His blood on the cross to take away the sins of the world and ratify the new covenant between God and man. Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17) and to establish the New Covenant between God and His people.

In Matthew 26:27-27 tells us that on the night He was betrayed, Jesus took the cup and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."

In the new covenant, no one has to come to God by first converting to Judaism. Nor are Gentiles second-class citizens in God's kingdom, but Ephesians 3:6 says they are "fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

So, the heart of the new covenant and the gospel message is the Cross of Jesus Christ. The new covenant, unlike the old covenant, was not ratified by the blood of bulls and goats but by the blood of Christ.

1 Peter 1:18-19 tells us, "You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."

The old covenant law was written on stone tablets by the finger of God. It is holy. It is righteous. It is good. The problem was never the law of God. The problem was we are sinners.

Let me put it plainly: I may break the Ten Commandments, but the reality is the Ten Commandments break me.

When I read, "You shall have no other gods before Me," I realize how often my priorities expose rival allegiances.

When I read, "You shall not covet," I discover that my heart is full of desires that compete with God.

The law does not merely inform me. It indicts me. It does not say, "Try harder." It says, "Guilty."

Look with me at Romans 7:7-11...

Notice this is what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:6 - he says the letter kills. Why?

Because the law reveals God's perfect standard—and our complete failure to meet it.

Imagine going to the doctor with severe pain. The doctor orders an X-ray. The image clearly reveals a serious fracture. The X-ray has done its job perfectly. It reveals what is broken.

But no one expects the X-ray to heal the bone. You wouldn't say, "Take another X-ray—that should fix it."

The law functions like that X-ray. It exposes the fracture of sin. It shows us the break. It names it accurately. But it cannot repair it.

The old covenant law was never given as a way of salvation for either Jews or Gentiles, because Galatians 2:16 says “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” Salvation is not a reward for good works but the gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9).

The Law reveals God’s righteousness and demands righteousness, but it can’t give righteousness (Galatians 2:21); only Jesus Christ can do that (2 Corinthians 5:21). The law is like a mirror that reveals where you’re dirty, but you can’t wash your face with the mirror (James 1:22–25). Only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse us from sin (1 John 1:7, 9; Hebrews 10:22).

That is why Paul calls the old covenant a “ministry of death” and a “ministry of condemnation.” Not because the law was evil—but because we are sinful. The law pronounces a verdict we cannot escape: “The wages of sin is death” Romans 6:23.

Even one sin makes us lawbreakers. One broken link breaks the entire chain. One violation renders us guilty.

And here is the crushing reality: the law does not grade on a curve. A 99.99% obedience rate is still failure. Heaven requires perfection. The law demands it—but cannot produce it.

So, the letter of the law kills. It kills through guilt. It kills through shame. It kills through frustration. And ultimately, it kills through judgment and damnation.

But that is not the end of the story. Paul says at the end of verse 6, “But the Spirit gives life.”

The new covenant does what the law never could. It does not merely command life—it creates it.

Under the new covenant, God does not simply hand us new rules. He gives us a new heart. He writes His law within us. He puts His Spirit within us. He regenerates us. He makes us alive.

Think of the difference this way:

The old covenant says, “Run.”

The new covenant gives you new legs.

The old covenant says, “Love God perfectly.”

The new covenant pours the love of God into your heart by the Spirit.

The old covenant says, “Be holy.”

The new covenant unites you to Christ, who is your holiness.

This is not self-reformation. It is resurrection. Salvation is not God helping you improve your spiritual fitness. It is God raising you from the dead. The Spirit gives life.

Life where there was spiritual death. Freedom where there was bondage. Godly desire where there was indifference. Power where there was weakness.

And notice something crucial: Paul says in verses 5 and 6 our adequacy is from God. Not from ourselves. Not from our performance. Not from our record.

The old covenant is man trying to do his best for God. The new covenant is God doing His best through man. What a difference!

Under the new covenant, we are not striving to earn life. We have been given life. Romans 8:1 declares “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

That is the heart and soul of the gospel—that Jesus completely and permanently paid the debt of sin and the penalty of the law (which is condemnation to death) for every person who humbly repents and asks for forgiveness and trusts in Christ alone for salvation.

