Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Glory of the New Covenant, Part 2
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:6
Code: 47-16

Again this morning it is our great joy to turn to the Word of God. Worship must be in spirit and in truth. We have certainly worshiped in spirit and now we come to look at the truth of God which elicits that worship. Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter 3. We are progressing through this wonderful epistle, finding ourselves now in the third chapter. We're addressing the section from verse 6 through verse 18 under the title, "The Glory of the New Covenant...The Glory of the New Covenant."

The section is introduced in verse 6. Let me read it to you. "God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant; not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life." And we'll stop at that point.

A new covenant, it is essential for us as Christians to understand the nature of the new covenant, to understand not only its nature and definition but to understand its relationship to other covenants...particular to what is called the old covenant, or the Law given through Moses. A comprehension of the old covenant and the new covenant gives to us a comprehension of the sweep of redemptive history and divine purpose. To misunderstand these covenants and their relationship is to misunderstand the Scripture and God's saving purpose.

Sad to say there has been and still is a lot of misunderstanding about this subject. And I want to do the best I can to help alleviate any of that and to draw some clear distinctive lines so that you can find a path to comprehension.

Now before we get into our text and talk about the new covenant, I want you to turn in your Bible to Hebrews chapter 11 which I'd like to use as an introduction. Hebrews chapter 11, this chapter has been called the Christian Hall of Fame, or the Faith Hall of Fame, or the Heroes of Faith. It lists for us both the names and the exploits of Old Testament heroes, Old Testament saints. We're not unfamiliar with the concept of a Hall of Fame. In our society we have a number of halls of fame honoring people of different exploits in different fields and different areas of life. A hall of fame is where heroes are named and featured for all generations to remember because of their exploits and because of their achievements and because of their uniqueness.

And here is such a hall of fame. Here is a listing that, by the way, is not exhaustive really but representative. Not all the names that could be here are here but representative names are here. Some of the noblest of Old Testament saints are here. Some are only alluded here by virtue of their

exploits. But this is a hall of fame. It memorializes all the heroes that the Spirit of God identifies here because of their faith. It is a tribute to faith, to men and women who exercised unusual, profound, life-changing trust in God in the midst of very difficult circumstances.

In fact, these heroes of faith are models for us to follow because chapter 12 begins, "Therefore since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and let us run with endurance the faith race." These people are models for us. They are examples. They are a cloud or a great multitude of witnesses. To what do they witness? To what do they give testimony? To the validity of faith, to the benefits of faith, to the superiority of living by faith, to the blessing of living by faith...they are living testimonies to faith and they are our heroes, our examples, the models we are to follow.

Let's go back to the beginning of chapter 11. And it says in verse 2, "For by it men of old gained approval." What is it? Faith...faith which is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Faith was the cause of their approval. And their approval was not just by men but rather by God. They were approved by God because of their faith. There was Abel, verse 4, there was Enoch. Down in verse 7 there's Noah, and in verse 8 Abraham, verse 11 Sarah. Down in verse 20 there is Isaac and then verse 21 Jacob, and verse 22 Joseph, and verse 23 Moses and then perhaps an unlikely one, verse 31, Rahab the harlot, a model of faith. And then in verse 32, just gathering up a representative group, there was Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah and David and Samuel and the prophets like Isaiah and Daniel and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Those are the hall of famers, not exhaustive in the listing but representative, many others could be listed also who by faith, verse 33, conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. And then women of faith received back their dead by resurrection, others were tortured not accepting their release in order that they might obtain a better resurrection. Others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes also chains and imprisonments. They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were tempted. They were put to death with the sword. They went about in sheepskins, goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill treated, men and women of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. What an incredible list. What a hall of fame.

And then a most shocking verse, verse 39, "And all these having gained approval through their faith..." and that's exactly what it said back in verse 2. The chapter is bracketed by that statement. They were approved by God because of their faith. As great as they were, as incredibly tested as their faith was, as strong as their trust proved to be, as exemplary as their lives are for us and though they are the models and the patterns we are to follow...the end of verse 39 says, "They did not receive what was promised."

