

The Glory of the New Covenant, Part 3

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:7

Code: 47-17

It's been our privilege over the last several weeks, and will again this morning, to be looking at Second Corinthians chapter 3, Paul's rich, heartfelt letter to His beloved Corinthian church. And as we are in chapter 3, looking at Verses 6 through 18, we're considering the subject, The Glory of the New Covenant, the new covenant. I have reminded you in the weeks past that the new covenant is the covenant in Christ's blood. That is the promise of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The new covenant is glorious. The new covenant is all-sufficient. The new covenant saves. It is the new covenant that is the heart of the Christian gospel that Jesus died, rose again to provide forgiveness of sin, a covering righteousness, and eternal life. We preach the new covenant. We preach the gospel. So did Paul.

Unfortunately, however, Paul had His steps dogged by some people who were preaching the old covenant also, trying to confuse the issue of salvation. The gospel of Jesus Christ is sufficient to save. We always say that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. It has no necessary ritual that contributes to salvation. There is no ceremony and there are no human works. A sinner, broken and contrite, and humbled over His own inequity or her own inequity, realizing there's no way out of judgment and inequity, comes to God, pleads grace, pleads mercy, pleads forgiveness. And God, on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done to satisfy His own justice and to provide an atonement for that sinner, forgives, embraces the sinner, covers the sinner in the righteousness of Christ, and gives him the promise of eternal life. That's the Christian gospel.

There is no ceremony that is a part of it. There is no ritual that is a part of it. That is why, in a truly Christian church where the gospel is understood in a truly new-covenant environment, we don't have ceremony and symbols but rather the clear explanation of the reality in Jesus Christ. We're not depending on symbols for our salvation. We're depending on the reality of Jesus Christ. But always, always, whether in Paul's day or our day, there are those who want to come along with what we call symbolic religion, a kind of a sacramental religion, sacerdotal religion, that puts into some symbolic kind of behavior spiritual meaning, spiritual reality, and saving grace.

There were those in Corinth doing that. Coming along and demanding that the people who were already redeemed in Christ, in order to validate their redemption and to assure their redemption, needed to keep the ceremonial Law of Moses. These gentiles needed to be circumcised. They needed to make sure they followed through on washings and ceremonies and sacrifices and et cetera. They were demanding a return to old-covenant symbols which were now obsolete since the

reality had come. Going back and exalting the symbols is pointless. It not only rejects the reality of the gospel but perverts the purpose and meaning of the symbol. It never were intended to minister grace. It never were intended to minister spiritual life, but only to be pictures of that which could and would do that.

So in dealing with this in Corinth, Paul writes in this section a concern that people understand the difference between the new covenant and the old. Or better stated, that people will understand the transition from the old covenant to the new. It isn't that the old covenant and new covenant are opposites. It isn't that they are opposed to each other. It is that one gives way to the next. The old covenant, in and of itself, was not complete. It could not save. It could not grant righteousness. It had to pass away and be replaced by the new. The old covenant, however, did serve a purpose, a very good purpose. And that purpose was fulfilled historically, and when the time came for that purpose to fade, it faded, and the new covenant came in its place.

As I've been thinking about all of this, I've been trying to cover as much as I could to help you to get a grip on it, I've been made more aware that there are some people in broad evangelicalism who do not understand the relationship between the new covenant and the old, between law and gospel, between law and grace. This was pointed out to me this week in a most surprising and disappointing way. I was talking to an individual telling me about His church, telling me about His pastor. And he was telling me that after years in the pastorate and years in this particular church, he had gone to His pastor in doing some of His own Bible study as a layman. And he had said to him, "How were people in the Old Testament saved?" to which the pastor immediately replied, "By keeping the law." And, of course, I don't know how far and wide that misconception goes. But when you find it at the level of spiritual leadership it is indeed a grievous thing. Nobody was ever saved by the law in any age, ever. The law couldn't save.

Now, let me talk a little bit about the law. And let's get back to kind of...we'll kind of work our way down a funnel to get back to where we left off. When we talk about the law in the Bible, we're talking about the law that we put under the category of the Mosaic Law. That is to say that which God revealed to Moses. God revealed His law to Moses. Now, the law that God revealed to Moses, which is recorded in the Old Testament, particularly, of course, in the law, the first five books, that law has three components basically, three components: civil law, moral law, and ceremonial law.