God assures us that “if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” 1 John 2:1–2.

Jesus not only pays the believer’s debt of sin but cleanses us “from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Still more amazingly, He graciously imputes and imparts to each believer His own perfect righteousness. Hebrews 10:14 says, “For by one offering He [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

On top of that, Jesus shares His vast heavenly inheritance with those who come to Him in faith (Ephesians 1:3, 11, 14). It is because of such immeasurable divine grace that Paul says in Colossians 1:12 we are to be continually “giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

So let me ask you: Are you trying to live by the letter—or by the Spirit? Are you measuring your standing with God by your performance this week? Or by Christ’s finished work? Will you repent of your self-sufficiency and your own self agenda and surrender to Jesus and receive eternal life? Will you trust and obey the Lord Jesus Christ?

The letter kills. The Spirit gives life.

II. The New Covenant Produces Righteousness (vv. 7–9)

Look at verses 7-8...

Paul says the old covenant was a ministry of death engraved on stones. It came with glory. Moses’ face shone with reflected radiance after encountering God. The Israelites could not look at him. The glory was real. But it was fading.

Paul’s Jewish audience would have been stunned. For generations, Israel believed the law gave life. Paul now says it brought condemnation.

Why? Because the law specifies transgression. It turns sin into conscious rebellion. It exposes the depth of our defiance. It even intensifies it.

Have you ever noticed that when a rule is posted, something inside you resists it? The speed limit says 65, but you think “that is simply a recommendation.” Or you are walking past a park bench and you see the sign “Wet Paint: Do not touch.” Suddenly, you want to touch. You would have walked right past that bench, but now you see the sign you cannot resist touching it.

The law reveals not only our wrongdoing—but our rebellious hearts. And worse, it can foster self-righteousness. People begin to measure themselves by external conformity to performance.

They trust in traditions, rituals, or heritage. The apostle Paul knew this personally. He had impeccable credentials. And he lists them in Philippians 3. Circumcised on the eighth day. Tribe of Benjamin. A Pharisee. Zealous. Blameless according to the law. By all outward standards, he was spiritually elite. And yet, after encountering the risen Christ, he called all of it rubbish.

Why?

Because Paul understood something revolutionary: righteousness does not come from law-keeping. It comes only from Jesus Christ. That's why Paul calls the new covenant a "ministry of righteousness that abounds in glory" in verse 9.

Not a righteousness we achieve. A righteousness we receive.

Under the new covenant, God imputes to believers the righteousness of Christ. Jesus Christ, the One who fulfilled the law perfectly stands in our place. His obedience becomes our standing.

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

Galatians 2:21 says "For if righteousness comes by the Law, then Christ died in vain." The person who tries to live under the Law will find himself feeling more and more guilty, and this can produce a feeling of hopelessness and rejection.

It is when we trust in Christ alone, and live by faith in God's grace, that we experience the joy that Jesus promised.

The law says, "Do this and live."

The gospel says, "Live—because Christ has done this for you."

And more than that—the Spirit begins producing practical righteousness within us.

The law commands obedience. The Holy Spirit creates desire to obey.

The law could define holiness. The Spirit cultivates holiness.

The old covenant wrote commands on stone. The new covenant writes them on hearts.

Imagine trying to save someone with heart failure by handing them a medical textbook titled "How a Healthy Heart Functions." The information may be accurate—but it will not save them.

They do not need better instructions. They need a new heart.

That is what the new covenant promises. Not external compliance, but internal transformation.

Not behavior modification, but spiritual regeneration.

And this righteousness is not partial. It is not fragile. It is not probationary. It is the eternal righteousness of Christ credited to your account.

The ministry of condemnation exposes failure. The ministry of righteousness declares forgiveness.

The ministry of condemnation says, "You fall short." The ministry of righteousness says, "It is finished." And that is glory.

This changes how we view ourselves. You are not defined by your worst day. You are not accepted by God because of your best day. You are forever loved by God because of Christ. The realization that your daily relationship with God is based on the infinite merit of Christ instead of on your own performance is a very freeing and joyous experience. But it is not meant to be a one-time experience; that truth needs to be reaffirmed daily. And that assurance becomes the soil in which real obedience grows.