What? You mean there are people who are the model of virtuous faith, there are people who set the standard for how you're to live your life trusting God in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances and never wavering, you mean there are these men and women who really are the pinnacles of Old Testament redemptive history and with all of that faith and all of that divine approval they did not receive what was promised? How can that be?

Verse 40, "Because God had provided something better for us." That is in our time, "So that apart from us, apart from our time, they should not be made...what?...perfect."

Now listen to this. The word "perfect" in the book of Hebrews is used synonymously with "salvation." And what he is saying is, as great as their faith was, as noble as their faith was, as exemplary as their faith was, they would never be saved apart from a promise that is fulfilled in our time. What is he saying? He's saying that apart from the new covenant in Jesus Christ there would be no salvation for those old covenant saints. That's what he's saying.

Now you say, "Wait a minute. Are you saying that they weren't saved?" No. Obviously they were. But they weren't saved by anything inherent in the old covenant, right? They weren't saved by keeping the Law, the Mosaic Law, because by the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified. They were saved because there was something inside of them that made them worthy of salvation and God granted to them on the basis of their meriting it. The only way they could possibly be forgiven for their sins...follow this...and granted salvation was if their sins had been atoned for. And that only happened in Christ. And the marvelous reality is that God knowing beforehand, ordaining beforehand the death of His Son applied what was to come to them in the past. But had there never been a new covenant, they could never have been saved because there was nothing in the old covenant to redeem them.

That's so important to understand. No matter how loyal they were, no matter how devoted they were to follow the Mosaic economy, no matter how great their faith was in God and how repentant they were over sin, if Jesus Christ was not the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world, there would never be for them any salvation. But listen carefully, Jesus Christ was the promise, He did come, He did die, He did atone for sin, He did rise from the dead accomplishing a perfect redemption and God before that ever happened applied what He knew would happen, what He planned to happen and what already had happened in His timeless eternal purpose to them in the past.

You say, "How were people in the Old Testament saved?" They were saved by faith. But wait a minute? Were they just saved because they believed? No, they were saved because God accepted their faith, because Jesus Christ would bear their sins. There had to be a sacrifice for sin. And so that is exactly what the writer of Hebrews is saying. You can take the greatest examples of Old Testament faith, those people who went through the worst kind of possible circumstances and their faith never wavered. And you can tell them no matter how great your faith was, no matter how

religious you were, no matter how devoted you were, no matter how you tried to abide by the Law of God and keep your confidence in the living God, if Jesus Christ had never gone to the cross and died, you would perish in hell. They could not be made perfect without us...what he means is without what has happened in our time, without the gospel.

They were looking for that. They were hoping for that. In fact, even Abraham, verse 10 says of Hebrews 11, was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. He was looking beyond his own life and time and circumstance. Moses, look at verse 25, chose rather to endure ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. Why? Because he considered the reproach of Christ. Wait a minute. How did he know the reproach of Christ? How did he know about Christ? He knew about a greater prophet because God had revealed it to him. He knew that God would send a redeemer because he could see that prefigured and symbolized in every animal sacrifice he ever made. And he would rather endure suffering, bearing the reproach of Christ because he considered it greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Because he was looking forward to that reward. Old Testament saints were saved by faith. They were saved by faith. Faith in God and faith that God would provide a sacrifice that would take away their sins.

And He did in Christ. But if Christ had never come and never died, the most admirable, the most religious, the most faithful, the most loyal, the most sacrificial heroes of redemptive history would be in hell forever because there is no way to be saved apart from the provision of Jesus Christ on the cross which extends into past and future and covers the sins of all who believe.

