

II Corinthians 3:12-18 "The Glory of the New
Covenant" (Part II) March 3, 2018

Throughout redemptive history, Satan has sought to confuse the issue of salvation by making it a matter of human effort. In fact, one of the most devious plots against the gospel is the role of religion, which presents to man the ability somehow to make his way to Heaven on his own, to use external ceremonies, to employ sacraments or external rites as a substitute for the grace that you can find in Christ. Yet the Bible would scream to us that approach will damn men's hearts, because it will delude us into believing that religious practices are good enough to give us a standing with God.

In Paul's day, for that matter, in the first century, that the most powerful, I should say, counterfeit religion was the legalism that the Judaizers provided. They clung to the law as a way of salvation. They even bent it and turned it inside out. They taught it as something that God was promoting. He was not. They even, when the Gentiles began to get saved and come to Jesus, demanded that these Gentile believers first become Jewish proselytes. In other words, convert to Judaism first and then you can get to Jesus, but not without us. It became the subject of the Acts 15 council meeting. How do men get saved? Is it by grace alone or something else?

There was a difficulty early on in the church between the believer and the just in Jerusalem, even the believing saints. In fact, the church in Jerusalem headed up by James was very slow to embrace grace alone. When Paul came after this third missionary journey to Jerusalem, with a lot of money in hand from Gentile churches around Europe and Asia that were wanting to support the poor in Jerusalem, Paul had a council meeting with James, and the elders told him of all that God had done, how the Lord had just saved the Gentiles like He had saved them at the beginning, and they said, oh, isn't that great. Praise the Lord. But right on the heels of that, there in Acts Chapter 20, they said, look, Paul, we just want you to

know that there is a myriad of Jews here in Jerusalem who are also believers, and they are zealous for the law.

That transition from works to grace is a hard one. It was hard in the early church. It can be hard in your life and in mine. When my dad got saved after years of being a really religious guy, he had a hard time resting in grace. He still felt like there's a lot of stuff he should do. Christians do the same thing. I hear people say, well, maybe if I prayed a little bit more, maybe I should go to church twice this week, maybe if I put a little more in the offering plate; as if somehow then you could increase your status with God. If it's grace alone, it's grace alone. God loves you as much on your worst day as He does on your best, and He'll respond to you in the same manner on both of those days. But that's the battle between the works versus the grace that God provides in His Son. Or if you will, in the biblical sense, the law of the Old Testament and the glory of the new covenant that God sent to us in His Son.

So these Judaizers left men believing that the law's purpose was to give them a way in, even if they had to rewrite the law for their own benefit. If they ran into something and they said, well, I can't do that, they began to reinterpret the words. Well, maybe that's not what it means. Because if God wants us to do it and we can't, there must be something wrong with our understanding, so let's change the verses, until it just became a worthless endeavor. For Paul and others in the first century, for that matter for us, that constant stress between the Old Testament, the law, and the New Testament, grace in Christ, is a battle that continues to be fought. In fact, proclaiming and defending the gospel is a high priority for the church in every generation, because it'll lead people astray.

In Corinth, a church that Paul saw established and grow, these false teachers, these Judaizers, these false apostles had come in and had begun to pull people away with the suggestion of works salvation. In order to boost their credibility, they attacked Paul mercilessly; questioned his integrity, his ministry, his doctrines, his methods. But my goodness, if you know anything about Corinth and the people that lived there, what they needed more than anything else was grace. They had plenty of rules. Nobody was following them anyway. In his defense, Paul devotes Chapter 3 to demonstrating that the

new covenant in God's grace through His Son is far superior to the old covenant that you found in the law that is being held on to; not only then, but today as well. In fact, when Paul wrote to the Hebrews in Chapter 8 verse 13, he said, "In that 'a new covenant' has made the old or the first one obsolete. And it was becoming obsolete, and it is growing old, and it is ready to vanish away." He'll say to them in Chapter 10 of Hebrews, "The law, having a shadowing of good things to come, and not the very image of those things, can never with those same sacrifices, which they offer every year, make those who approach perfect." So Paul loved the church. The church had been borne on the wings of the grace and the mercy of God found in Christ. The glory of God seen in His face. But now they were being attacked by those who would preach the law, this fading temporary work of God that was good and necessary, but could not save.