Now let me see if I can't help you to understand the purposes of those. Civil law was God-given instruction for the socioeconomic life of His people, Israel. Certainly, some of the things that God gave in His civil law for their life would transcend them. But, primarily, he gave a kind of order for their social life that would isolate them from the world around them so they wouldn't be overly influenced by paganism, and they could maintain themselves as a pure testimony to the one God in the world. So there is in the Law of Moses a civil component which was designed to make Israel a unique nation.

Secondly, there is a moral component. There is a part of the revealed law to Moses which is ethical, which is moral. It has nothing to do with social behavior in terms of a socioeconomic system to make a nation distinct. It has to do with morality. It has to do with behavior toward God and toward man in a social realm but behavior that is moral. It's the moral part of the law. It has to do with the heart. It has to do with virtue, with righteousness and with sin.

The third component of the law is the ceremonial component. The ceremonial component of the law is a series of pictures or symbols. In one way or another, they're all tied to redemption. They're all tied to God's saving purpose. They may demonstrate the sinfulness of man, which portrays His need for saving. They may demonstrate the sacrifice of the cross, its...for example the animal sacrifices. They may demonstrate the need for cleansing in the sense of the washing. They may demonstrate the goal or the benefit of salvation which is rest, namely the Sabbath.

But all of the symbolic components of the Mosaic Law are built around the redemptive purpose of God. So that the law then, with those three parts, was very comprehensive. Given to a special people, it identified how this people was to live in the world to be a separated people. You know they had dietary laws and they had certain festivals and feasts and all of that that subscribed their...prescribed their daily routine. They had certain customs and traditions in the way they dressed and the way they prepared food and all of that, that isolated them out. And then there were ways in which they were to deal with the things that they owned, their crops and their animals and all of that, which structured them as a self-contained entity, isolated in some ways from the rest of the world, and yet to reach the rest of the world with the truth about the one true God. But that was the civil kind of thing.

The ceremonial law, as I said, was pictures and symbols. Never was a person saved by making an animal sacrifice. Never was a person saved by going through a ceremonial washing. Never was a person saved by maintaining Sabbath or a jubilee year. People were not saved by keeping the ceremonial law. It was the picture of the need to be saved. Now then we look, most importantly, at that middle one, the moral law. Now mark this. When the new covenant comes, the civil law, that which uniquely identifies nation as...the nation Israel as a separate people who are set aside. Why? Because the middle wall has come down. Jew and gentile are made one in Christ, right. So there's no more unique ethic...a unique civil, social kind of behavioral code for the church.

Now, there are some people who, today, still believe there is. Sometimes we call them reconstructionists or theologians, so you may have heard those terms. If you haven't heard them, good. And if you don't know what I'm talking about, better. But they're trying to impose the whole civil identification of Israel's kind of living on the church, which is an unnecessary thing. It's all been set aside. The New Testament makes these issues clear for us. Now, the ceremonial law, set aside. Colossians 2, "Don't let anybody hold you to any of those feasts, and new moons and festivals." And,

of course, the Book of Hebrews show that the whole sacrificial system has been done away.

But the heart and soul of the law then is the moral law, the moral law. The ceremonial law was temporary, picturing the new covenant which was to come. That is why I said to you in the last couple of weeks, that a ceremonial kind of sacramental, sacerdotal, symbolic kind of Christianity is a perversion. Because that whole approach to ceremony, in the true religion of Judaism, was only a picture of the new covenant. And once the new covenant comes you don't need any of that stuff. I'll say a little more about that in a minute.

Now, let's look at the moral law. Let's take that middle part called the moral law. And let me tell you there were three basic reasons for the moral law, three reasons. Reason number one, to reveal God. You will never see God's essence more clearly, that is the essence of His moral nature, His holiness, His supreme attribute, than you will see it in His revealed law. That's Him. That's God. The truest expression of God comes through His law. God is revealed as the holy, holy, holy God that the angels said he was in Isaiah 6, when you look at His law. So it reveals God. Secondly, it reveals God's will for man's behavior.

And then there's a third purpose of the law. The third purpose of the moral law is, therefore, to render man a sinner. Because as sinful man comes to the law and sees holy God and God's holy standard for him and looks at His own life, he realizes he comes short, right. So the law, then, exposes His sin. The purpose of the law then, in the Old Testament, in one category, was to identify a unique people who would live separate from the world as a witness to the true good.