God provided in Christ something better, something better than what they had. What they had was a covenant of Law, it was good, it was right, it was true, but there had to be something more because all the covenant of Law did was point out their...what?...their sin. And so from Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses, right on down to Rahab and Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah and David and Samuel and the prophets and everybody else, they were hoping for something better. They were hoping for a full redemption and that redemption couldn't happen without the Lord Jesus Christ. See, that's why...look at 1 Peter 1:10, 1 Peter 1:10...it says, "As to this salvation in Christ the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry." Here are the prophets and they're getting the word from the Lord that God's going to take away sin, the Lord's going to bring a sacrifice. Sin will be removed. And they wrote about it. And when they wrote about it, it says they made a careful search and inquiry. You know what they were doing? They were looking into the very thing they were writing. And it says in verse 11 they were seeking to know what person or time, when is this going to happen and who will it be? What person? What time does the Holy Spirit speak of when He predicts the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow? They knew there was a suffering servant coming. They knew there was coming a redeemer and they knew beyond that redeemer there was going to be glory. But when? And who?

Their salvation was based on faith in what God would do to provide a redeemer. And He did it in Jesus Christ. People in the Old Testament were never saved by keeping the Law. They were saved by trusting in the grace of God and the mercy of God and the forgiveness of God for the sins which the Law pointed out. That's the point.

Now listen, though their salvation could not be accomplished without the sacrifice of Christ in the future, that doesn't make them second-rate believers. They aren't second-rate believers, they're first-rate believers. They are believers of the very highest order. In fact, they are such models of true and godly faith that in Hebrews 11 they are the heroes that we are to follow. They're not less than us. They are the cloud of witnesses who model for us the life of faith.

Now let's go back to our text. In our passage here, Paul is dealing with the distinction between the old covenant and the new covenant. And he's trying to point out that the old covenant had a function and its function was to symbolize and point toward the new covenant but now that the new covenant has come, the old covenant is obsolete...as Hebrews 8:13 says exactly. But, you see, in the Corinthian church, false teachers had come in and they were teaching the old covenant...they were saying you have to be circumcised, you have to keep the Law of Moses, you have to follow all the rituals, all the rites, all the ceremonies, or God won't accept you. And sadly, some of the Christians were getting caught up in that. Demanding that believers live under the old covenant as well as the new covenant was a heresy. The old covenant had a purpose, that purpose is set aside when the new covenant comes.

Now this issue of the old covenant and the new covenant obviously is a big issue in the New Testament, it's all over the place because the New Testament was in that transition. And, in fact, the Jews were generally so furious with the Apostle Paul because of that issue that they went after his life. They weren't ready to accept that the old covenant was obsolete and a new covenant had come in this Jesus Christ. But that was the fact. And would you believe there were even some who associated with the church and who believed, who were still trying to hold on to old covenant practices? Some of them, probably like the false teachers in Corinth, believed that maintaining old covenant ceremonies was part and parcel of salvation, and therefore they convoluted salvation to the degree they couldn't be saved. But for others, Christians, they came to Christ by faith and repentance and they were saved and then they were told, "Now that you're saved you must keep all those Mosaic Laws." And some of them maintained the Sabbath and some of them felt they had to get circumcised and circumcise the Gentiles, too. And some of them felt they had to follow dietary laws.

So Paul has to deal with both issues. Those who mess with the doctrine of salvation by adding works and ceremonies to it and those who having taken a pure doctrine of salvation and come to Christ on right terms now think they need to add to that as a matter of obedience all the Mosaic ceremonies.

Both cases are wrong. You don't need the Mosaic ceremonies to be saved and you no longer need to maintain them as a believer because that Law is obsolete.

So here in this particular text of 2 Corinthians chapter 3 he knows he is facing these Judaizing legalists who were there in Corinth espousing this ceremonial kind of sacramental kind of religion, and he wants to address the fact that all of that stuff that is symbolic...pictures, types...is all set aside because the reality is here in Christ.

Now, he says in verse 6, "We are servants of a new covenant...of a new covenant." And this new covenant has seven distinctive qualities...seven distinctive qualities. Let me give them to you. It gives life, it produces righteousness, it is permanent, it is clear, it is centered on Christ, it is liberating and it is transforming. I'll say it again. It gives life, produces righteousness, is permanent, clear, centered on Christ, liberating and transforming...now those are the surpassing excellencies of the new covenant that are given in the text ahead of us...marvelous, marvelous glories of the new covenant.