So last week we looked at verses, well, we looked down through verse 11 I think, and Paul said some really important things. He said the law was a letter that kills, that it was a ministry of death, that it was a ministry of condemnation. That's how he described the law. The new ministry from Jesus was to give you righteousness, to make you right in God's eyes, to work in your hearts, to do a permanent work, that the law was fading. It was glorious, but fading, but this work that God had come to do was permanent. And so this morning we want to finish those thoughts as Paul kind of writes these things out, because his acclaim or his claim to this church was, we don't need letters of you. We'll show you lives that have been changed by the good news of God's Spirit.

So we read in verse 12, "therefore." I think it was Dr. McGee that said years ago, "Wherever you find a therefore, go look for the wherefore." "So therefore," because we believe these things about the law and its work and the glory of the salvation that God has brought, "Therefore, we have such a hope, and we use great boldness of speech, unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly at the end of what was passing away." Paul says he knew that there was an excellency of this message that he was preaching through Jesus, and that because he knew that it worked, he was bold. In other words, he had experienced God's salvation. You say with Paul, if Paul

can be saved, anyone can be saved. I look at some of you guys, I knew you before you got saved. If you can be saved, anyone can be saved. And your hope in sharing with others would be that what God has done for you, He can do for them. It's the gospel as we know it.

From Paul's standpoint, the new covenant gives us great hope and it gives us great boldness. Hope is the confident belief that God will do what He says, that what He did at the cross can be ratified in the heart, that the benefits can be appropriated by faith, that there's a hope down the road. Paul constantly wrote about hope. The New Testament brings hope. The Old Testament brings condemnation. The law is designed to kill your hopes, your ambitions, your self-confidence. It will destroy those, because you'll come up against that "you shalt not," and you go, I've already done that. So you either have to confess you're sinful, or you have to rewrite the law in a way that you think you can now manage it and handle it. That's not God's purpose. The law dies. It finishes, in the sense that the minute you come to Jesus, you now have hope, and His work begins in you, it's not dependent upon you to do the work, it's dependent upon Him. So in that case, the law fades. It doesn't mean it doesn't reflect God's goodness. It does. It is an accurate reflection of the moral law. God wants these things for us. The thing is, we can't do them on our own; but if His Spirit comes to live within us, like the prophet says, then God can do within us what we can't do on our own. He can make that law a reality in our hearts. We can begin to live up to those things that God has begun to do, because now He's in us working within. It isn't us, it's a new covenant. It's a lasting work. It depends upon Him and not upon you and not upon me.

But Paul writes to the Romans, "May the God of all hope fill you with joy and hope in believing. May you abound in the hope of God's Spirit." He writes to the Ephesians Chapter 1, "May the eyes of your understanding be a light, so that you might know that it's the hope of His calling." So Paul says to the Corinthians that he's writing to, we know that the New Testament is far greater, or the new covenant is far greater than the old, because we've come to the Lord. We've seen what God can do. And so we have this irrevocable well-established hope, and because of that, we have great boldness of speech.

The cool thing about sharing your faith is, well, the difficulty is you run into a lot of people that don't want to hear it, who are stuck on the old "I could do it myself." But the cool thing is, we know it works, don't we? You ever try reading your Bible before you got saved? I felt holy doing it, but I didn't understand any of it. And then when I got saved, oh, man, God began to open my eyes. My life began to be changed. I can speak with great boldness, Paul says, because without hesitancy, without any reluctance, I can be courageous, because I know that the gospel works. It's the new covenant. It is God's solution for man's sin.

And then he says, "unlike Moses." He even makes the comparison between Moses and he, and he says of Moses, he had to hide his face due to the decreasing glory of the law. The fading away, as Paul will say, of the old covenant. Doesn't mean it isn't important or it isn't holy or it isn't glorious. Without the law we wouldn't know sin. But there's no salvation in it.