The second component of the law, the ceremonial one, was to give that people graphic, symbolic pictures of a redemption that they desperately needed, which was to come later in the new covenant promise to them. And the middle portion, the moral portion, was to reveal God, reveal God's will for man, and to leave men very aware that they fell short and were sinners. Never did God intend the ceremonial part of the law to keep going and going and going and going, and yet that's what the Jews wanted to do with it.

These people called Judaizers or false teachers or false apostles, or the circumcision party if you will, they were going around and following Paul and, of course, anywhere there was a church, and they were confusing the scene by saying, "We have to keep the ceremonies, we have to keep the ceremonies, we have to keep the ceremonies," because they had been confused at some point and deceived into believing that those ceremonies played a part in salvation. And they never did, never did. They were demanding a return to old covenant symbols, which were obsolete since the reality had come.

Why do you need the symbol? They wanted to go back and exalt the symbols, and that's absolutely pointless. It not only, as I said, rejects the reality of the gospel, but it rejects the meaning of the

symbol. It turns from the gospel of reality in Christ and the gospel of grace to the empty sacramentalism of symbols and shadows and pictures. And that's what was going on in Corinth, and that's what Paul had to address to get them to realize that the old covenant was fine. It had its day; it's had its glory. But the new covenant has come and the old has gone. And that's what he's basically saying in this chapter, as we will see.

Now, I've been telling you that there's a parallel to that today. Today, we have a very similar situation. We have evangelical, orthodox, fundamental Christianity people who go around like we do, preaching the gospel of Christ, salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that great sola testimony of the reformation. We go around preaching the gospel and also confusing the scene. And following around after us is the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and certain sacramental, sacerdotal forms of a high-church liturgical Protestantism, advocating symbols and pictures as they were...as if they were reality.

This is exactly the same kind of thing that the Apostle Paul is dealing with. Only in some ways it's worse. At least the Judaizers had a God-ordained and God-instituted bunch of symbols. At least they could say, "Well, they're in the Bible. They're in the Old Testament." At least the Jewish legalists could go back to a system, which though now obsolete, had originally been instituted and prescribed by God, Himself, in the Old Testament.

But Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, has substituted symbols which never were in the Bible, and invented them. And they are symbols, believe me, that are in place of the reality. Catholicism, through the years, and forms of Greek Orthodoxy and Eastern Orthodoxy, and even forms of Protestantism, have invented their own non-Scriptural system of works and ceremonies. The Roman system, for example, has Rosary Beads, prayers to the saints and Mary, formula prayers, penance, veneration of saints and angels, et cetera, et cetera. None of it is biblical. None of it is Old Testament. None of it is New Testament. They just invented it all. This all grew out of their own musings and traditions and councils and edicts.

These kinds of things even show up in, for example, Lutheranism, where you have the belief that there is grace being ministered in the real presence of Christ in the Communion service itself, where the ritual becomes a reality. They make the blasphemous claim, do these sacramentalists, that Christ is actually present in the elements. He's in the bread and he's in the wine, and when the mass is taking place and it's being offered to you in the mass, he is being sacrificed really, literally, over and over and over and over.

And even the worst form of Jewish ritualism never went so far as to invent all of that kind of wild stuff. So it's not anything that we don't experience today. True, simple, pure salvation, as understood in the new covenant, is always cluttered up by the ritualists. It was then. It is now. Now, Paul wants us to understand that the old covenant had a glory, but it was temporary glory. It did its role well. It had its

place. It served its purpose. But now, the new covenant has come, and the new covenant is the saving covenant.

Let's go back into our text, so much that can be said about all of this. The old covenant then, looking at the moral law, was designed to produce an awareness of sin. It was designed to lead a person to sin. Now, if you were a Jew living in the Old Testament, as I told you last time, and you were exposed to the law of God, which they were, and it was read every...every Sabbath. They were aware of the law of God. They taught it to their children, day in and day out, sitting down, standing up, walking in the way. And as they were exposed to the law of God, it revealed God, it revealed God's holy standard for their living. And, consequently, it exposed their sin because they never could live up to the standard, never, never. And so it awakened the reality of sin.