Let's just take the first one, and we already discussed this some weeks ago when we looked at verse 6, but I want to discuss it again. So I want to review the review but I want to say some things beyond what I said in the past. Look at verse 6, first thing, the new covenant gives life. "We are servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life."

Now I want you to understand what this verse is saying and it's going to take a little thinking for you to do it because it's very, very important. You'll notice in verse 7 that the old covenant, the Law is called the ministry of death, and in verse 9 it is called the ministry of condemnation. Okay? The Old Testament is a killer and we pointed that out last time. Now follow very carefully. The Old Testament is a killer. We'll stay away from verse 6 for a moment, we'll just take that concept of the ministry of death and the ministry of condemnation. Why did God give the Law? The Apostle Paul says the Law came because of the transgression. Okay? God gave the Law to demonstrate to man how sinful he is. The Law, says Paul, is our tutor, our school master, to drive us to Christ.

In other words, it shows us our desperate need of a redeemer. God puts down a Law, a standard. It is good, it is noble. Frankly, according to Leviticus 18:5 it is the path of life. "Obey My statutes and My commandments and you shall live," says Leviticus 18:5. It's a path of life. There's nothing wrong with it. It's holy, just and good and righteous and God lays it down and says this is the path of life, this is the path of blessing, this is the way to prosperity, peace and joy. There's no problem with the Law. The problem is with the sinner, right? He can't keep the Law.

Now listen carefully. In that Law there were absolute invariable moral principles that never change, but also in that Law there were symbols of the coming redemption. So a practicing Jew under the old covenant would be endeavoring to obey the moral principles of the Law and at the same time going

through the ceremonies which symbolized that morality and symbolized the coming redemption...or rather symbolized their sinfulness, their falling short of that morality, such as circumcision which is a symbol of cleansing so desperately needed in the heart, all the washings and baptizings and ceremonies were symbols of the need for washing. So you had a real moral code and then along with it you had symbols which they were to carry out externally, the moral code obviously on the inside, the ceremonies on the outside. The moral code was God's standard for life and the symbols were pictures and portraits and previews and symbols of the redemptive work to come in Christ.

Now let's just take the moral side. Though the Law was the path of life, a sinner couldn't keep it. Couldn't keep it. Try as he will, he couldn't keep it. In fact, the Apostle Paul really thought he was a pretty righteous guy, thought he was a pretty good man...you hear people say that all the time, "Well I think I'm pretty good. When it comes down to the end I'm sure my good stuff will outweigh my bad stuff." Well the Apostle Paul thought he was pretty good. In verse 9 of Romans 7 he says, "I was once alive apart from the Law." I thought I was really okay. "And then I saw the Law of God and I died." I was dead. "And the commandment which was supposed to be life resulted in death for me."

And then he says something else. "The commandment...sin...the commandment was good, sin deceived me and killed me." Now I want you to follow this. The Law, he says, really killed me. It killed me three ways...first it created a living death. I thought I was alive and then I saw the Law and I died. What do you mean you died? I was frustrated, in sorrow, despair, guilt, shame...the living death, it killed my joy, it killed my peace, it killed my confidence, it killed my hope, it killed my fulfillment...I thought I was okay until I really saw the Law of God. And when I really saw the Law of God I said to myself I'm not okay, I'm in deep trouble and I was plunged into despair." It's a living death.

Secondly, it not only killed him with a kind of living death but it killed him also with the anticipation of eternal death. Let's put it this way, spiritual death. It killed him spiritually. In other words, Galatians 3 puts it as clearly as anywhere. "As many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse." If you try to walk this righteous Law on your own by yourself by your works, you're under a curse. Why? Cursed is everyone who doesn't abide by all things written in the book of the Law to perform them. In other words, if you break one law one time, you're damned. And we're not talking here about a curse that you're going to be frustrated and shameful and guilty. We're talking about a curse that you're going to be alienated from God forever. The Law really killed me. It showed me that I wasn't the man I thought I was and life took on a sort of a living death, frustration and unfulfillment. It killed me in the fact that it sentenced me to an eternal curse.