So works righteousness, when it runs up against the law, just says you failed. Well, I do better than most people. That's not what the rule us. It doesn't say go stand next to most people and say I'm taller and better and holier. It says go stand next to Jesus and then hide your face. You stand next to Jesus, you don't look so good. I'm sure you'll find somebody that has less hair than I do, but not many. Same thing. You just can't do it that way.

Not like Moses. Though Moses was not allowed to see the full glory of God in his flesh, the Lord said you will die, he did get to see where the Lord had been, the afterglow. That's where the word comes from. The "shekinah"; right? Here's where God's presence was just a minute ago. Oh, man, I could see that. The people in their sinfulness couldn't even look at the partial glory of God that was shining in Moses' face that the law was providing because of their sinfulness. But even though the law or the old covenant was fading, it was glorious. It was brilliant. It's binding. It just brings you to the place that you're convicted. The law at best, for those of you that want to work your way to Heaven, the law at best is supposed to leave you guilty and convicted and dead in your sin. It has to make you cry out, help me. I can't do this. I fail. The law's glory fades when Jesus steps in. The law can be set-aside in the

sense that it no longer becomes a method or a way by which you hope to achieve Heaven. It now becomes a definition of what I'm not, and what God can do in me. He saves. He gives hope.

So Paul says, I can share with great hope and shine brightly for the glory of the message I preach. It is eternal and it won't fade or diminish over time. And I've seen it work in my life. It gives me great boldness. It should you, as well. You'll run into a lot of people that are just going to fight you, but look, the gospel works. And the law is intended to convict. So it gave Paul hope. These guys that were in the church there at Corinth were saying to the people here, do this and don't do that and we got to follow these rules, and Paul said, that's a dead way to live, man. Here's where I find life in the face of Jesus.

Secondly, he says to them that the new covenant, or the New Testament, centers on Jesus, and that it explains to us the Old Testament. The New Testament explains the old. Verse 14, "But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their hearts. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, then that veil is taken away." "Their minds were blinded." The Old Testament glorious law, with all of its pictures and types and symbolisms, cannot be fully understood without putting Jesus in the equation. It just stops short of explanation.

In fact, Paul was given the job of writing to the Hebrew Christians, Jewish Christians, in the first century who were suffering miserably. They were in many cases isolated from their families because of their conversion to Christianity. They were the focus of Roman persecution. For a time, all the Jews were forced to leave Rome because of the persecution against them. These were folks that were going through it on both sides. And the thought in this Jewish Christian church, if you will, these Hebrew believers, maybe we should just go back to being Jews and walk away from this waiting on Jesus, who hadn't come, because life will be a lot easier for us if we do that. So Paul spends 10 1/2 chapters of the book of Hebrews arguing with them, or laying before them all of the symbols of the things they grew up with: the priesthood, the angels, the sacrifices, the

bloodshed, the law, the sacraments. And he said, look, all of these things pointed to Jesus, and this one was fulfilled in Christ, and when Jesus came, this one was fulfilled in Christ, and now we have a better savior, and a better high priest. And he just went on and on until he couldn't say anymore. And then he finally said in the middle of Chapter 10 verse 26, Therefore, come on. Let's walk with the Lord by faith, because the just have always had to live by faith. And run the race set before us looking to Jesus. And he said to them, what are you going to go back to? What you go back to points you right back here where you're at. And that's the key. The New Testament centers on Christ, and that is an explanation of all that we read in the Old Testament is found in the New Testament.

The New Testament reveals the mysteries hidden in the Old Testament. And the problem for Israel's history was that they looked steadfastly at the Old Testament as a method of salvation. And they never looked at the Old Testament to say, where is this sending us or leading us to? Where should I now turn? Instead they lowered the standards of the law so they could keep it on their own, but in so doing they negated the purpose for it altogether. They failed the law at every turn.