We do not obey the law to earn righteousness. We obey because we have received righteousness in Christ.

We do obey God's law to be loved. We obey God's law because we are loved in Christ.

The New Covenant Gives Life, the New Covenant Produces Righteousness

III. The New Covenant Possesses Surpassing and Enduring Glory

Paul now reaches his crescendo. He does not deny that the old covenant had glory. It did. The radiance on Moses' face proved it. But that glory was temporary. It was reflected. It was fading.

Look at verses 10-11...

Paul says that compared to the new covenant, the old covenant's glory is like the moon at sunrise. The moon is beautiful—but when the sun rises, the reflected light of the moon disappears in greater brilliance.

The old covenant was preparatory. The new covenant is permanent.

The old covenant pointed forward. The new covenant fulfills.

The old covenant revealed God's holiness. The new covenant reveals God's grace in Christ.

Like the glory on Moses' face, the old covenant was never intended to be permanent. Its glory was a fading, passing glory. It was not the solution to the plight of sinners, since it could not save them.

The old covenant prescribed what men were to do but could not enable them to do it. It provided a basis for damnation, but not salvation; for condemnation, but not for justification; for moral culpability, but not for moral purity.

On the other hand, the new covenant is permanent. Paul writes in verse 10, "For indeed what had glory (the old covenant), in this case has no glory because of the glory (of the new covenant) that surpasses it. For if that which fades away (the old covenant) was with glory, much more that which remains (the new covenant) is in glory."

The old covenant had glory. But so superior is the new covenant that it is as if the old covenant had no glory because of the glory that surpasses it.

The old covenant produces conviction of sin. The new covenant brings the gospel message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ, and this is God's final word to man.

Let me give you a picture. Imagine you are an employee working under a series of temporary contracts.

Every six months, performance reviews come. Every mistake feels magnified. Every rumor of budget cuts creates anxiety. You work hard—very hard—but there is always a quiet question in the back of the mind: Will I still be here next year?

The job is real. The paycheck is real. The work matters. But security is fragile.

Now imagine the company's owner calling you into the office and saying, "We're not renewing your contract. We're doing something better. I'm making you a permanent partner in this company. Your place here is not based on quarterly performance anymore. You belong here. Your future is secure."

The work doesn't disappear. Effort doesn't disappear. But fear of failure does disappear.

That is the movement from old covenant to new.

Under the old covenant, there was a constant reminder of inadequacy. The law evaluated. It exposed. It reviewed. It measured. And every failure reinforced the reality that something was lacking.

Under the new covenant, Christ fulfills what we could not. Our standing before God is no longer a renewable contract based on performance. It is secured by the finished work of Jesus and sealed by the indwelling Spirit.

When you stumble, you are not escorted out of the building.

When your emotions fluctuate, your status does not.

When your obedience falters, your partnership with Christ is not revoked.

You are not living on spiritual probation.

You are not awaiting another review.

You are not hoping for renewal.

You belong. Galatians 4:7 says, "Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

Ephesians 2:19-20 says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone."

Romans 8:15-17 says, "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

This is not temporary clearance into God's presence.

This is permanent standing.

Not a contract that must be re-earned—but a covenant secured by Christ and sustained by the Spirit.

That is glory that surpasses—and remains.

As the apostle Paul says, our confidence is in the Lord, not ourselves. "Our adequacy is from God."

We are not ministers of stone tablets. We are living letters of Christ.

The old covenant showed us what holiness looks like. The new covenant gives us the power to live it.

The law says, "Do this and live." The gospel says, "Live—because Christ has done this for you."

If you are in Christ, you are not living under fading glory. You are living in surpassing glory.

So do not return to stone tablets when God has given you a new heart.

Do not measure your performance in letters that kill when the Spirit gives life.

Do not settle for a glory that fades when Christ invites you to behold His eternal glory and reflect it to the world.

The treadmill of law-keeping can measure your failure—but it cannot give you strength.
The gospel does not simply post the standard. It unites you to the One who fulfilled it.

The new covenant gives life.

The new covenant produces righteousness.

The new covenant possesses surpassing and eternal glory.

And that glory is not merely something we admire. It is something we behold in Christ as we know Him and make Him known.

Will you pray with me...