Listen, precisely at that point the Law had done its work. That's what it was supposed to do. It was supposed to shut up men. That is to confine them with no escape to the reality that they were doomed and damned sinners. That's what it was supposed to do. And so when it did that it was doing exactly what it was supposed to do. It was a path of life, it was an unattainable path of life

which left the sinner with the realization that he was really dead. And that's the way it was a ministry of death and a ministry of condemnation. It was a killer, an absolute killer. But that's exactly what it was supposed to do.

Now let's take an Old Testament saint, okay? Let's take anybody you want, Moses or anybody, Isaiah, Jeremiah...you know what happened? They knew that salvation was by faith because they knew that it was the faith of Abraham that caused God to justify him, remember that? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness, right? They knew that Noah was saved by grace. Remember, Noah found grace. So Old Testament people who really understood knew that salvation came when you went to God in faith and received grace.

But what was preliminary to that? A sense of your own sin, helplessness, hopelessness. You see, it's just kind of built in to fallenness that we think we can pick ourselves up, we can achieve what God wants us to achieve on our own. And it's not until we are driven to absolute bankruptcy, until we are to the point where we have no confidence in ourselves, until we are mourning and pounding on our breasts and crying, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." Did you remember that guy, that Publican doing that in the temple in Luke 18? Do you understand that he was not a New Testament Christian, he was an Old Testament sinner under the conviction of the Law? And the Law had done in his life exactly what the Law is supposed to do, it had driven him to the place where he was pounding his breasts and saying, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." And that is what the Law had intended it to do, to shut you up.

Now before there was the Law man didn't really understand the depth and breadth of his iniquity. That is why Acts 17 says, "The time of their ignorance got overlooked," and He was patient and He was more tolerant because He realized that there was not a very strict and clear, crystal-clear categorical laying out of His Law to which a man could be measured and therefore rendered wicked. And so He was more patient. But when the Law came, it was set. And so, here's what would happen. Some Old Testament person, a Jew and perhaps a proselyte from the Gentiles would be exposed to the Law of God, he would see what he was. He might see the Law of God in its narrowest summary...love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself...and say, "I don't love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength...there's a lot of stuff in there vying for my affections." He might have understood the Law in the Ten Commandments, the first half dealing with the relationship to God, the second half with man. And he could find in there places where he had violated that Law of God. Or he might be exposed to the huge codification of Law that had been given in the Mosaic economy, laid out in the Pentateuch in the Old Testament. At whatever point he intersected with the Law of God, he would come to himself and he would say, "I can't...I can't keep it." And he would look at his inability and his helplessness and his hopelessness and he would say, "I am lost, I am undone," like Paul said...like the Publican, he would pound his chest and say, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner, I can't save myself, I am dead, I am a living dead man. I'm headed for an eternal death. What am I going to do? How do I get out of

this?" And he would come to God because he has heard that God is a God of grace and surely He is. When Moses said to God, "Show me Your glory," God said, "Here, I'll let you see My grace and My mercy," because that's His glory. They knew God was gracious.

The fact that Adam and Eve lived past their sin means God is gracious, doesn't it? And that God allowed them to be redeemed. They knew God was gracious. And so in the despair of their sinfulness, having been clearly told what their sin was because they had been measured by the Law of God, that person would then come with a repentant penitent heart, like that Publican pounding on their chests and say, "God, I have nowhere to turn, I have no resource, I can't keep the Law, it's killing me. I'm dead. All I can do is cast myself on Your mercy and Your grace, please save me." And at that point they would exercise faith and they would be saved.

And you say, "Well how could God just wash their sin away?" Because Jesus Christ would come and in His body would bear the very sin that God was forgiving. That's how Old Testament people were saved, by faith through grace. And the Law had a gracious purpose in that it drove them to that point. That's what it was supposed to do.