So it's important that we see especially when we go out and minister to people as well, that if this veil is to be removed from our eyes, this blindness, this unbelief, it will happen when we turn to the Lord and call upon His name. Jesus said to the Jewish folks around Him in John 5, "You read the scriptures and in them you think you have life, but they're the ones that speak about Me, or testify to Me." He said to them in John Chapter 5, same group, "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, because Moses wrote about Me. But if you won't believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" Jesus gathers with the folks after the resurrection in the upper room at night, and it says there in Luke 24, "Beginning at Moses and then taking them through the prophets, He told them everything in the scripture that pertained to Himself." He spent the most part of Sunday, resurrection day, with a couple on the way to Emmaus. All of the afternoon was spent with them, and He took them through the scriptures. "Oh, you fools, and so slow to believe all that the scriptures told you." And again, He went through the scriptures. He took them through Moses. He went to the prophets. He pointed them out all

of the things that were signposts to point them to Jesus. Paul said, you try to find life there, but you can't. That's a signpost. It is a shadow of things to come. The essence is Christ. And that's the way it should be.

So when you get to Jesus, then all of a sudden, the veil is lifted. The old line that says, "The new is in the old contained, and the old is in the explained" is right. Coming to Jesus will clear up your spiritual understanding. You'll no longer be impaired in your vision. But look at the explanation of someone who looked to the law, their works to get to Heaven. It says their minds are blinded in verse 14. They have a veil over their heart in verse 15. And that veil of unbelief or blindness is only removed when Jesus is invited to come in and be the Lord. Isaiah wrote in Chapter 45, I think it's verse 22, the Lord said, "Look to Me, then you'll be saved. I'm God, there's no one like Me. There is no other." So the mist that hides the truth of Jesus, you find it in the Old Testament, but as you turn to the Lord, the light comes on.

We read that Moses had to veil his face, and not only then, but also every time since then there's been a veil over people's eyes. The Bible's been read, the Old Testament's been quoted, but if it doesn't allow you to drive you to Jesus, it's like this blindness that continues to keep you from the truth.

If you read in the New Testament that story of the transfiguration, where Jesus goes up with three of His disciples into a high mountain, and there He is transfigured, transformed before their eyes, they saw standing on His one side Moses and on the other Elijah. But those weren't transformed; only He was. The law and the prophets pointed to the Lord. The law and the prophets were dead in that regard. He was alive, and He offered life. "This is My beloved Son," you'll read the Father saying, "In whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him."

The Judaizers, and their followers in Paul's day, were spiritually blind, even though they quoted the Old Testament and read Moses every week, because they went to that law as the hope of their salvation. It's the way it is in lots of churches. People believe they can do enough works of righteousness, law dependency. It is a bondage from which you are free only when you come to the

Lord.

So Paul said, I have great boldness in my speech because I have great hope. God changed me. He can change you. And the gospel that we have will explain everything that you read in the Old Testament.

I'm always worried when people go, yeah, we don't need the Old Testament anymore. Is that true? Why do you think the Lord spent all that time writing all that stuff down? Just kind of as a filler? No. It provides depth and clarity and understanding and the heart of God clearly for every believer who would like to walk with Him.

Finally, Paul says, "The new covenant is a work of God's Spirit in the heart, not a work of man in his flesh." So we read in verse 17, "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there's liberty. So we all, with unveiled faces, believing hearts, behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and we are being transformed into that same image from glory to glory, by the spirit of the Lord." Now, that's been Paul's kind of theme throughout this whole chapter. He's been focusing on this starting, I think, back in verse 6 where he says, "The letter kills, but it's the Spirit that gives life." The greatest distinction between works righteousness and salvation is one that requires you, and you'll fail; the other requires Him, and you can't fail. One is His work; the other is your work. Yours is going to come up short; His will accomplish everything that God intends. So the Lord is the Spirit who comes to dwell in you.