And it led that Old Testament person, that Old Testament Jew, to a point of despair or a point of brokenness or contrition...as that word is used also...to a point where he said, "I can't live up to the law of God. I'm cursed." "Cursed is everyone who doesn't abide by all things written in the book of the law," it says in Deuteronomy. So he knew that if he every broke the law in any way he was damned. So here he has a revelation of the perfect purpose of God, the perfect mind of God, the perfect nature of God, and the perfect will of God for man. He can't live up to it. He is a wretched sinner. He's got no hope. He can't save himself. What's he gonna do?

Well, the lie was keep all the sacrifices. And if you just do the sacrifices and show up at the temple on the appropriate times and observe the Sabbath and do the washings and eat a kosher diet and take care of all the Sabbath law, if you just do all that stuff that'll save you. That'll save you. And that is the kind of false Judaism that grew up and deceived the whole nation, so that by the time Jesus arrives all the leadership of the whole nation of Israel believes that the way to deal with the sin problem is by maintaining the ceremonies.

And it's their daily genuflections at the purpose of...for the purpose of prayer at the right hour. It's their going through all of the myriad of things that they do ceremonially that delivers them from the consequence of their sinfulness. So instead of seeing the ceremonial part of the law as a picture of redemption, they saw it as a means of redemption, just like Catholicism does today. You could look at the symbols of Catholicism and say, "Well, certainly they're symbolic of the reality," if they could see the reality. But the symbol obscures the reality and the deception is that by virtue of attending to the symbols, you've saved yourself. That's the same deception.

So the law which drives men to sin was never intended to give them a solution to their sin by keeping the ceremonies, and yet that became the perversion of Judaism. And that is, today, the perversion of any sacramental, sacerdotal kind of religion. It's not a relationship; it's not a reality. It's just a bunch of symbols. But the deception is deadly, because the deception, you think, is the solution to the problem, and it isn't. And so we have all these people who are religious, very religious. And you can

go to the land of Israel and I mean you'll see some religious Jewish people. I mean very religious. And they are observing all the ceremonies, and they go through it all. I mean they are devout and they are orthodox, and they are going through it all.

I've gone in the temple...the synagogue, rather, at the old temple ground. I've gone in there, spent hours in there, and I've watched these guys studying the letter of the law, the minutiae of the law. I've watched them with little boys at their feet as they are teaching them the Quran, and going through the whole thing and all of this. And they do this hour upon hour, upon hour, day after day, after day, after day. And their conclusion is that they can't live up to the law, and in order to accommodate that inability, they keep certain ceremonies and certain rituals and do certain works on the side, and that's the saving means.

And they are never driven to the point where, in utter despair and in abject horror over their inability, and seeing the uselessness of ceremonial religion, driving themselves to God, crying out, beating on their breast, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner, and save me by grace." They never get to that bit. They substitute the ceremony for the salvation God provides in His Son. And, again, I say you have the same thing here. You have it with the Roman Catholics, who are content to go to the ceremony week after week, after week, after week and believe in their heart that that takes care of their sin, right. And it doesn't.

I'm not saying this because I don't like Catholics. I'm saying this because I love them. What fool is going to leave them in their deception? So the Apostle Paul wants to take us back and say, "Look, you need to understand the purpose of the law in all its components; its moral component to drive you to despair; its ceremonial to show you how desperately you needed a Savior. You're not to see the law as your salvation in its ceremonial form." Circumcising people isn't gonna save them. Putting them through mosaic ceremony isn't gonna save them any more than some personal effort to keep the moral law could save you. It can't because as soon as you break one thing, you're doomed. That's why Paul says in verse 6 that "Any true preacher, any true minister, any true servant of God is a servant of a new covenant, of a new covenant."

See all the law was ever supposed to do was make your sin visible to you. I'll say more about that in a moment. Now, in describing the better new covenant which he launches in verse 6, Paul makes eight points. He only made seven last week, but I found another one. So this week he's gonna make eight, but actually he's gonna make none of them because he won't get there. But I found at least eight ways in which he shows the superiority of the new covenant here, eight ways.