But do you know what happened? The Law was supposed to kill in those two ways, but there's a third way the Law killed and when it kills this way it really kills...it really kills. Look at Romans 9:31. Now follow very carefully Romans 9:31, "Israel pursuing a Law of righteousness did not arrive at that Law." Oh boy. Here was Israel, they were pursuing righteousness by the Law, they never got it. Now listen very carefully. The Law had the ability, listen carefully, the Law had the ability to bring you to righteousness. How? By manifesting your sin and in the despair of that realization you in faith cast yourself on the forgiving mercy and grace of God. In that way the Law could lead you to righteousness. In that way it could fulfill its gracious purpose, even though you couldn't be saved by obeying it because you couldn't obey it perfectly. At least you can know your imperfection and the Law then would drive you to the righteousness available from God to those who believed.

But Israel never ever arrived at that point where they understood the Law in its intention. Do you know what they did? Verse 32, why didn't they ever arrive at it? Because they didn't pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.

You know what they did? Instead of looking at the moral Law and saying, "I'm falling short, I'm a living dead man, I'm going to go into an eternity without God, God...be merciful to me a sinner." They didn't want to accept that. They didn't want to accept that assessment of their condition so they flipped over to the ceremonial side, right? And they said, "Well, we know what we'll do, we'll become righteous by maintaining all the ceremonies. And so they developed this whole sacramental, sacerdotal, ceremonial, liturgical, religious, ritualistic kind of format. And that's exactly what Paul means when he says, "They didn't arrive at the Law." They never got there in the sense that they never comprehended its intent because they wanted to pursue it by works. They couldn't do this part,

the moral part by works but they could sure do this part. Right? Now does that remind you of the same kind of sacramental ceremonialism we see today in the Greek Orthodox, the Roman Catholic Churches and liturgical Protestant churches?...where people never do really deal with the intent of God's moral Law, driving them to desperation, penitence, brokenness, contrition and repentance, but rather they substitute all the format, all the stand up, sit down, light the candles, do the whole deal, go through all of the mechanics of the thing and God will accept that as true religion and righteousness. That's why God hates sacramentalism because it is a deception which produces damnation...because you never arrive at the real intent. And in Romans 10:3 it says, "The Jews didn't know about God's righteousness and so they went about seeking to establish their own..." To put it simply, they thought God was less righteous then they were...they thought God was less righteous than He was. They thought they were more righteous than they were so they were fine.

What a terrible deception, right? And that's why Jesus could look into the eyeballs of the most religious, fastidious, ceremonial, legalistic, Mosaic people in the whole of the economy, the Pharisees and say to them, "You are of your father, the devil and where I go you will never come." And, beloved, I submit to you that there are people not in Judaistic ceremonialism today but there are people caught up in Roman ceremonialism and orthodox ceremonialism and liturgy like that who are all wrapped up in symbols and have never dealt with the moral issues of their spiritual deadness and have never been driven to brokenness, repentance and contrition and embraced Jesus Christ by grace through faith. This is real deadness because now you have misconstrued the whole intent of God's Law. You talk about being dead, you're really dead.

Now all of that and I didn't even get to my notes...all of that takes us to verse 6 where we've already been. Now look what he says, "This new covenant...now listen very carefully...is not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life." Listen to what I'm going to say to you. You know something? Even under the old covenant the letter killed and the Spirit gave life. Even under the old covenant that was true.

What does he mean by the letter? Well I think the letter here is not just a synonym for Law, I don't think that's what it is. I don't think it is a direct synonym for Law. I think it is a term expressing a distortion of the true intention of the Law. The true intention of the Law was to make a person recognize his sinfulness, his inability, his hopelessness, his helplessness. And there he is lost in the pit of his own iniquity and he knows he can't do anything about it and he has to cast himself on the mercy and grace of God and he comes in faith. And when he comes, God will forgive him...absolutely. Isaiah 55:6 and 7 lays that out as clearly as it can be laid out, so do many other places in the prophets. So that, listen, Paul does not use letter as a simple equivalent of the Law. Letter is rather what the legalist is left with as a result of misunderstanding the Law, or misusing the Law because the Law is spiritual, Romans 7:14 says. The letter of the Law is in isolation from the spirit of the Law which is its true character. That's what commentator Cranfield who wrote on Romans called the denatured Law, it's stripped of its purposes.

