

## The Surpassing Glory of the Gospel

Westview Church | 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 | Pastor Brett Toney | March 15, 2026

### An Achievable Religion

A common thread to the vain religions of the world is that they are achievable. They summon their worshipers to look within and do what is required of the god. Islam calls for submission to Allah. Make the profession. Say the prayers. Give the alms. Do the fast. Make the pilgrimage. Hinduism would have its adherents meditate more, do more good, be more devoted.<sup>1</sup> Roman Catholicism calls its faithful to make penance, avoid mortal sins, participate in the sacraments, do enough good works. Judaism calls for obeying the law, keeping Sabbath, attain righteousness. Wokeism demands converts to be *more* anti-racist, never quite being so enough. They are all enticing because *you* are at the center. *You* are in control. Do the thing, and you can achieve the religion's conception of salvation.

In stark contrast stands the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ revealed in the sixty-six books of Holy Scripture. Rather than looking *within* to achieve salvation, the good news of the gospel points us to look *out* and onto what *Jesus* has achieved. Christianity is no achievable religion. You cannot do it. You cannot be good enough, faithful enough, righteous enough, devoted enough. This is the particular glory that makes Jesus and his gospel so glorious. Through his death and resurrection, he does it all. He is sufficient. And he makes his own followers sufficient. But, brothers and sisters, we forget this. We forget that it is not our Bible reading or our confession of sin or our doctrine that saves. That's why we're stuck in our sanctification and bored with our faith. That's why we need to reorient on the gospel and its superseding splendor. And that is what Paul points us to in our passage this morning. In these five verses, he adds to the foundation of gospel ministry. He highlights the exceeding glory we participate in through the

New Covenant of Christ. This glory of the New Covenant emanates from its righteous glory and abiding glory.

### **The Glory of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:7-8)**

There is a thesis statement of sorts that Paul makes in the contrast of v.7-8. His point is that the New Covenant of Christ is even more glorious than what preceded. To get there though, we need to look back in our Bibles. The way God has chosen to interact with humanity to reveal himself is through covenants. These are more than agreements or contracts. They are solemn commitments, usually promised under penalty of death. Think of how marriage vows are solemn oaths, breakable by death. A couple vows, like Andrew and Katy will Saturday, “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse ... until we are parted by death.” It’s a covenant, and that’s how God has related to humanity. God made a number of covenants, but our focus is on the one he made in Exodus 34 with the people of Israel under Moses’ leadership. This is the covenant known to us as the Old Covenant. It is the main covenant that described God’s relationship with his people before the coming of Christ.

Now, we know this is what Paul is talking about in v.7 because he mentions “the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone” and how Israel could “not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory.” This is a reference to Exodus 34. God gave Moses the summary of the covenant in the Ten Commandments that he carved into stone tablets. When Moses descended Mt Sinai, his face was glowing from beholding the glory of the Lord. Paul said in v.6 that God has made him a minister of “a *new* covenant”—implying there was an old one—and this new covenant is “not of the letter but of the Spirit.” So there are two covenants, two ministries. One of the letter and one of the Spirit. And *both* are glorious.

The Old Covenant, the Law—it can get a bad rap. We know we can't achieve salvation and legalism is bad. So, we can throw shade on Moses and the Law. But the basis of Paul's argument, his thesis, is that the Old Covenant was *so* glorious! It was so glorious that Moses' face shown with glory. I'm pretty sure none of us have beheld God's glory in the *New* Covenant to the degree Moses did in the *Old* Covenant. O, that we would know the Old Testament better—that is, the Old Covenant—that we would behold God there and become glorious like he is! Don't fly through the Old Testament in your Bible reading. Wrestle with it. Don't leave it until God blesses you in the reading of it, and you behold his glory there. It can be challenging. But there is glory to behold in those pages—yes, even in Leviticus and Numbers. The parts of the Old Testament you find boring are probably the places you need to spend more time so you see the glory they hold out to you. And if the Old Covenant under Moses was so glorious, *how much more* glorious must the New Covenant be?! That's Paul's point. If you will see more clearly the glory of the Old, the New will be even more glorious to you.

### **The Righteous Glory (2 Corinthians 3:9)**

And Paul provides two reasons why the New Covenant is so much more glorious than the Old Covenant. The first reason is the righteous glory of the New Covenant, v.9. We've got a new comparison here. Paul changes his terminology. We read of “the ministry of condemnation” and “the ministry of righteousness.” What's he getting at? He is saying that the glorious Old Covenant was of “the letter,” was “the ministry of death,” “the ministry of condemnation.” The result of the Law was to produce condemnation leading to death. Theologians over the years have identified this as the first purpose or use of the Law. The Old Covenant served like a mirror, revealing just how sinful Israel and all humanity are. Paul says in Romans 7, “If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the

law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’” And the wickedness in your heart and mine takes that glorious word and says, “O, watch me covet all the more!” Israel should have received the “letters on stone” and lived in humble faith, knowing they could not live before a holy God. Instead, “they did not pursue [the Law] by faith, but as if it were based on works,” Romans 9:32. They thought they could achieve it. And they were, by and large, condemned for trying.