He gives life, produces righteousness, is permanent, brings hope, is clear, centered on Christ, liberating, and transforming. Don't worry about that. We'll get to them. Eight superior elements of the new covenant, which would cause us to take the old covenant and set it in its proper place. It's been replaced. Marvelous, marvelous distinction, thrilling distinction. Now, let me remind you of the first

one. We went into that last week. The new covenant gives life, verse 6. Look at it there. "The new covenant is not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." You remember we discussed that, that the new covenant gives life because it is spiritual. It is empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is internal. It is not external.

And the word, "letter," here is not so much the idea of the law itself but of the misrepresentation in formality or ceremony. Letter literally means the miscomprehension of the law. It's described, by the way, in Romans 2:27 through 29 where it talks about he who is physically circumcised and he who is not. He says, for example, in verse 27, "And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?" And there he distinguishes the letter from the law, the letter of the law. And, again, down in verse 29, he says, "Not by the letter, and His praise is not from men but of God." So letter is distinguished from law there. And I pointed this out last week so I won't go into it in detail.

Letter is a misunderstanding of the law. Letter is what I told you. It is to look at the moral law and then say, "Oh, the cure is to keep the ceremony." And so you create some external, mechanical means of physical observance of these codes and these ceremonies, and thereby a system of supposed salvation. That's the letter. And that's particularly damning. The law is enough to kill you. The law will kill you in a positive sense because it'll drive you to despair and, hopefully, drive you to Christ. The letter will kill you in a negative way. The letter will kill you for sure for good because the letter appears to be the answer to your dilemma. It is the deception of a false and sacramental religion.

The letter is really a killer. So Paul is saying, "Look, when you have these people coming in, imposing on you this external kind of stuff, this misuse, misunderstanding, misapprehension of the law, it's gonna kill you. Only the Spirit can give life. We are preaching Christ and the power of the Spirit in the new covenant gospel." The sacramental system causes people to pursue salvation by letter, religious ritual, a damning distortion of true Christianity.

Now, let's look at the second point. This is the only one we'll cover. Again, I told you I'm not gonna hurry through this 'cause I really want you to get ahold of this. Second point is the new covenant produces righteousness. The new covenant produces righteousness. Let's look at verse 7, and we'll just get started into this one. "If" ...let's translate it differently. "Since the ministry of death and letters engraved on stones, came with glory..." Stop there. Now, for sure, Paul had been accused of depreciating the law of God. He had been accused of being against the law of God. In fact, they arrested him in Jerusalem for that and said, "He speaks against the law."

He was called by the Jews an antinomian, somebody who's against the law, *nomos* being the Greek word for law. He was always getting blasted with that accusation that he was against the law and the customs and the ceremonies of Judaism. So here he wants us to know that he's not. He sees the old covenant and he sees the law in its proper perspective. But its proper perspective is to see it, from

verse 7, as a ministry of death. "Since the ministry of death," he says. "The ministry of death.

Law is a killer. Are you ready for this? Law is the greatest mass murderer in the world's history. That's right. Law is a killer beyond all killers. It has a ministry of death. The law of God has the ministry of death. It just slays everybody who gets in front of it. Let me illustrate that by having you go to Romans chapter 7. Just follow this thought now from Paul. "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin?" Well, the answer, "May it never be, *m genoito*. No, no, no, no, no, no, and not in any regard. Never, can't be."

The law is not sin. Nothing wrong with the law; totally just and good. The law is not sin. But, on the contrary, look at verse 7. This is so powerful. "I would not have come to know sin, except through the law. Now, how would I know I was sinning if there wasn't a law to define my sin?" And he gives an illustration. "I would not have known what coveting if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' I wouldn't have known that." Now, if there's no law, then there's no way to define sin. So Paul says, "The law came to define sin. Apart from that law, I wouldn't know I was a sinner. If you don't tell me coveting is a sin, I'm not gonna know that it's wrong to do that." So the law came...notice this now. The law came to define sin, to define it. And where the law is, you know there's sin.

You know how the human being works. You know how we are? Let me just take a contemporary illustration today. Take the law of God out of society, okay. Just take the law of God and remove it from society. Now, how do we decide what's right and wrong? We can't, right. So the lady who's the head of some department at UCLA gets on the radio yesterday, and she says, "We've been greatly misunderstood at UCLA. Somebody's accusing us of discriminating against homosexuals and lesbians because we have an ROTC program and because the military and the ROTC has in their judgment a homosexual discriminatory policy, and because UCLA has ROTC; therefore, UCLA discriminates against homosexuals," and then goes into this long speech about, "We would never think of doing that. We don't want to do that. UCLA has a policy, and our policy is that we want to accept everybody from every sexual preference," et cetera, et cetera.