So the Jews came to a Law that was supposed to unmask their sin and drive them to God. The only way that could happen is if they were really dealing with the spirit of the Law...if they were really dealing with the intent of the Law, if they were really dealing with the inside. And, of course, that involves the Holy Spirit as well. And you can take the word there as "spirit" with a small "s," or the intent, the moral essence of the Law...or "S" the Holy Spirit...and I'm content with either. We are servants of the new covenant and there in the new covenant we deal with the Holy Spirit, we deal with the things of the heart, things of the Spirit, things of the inside...not external ceremony, for external ceremony kills but the Spirit, the Holy Spirit here, of course, gives life.

This leads back again one other Scripture, and then we'll close, to Romans 2:27. It's really challenging for me to sort all this out in my mind as I speak to you and I'm going to keep working through this passage, we'll get further quite a bit next Sunday, but verse 27 needs to be addressed in Romans 2. See the phrase "the letter of the Law," or just "the letter" in the original in the middle of verse 27? Mark that out as I read it, "And will not he who is physically uncircumcised," that's a Gentile, "if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?" There you can see that the letter is distinct from the Law. Just trying to prove the point that I was making there in 2 Corinthians 3, that the letter is not equal to the Law, but the letter is an interpretation of the Law that strips it of its moral spiritual content and makes it purely external.

Someone who does that...verse 28...is not a true Jew for he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly and circumcision is that which is of the heart by the Spirit and not by the...what?...the letter. So there consistently again Paul uses the term "letter" not as a synonym for Law but as a way to describe a misapprehension, a misunderstanding and a misconception of the Law. Keeping the letter means going through all the external ceremonies while never dealing with the moral intent so that you never grapple with sin, you never deal with real repentance, you never come by grace through faith to embrace Jesus Christ, you just fuss around with all the symbols. And that is a deception that leads people to think they are conforming to God's intention when they're not. Now that is a real killer...a real killer. That's very hard to recover from. You can recover from the Law's intent to kill you in the fact that it drives you to despair over your wretchedness because that's going to drive you to Christ. But when you get to that point and you opt out for the ceremonial religion, now you have lived passed your recognition into a damning deception. As I said, we don't have that same Judaizing, that same problem today but we have the problem of sacramental ceremonial religion predominantly in the Roman Catholic system where masses and masses of people feel they have a relationship to God because they crank through certain external ceremonies and the deception is frightening.

And as I said last Sunday, for us to just blindly throw our arms open and announce to the whole world that all of those people are brothers and sisters in Christ because they use His name and for us as

the document that I mentioned to you last week demands of us to confess our sin of trying to evangelize Catholics would be tantamount to joining the heresy. We can't do that. Their eternal souls are at stake and the integrity of God's truth is at stake as well.

Well, next week we'll get some more. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the new covenant in Christ...the new covenant which alone provides life through the Spirit, for the Spirit could only enter into a heart, could only be part of a life where sin was dealt with. We thank You that when the new covenant came the old was obsolete and all that external ceremony and all that ritual which was all symbolic of the real cleansing and the real sacrifice and the real washing in Christ, all the symbols are gone, the reality is here. And now we who were killed by the Law because of Christ and the indwelling Spirit now find the Law the very same Law to be a path of obedience and a path of life and a path of blessing and a path of joy and a path of fulfillment because by the Spirit we can obey the Law. As Paul said in Romans 8. So the Law killed us, Christ made us alive and now the Law is our friend and life to us and blessing. Father, I pray for people who are caught in the deception of external religion who have no relationship with you. May we reach out to these people and may we cause them not to look at the ceremony but to look at the commandments of the Scripture which unmask their wretchedness and their sinfulness and are intended to drive them to Christ. May we do all we can to help them listen to the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit that they might come to the place of real penitence and find Your ready forgiveness. We thank You for what You provided in Christ for the saints of old who were not made perfect without Him and for what You provided in Him for us. Help us to be people who live by faith and should there ever be a hall of fame for New Testament believers, we would be overjoyed should we be allowed to be mentioned. Help us to live exemplary lives of faith in Christ as repentant sinners who have cast ourselves on Your mercy in Him, we pray in His name. Amen.

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