You might go back and read the first 11 verses of Romans Chapter 8, but it begins with the words, "There is now therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was made weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of our flesh, and on account of our sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the law will be fulfilled in us who don't walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit," according to the things of the Spirit. That's the ultimate bottom line, isn't it? We preach to people, you need to get saved. And they're like, I'm

doing the best I can. Yeah, that's not good enough. Yeah, but if God won't accept me, there'll be a lot of people He won't accept. That's true, but He'll take anyone that cries out to His Son. And that's glorious. It is the work of God's Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit who will show you Jesus, and when you receive Him, He'll come to dwell in you. And something happens. You'll be freed from the works-oriented life, the Old Testament hope, if you will, and instead you'll turn to the Lord and you'll live a life that you can only live because He comes to live in you. You don't get credit; He does. But you're changed. Life changes. The hater loves. The liar tells the truth. The selfish person lives for others. God does the work.

Paul said in the beginning of this chapter, well, I'll tell you what, you're our commendation letters. You're the work of Jesus. You're the epistle, I say, verse 3, of Christ. God has written His name all over you. And I'll tell you what; my parents got saved not because I was such a good Christian, but because my life was changed. And they watched for 11 years, my dad even said to me about four years in, "You're always into something. First you're into this, then you're into that, and then you're into it. Now you're into this Jesus stuff. It'll wear away." And it didn't, and at some point he went, "All right. I guess that's for real." Not that I wasn't a jerk. I, well, you know me. He couldn't deny the work of God, and that's the key. God did this work. And Paul in standing against these false teachers who were dragging the people away from the only hope that they had, putting them back in the driver's seat, trying to save themselves and work their way in, said to them, I know, and I have great boldness in preaching, because I know that the gospel works. God has blessed. God uses it. It is glorious, and it is powerful, and it'll deliver; not like the law, which has been read day in and day out for years by the same people that can't be delivered by it. They've missed it. But by the work of God's Spirit.

So Paul says in verse 18, "So we're looking with unveiled faces in a mirror." Now, we don't yet see the full glory of God. In this flesh would not survive it. But we see the reflected glory of God in the face of Jesus, and as we do, we're being changed week in and week out into the image of God. We're going to be looking more and more

like Jesus. You should be looking more like Jesus. I don't mean outwardly, I mean inwardly. The love of God, the joy of the Lord, the patience of God's spirit, the knowledge of God, the commitment that you make should get better, not worse. And when the veil is removed, then we can see. In fact, Chapter 4, verse -- what is it, 6, "For the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It's what Paul started with in the chapter. The proof is in the changed life.

God has changed us. Continues to. Now, I don't know what we are going to look like when we're done. I think for some of you, you are going to have a lot of changing to do if the Lord comes today. You'll get changed a lot as you go. In the rapture, boy, will you change. For some of you others, you kind of nuzzled up to Jesus, you only have to change a little. But you're all in the process. Paul said, or John did in I John, "We are the children of God." It's not revealed to us what we shall be like, but we know when He's revealed, we'll look like Him. We'll see Him as He is. Paul says we can see the change. It's observable, and unlike the Moses face that was fading, we are unveiled. We're shining brighter. We're a being changed daily. We're a product of God's work in us.

God is love, so you love. God forgives, so you forgive. He doesn't keep a record of wrongs; neither should you. He's not puffed up and neither should you be puffed up. You're going to be looking more like Jesus. Oh, it's a big work. Oh, man. Look at us. Yet He's the potter and we're the clay, isn't He? I think Isaiah 64, maybe verse 8, it says, "You are our Father; we are the clay, You're the potter. We're the work of Your hands." Jeremiah Chapter 18 says the same thing. The only problem we have is when we start to stiffen our hearts towards God, then He has to kind of beat the clay down again to soften it up where He can shape us the way that He wants.

So God the Holy Spirit works in us to fashion us, to keep our eyes on the finished product, to see what God can do and wants to do in our lives. I think Paul said, Romans Chapter 12, "Don't be conformed to this world, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you can prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Put on the new man.

The New Testament far superior to the old, why? Because one is to lead to the other. One is to leave you without; the other is to leave you full. One is to warn you of your ways; the other is to invite you in. One will end; the other will never end. It's good to know we're Christians, isn't it? A good thing to know you're saved. Isn't it the best comfort that I have is, if I get up in the morning, man, I just know that I'm going to Heaven. God has done a glorious work. I don't deserve it, you certainly don't deserve it. We don't deserve it.