Here is the single greatest educational institution in the...Southern California, who is ostensibly educating the next generation of people who will lead the world. And they have absolutely no clue about what is right or what is wrong. They have none. And they want to run as rapidly as they can to the newest broadcast studio to make sure that nobody thinks they're gonna have some kind of a standard that is as antiquated as the a biblical one. So there's no way to define what is right or what is wrong. Now, what message do they send to their student body? Basically, "Do whatever you want, right. Whatever you want to do you just do." So what your doing is saying, "Just live out your humanity."

It's what Hugh Hefner said in the '60s. I'll never forget when I was a student at the seminary. I read an article in *Christianity Today*, which involved an interview with him in which he said, "What's wrong with...what's wrong with explicit sex?" He was starting *Playboy* magazine and all that stuff, and that

whole mentality. "After all, well, what's wrong with this? It's a natural urge, isn't it? And we have a natural urge to eat. We have a natural urge to drink and to sleep, and we have a natural urge to do this." And "This is just being human and we have that urge rather frequently like we do to eat. What's wrong with just doing that? That's just human behavior. And you know what. The depraved and fallen mind just says, "Yeah, yeah." And so he goes and does that. And do you think they're out there saying, "Oh, guilt, guilt, guilt"? No, but they don't know the rules.

That's why I wrote the book, *The Vanishing Conscience*." Because there's no system to inform the warning system. So why would they feel any compulsion about that? It's only when some authoritative law comes that they say, "Wait a minute. That's wrong to do that? And you mean if I do it I'm a sinner, and you mean sinners go to hell." Just take out the law and you can't...you can't get any message across. Paul says, "I was fine till I ran into the law. And when I ran into the law, I said, 'Covet, covet. You can't do that. I just thought that was normal human behavior, covet, covet, covet, covet. I coveted almost everything I saw.' " So it defines sin.

Now, I'm gonna give you the second thought. It not only defines sin...look at verse 8. "Sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind." I love that. It's like saying to somebody, "Don't think of a pink elephant. Don't you dare think of a pink elephant." As soon as you say to somebody, "Don't covet," what do they do? Covet. When you keep pounding the law on them, it just excites everything in them. And it's the sense of say..."That's wrong," and "Oh, I can..." And, all of a sudden, you begin to see coveting happening all over the place in your life, don't you? It's everywhere. It's every place.

It was there all the time. It was never defined for you. And then when the law came down, your fallenness said, "I don't like that law," and something in you starts to push you to do more of it. It's like the little kid walking through the store. And there's a little sign on the counter and it says, "Do not touch." And you're standing there and you watch him. His mom looks the other way, and he goes, "Um." "Stay out of the flower bed," and he looks around and sticks His foot in it just so he can say he did it.

It's just the way that the law is made. And when it confronts the fallenness of man, it defines His sin and it exacerbates His sin. Remember *Pilgrim's Progress* where law comes into the room and is like a servant, and starts to dust and billowing soot and dust...you never know how dirty it is and still you touch...till you start to dust when the sunlight's coming through the window. And you just say, "Whoa, this is"...and that's how the law...it just stirs dirt up every place. That's what it does.

It can't produce righteous. It's just a killer. It's a mass murderer. It has the ministry of death. In verse 9...well, end of verse 8, he says, "Apart from the law, sin is dead. And I was once alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin became live and I died." What did he mean? Well, he died a Spiritual death. He realized that His condition was Spiritual death. He realized he was cut off

from the life of God, that he was a sinner. He was doomed. "The commandment which God intended to result in life was death to me. Death to me." And in verse 11, "It killed me. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."

The problem is not with the law. The problem is what? With me, with me. Verse 14, "The law is spiritual. I'm flesh; I'm sold under bondage to sin." The law, the moral law was given by God to kill you. That's why we have to preach it. That's why you just have to have the moral law. You just have to hold it up and keep the standard high so that it slays people.