But not so this New Covenant, the one that is of the Spirit, that is a “ministry of righteousness.” The covenant made by Christ through his own death and resurrection actually secures righteousness for those who are a part of it. Jesus did not merely make righteousness *possible* for people to receive. Jesus made righteousness *actual* by virtue of his own righteousness. His sinless life and substitutionary death and justifying resurrection has achieved and guaranteed righteousness before God for all who are in Christ. Why stay on the religious hamster wheel of self-achievement?! You’re going nowhere. Get off the wheel and humble yourself before the Lord Jesus. Repent of your self-reliance and embrace the glorious weakness of Christ in the New Covenant. There is a righteous glory to behold and embrace and bask in!

### **The Abiding Glory (2 Corinthians 3:10-11)**

But wait—there’s more! Verses 10-11, there is an abiding glory to this New Covenant. Paul makes another contrast of these two covenants here. The glory of the Old Covenant was fading because it was never meant to be permanent. I think the glory of Moses’ face faded. The veil he used to cover his shining face is only mentioned in Exodus 34. There’s no mention of his shining face for the next forty years of his life in the wilderness. Likewise, the glory of the covenant he mediated was fading. There was planned obsolescence. It’s like the inverse of refrigerators. Your parents have one in the garage from the 80s still going strong but the one you bought five years ago is already on the fritz. The Old Covenant is like a new refrigerator. It’s

designed to fade and fail. Why would God do that? Because his plan all along was to send his Son into the world to achieve the redemption and renewal of his people and all creation. The plan from before creation was to save sinners in Christ. It's not that the Old Covenant was Plan A—like Israel just couldn't obey the Law, so now Jesus had to take on human form.

But now that the permanent has come in the New Covenant, in the ministry of the Spirit, the Old Covenant is as though it has no glory. There is no redemption to be found there. These covenants are like the sun and moon. I didn't see the Blood Moon a couple weeks ago, but there is a brilliance and glory to the moon. It's a wonder to behold. God put it in the sky to rule the night (Genesis 1:16). A full moon on a clear night—it is so bright, so glorious! But as soon as the sun rises—as soon as it just starts peaking over the horizon, and what happens to the glory of the moon? It goes away. It's not there. Even on days when you can still see the moon during daytime, it's not that impressive. The sun's brilliance so overpowers the moon. They are not comparable. And Paul is saying the New Covenant in Christ is like the dawn of a new, eternal day. What Christ has done in redeeming sinners—it is so glorious because it is permanent. It abides forever.

Christian, we have no fear of judgment because we are in Christ *forever*. So instead of working and toiling to try to please our Father in Heaven, we can instead rest. We rest in the redemption of Jesus. We rest knowing that all the good works Jesus has prepared for us to do, all the obedience he calls us to—it is all the fruit the Spirit produces in us because Jesus has given us new roots. Prayer is no longer a burden to appease God with, but the rich fellowship of lingering with your Beloved. Fasting is not self-flagellation to prove to God how devoted you are, but a means of aiding your prayers by revealing how much you actually hunger for things that are *not* God. You are participants of the New Covenant glory *forever*—rest in it.

## **The Table**

Church, as we come to the Table again at the start of another week, reflect on the timing of the Table in relation to the sun and moon again. God set the sun and moon in the heavens “for signs and for seasons, and for days and years” (Genesis 1:14), yet the marking of time we call a “week” was designated by God’s work. God rested from all his work on the Seventh Day, on Saturday, the Sabbath of the Old Covenant. Yet Jesus rose from the dead conquering sin and death on the First Day, on Sunday. It’s the start of a new creation, a New Covenant, that flows forth from the completed work of Jesus. The glory of the rising Son that we mark each Sunday shines from all that *he* achieved. The climax of our service at the Table grounds you in all that is to come this week.

Your acceptance before God is not in what you can do this week but in what Jesus has already done. This New Covenant Jesus made and institutes in the ministry of the Spirit is brilliant in splendor. His is a covenant that guarantees the righteousness of his followers because of *his* righteousness. His is a covenant that is enduring and abiding *forever* because *he* endures and abides forever. There is a righteous and abiding glory in this New Covenant we renew at this Table. So, reorient on the gospel and its superseding splendor knowing you cannot do enough or be enough. You can’t achieve it. You can’t do it. But Jesus did.

<sup>1</sup><https://radical.net/article/hindus-believe-about-salvation/>