Look at Galatians chapter 3. I think I'll take a minute with this and we'll close. Galatians 3. The law then is designed to bring sinners to the knowledge of their sin, not to save them. It can't produce righteousness. It just produces death. Law is inferior. It cannot save. Its purpose is to reveal sin, lead the repentant sinner to faith in God, pleading for God's gracious forgiveness made possible in the sacrifice of Christ.

Look at verse 21 here. "Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? And, again, I cry again, 'No, no, no, no, no.' For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law." The law is not contrary to the promises of God, that is the promise of God for life everlasting and salvation. The law isn't contrary to that. It just can't produce it. It just can't make it happen. If it could, then righteousness would have been by law. But it can't. The law can't produce righteousness. The old covenant can't produce righteousness.

Now, listen to me. Nobody could keep the moral law, so keeping the law didn't save you. And going through the ceremonies and the symbols and the pictures didn't save you, because that couldn't save you either. And just being a Jew in the civilly identified community didn't save you. None of that did. There's nothing inherent in the law to save you. In fact, back in verse 10, "Cursed is everyone who doesn't abide by all things written in the book of the law to perform them." If you ever break one once, the law will curse you. So the law isn't gonna save you.

Back in verse 19, it says, "The law was added because of transgression." In other words, the law came...historically, God brought the law to define sin, to exacerbate sin, and to drive the sinner to despair. And verse 22 says "the Scripture," which is a synonym for the law, "has shut up all men under sin that the promise of faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." The whole idea of the law was to shut the sinner up to His sin and make him turn toward a Savior. In verse 23, "Before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, shut up till the faith later to be revealed. Therefore the law has become our *paidaggos*, our tutor, to lead us to Christ."

And this is not a tutor who sits in a classroom and lectures. This is a moral guardian. This was usually a man who was a servant, who wasn't so much dispensing information as he was carrying a switch and following the kid around, disciplining and conforming His behavior to a standard. The law is our

tutor to lead us to Christ that we may be justified by faith. That's the only way you can ever be justified. That's the way Abraham was justified when he was before the law, and that's the way everybody's justified, everybody. And all who believe, follow the faith of Abraham, are the children of Abraham because they're of faith.

Faith is the only way you'll ever be saved in any period of time, ever. The law is just to drive you to God. And then he says this, verse 25. "Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." You can set that aside, it's purpose accomplished. Put it aside. It brought us to Christ. And now the law is written in our hearts, and now we can fulfill it...Romans 8...by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. All the law does is kill. That's why in Romans 3, he says, "By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified." The law just brings the knowledge of sin. That's all it can do. It is then a ministry of death.

Go back to Second Corinthians 3, and one last comment there. He says, "If the ministry of death..." and we know he's talking about the law because of the next statement..."in letters engraved on stones." What's he talking about there? The Ten Commandments, right. Exodus 32, verses 15 and 16. You remember that Moses was in the mountain. God was giving him the law. Gave him the Ten Commandments written in rock. It says in those verses, 32:15 and 16, "Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in His hand, tablets which were written on both sides. They were written on one side and the other. And the tablets were God's work and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets." That's what Paul has in mind, that very Scripture, no doubt, engraved on the tablets when he writes here about the law engraved on stone.

Now, what was the Ten Commandments? Listen carefully. It was simply the summary of the moral law. It was the summary of the moral law reduced down to Ten Commandments. But, really, the whole law is encompassed in those ten as the whole ten is encompassed in the two, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself." So God wrote His moral law in stone. And the purpose of that was to destroy.

Through the years of my life in ministry, I've collected lots of fascinating memorabilia. I've traveled all over the world, as you know, in lots of places, and I've come home with all kinds of things that people give me that are a part of my life and sort of a myriad of memories that surround me in my various offices and studies. One very precious treasure was given to me a number of years ago by a friend. It's a quite small and obscure little thing. But I never look at it without having a tear in my heart if not in my eye.

It is a pencil etching, framed, of someone who's supposed to be Moses. And over His head he's holding the tables of stone. And he's got this fierce look on His face, and he is ready to bring them down on the head of this fragile sort of bedraggled, despairing, weak, wan-looking person, ready, literally, to just crush their life out with the law. Only surrounding this poor, bedraggled, frail soul is

Christ, and he's got His arms wrapped around His chest and His shoulders over His head, and he is completely engulfed in the embrace of Christ so that he could never be hit. The law would only hit Christ and, of course, he would shatter it into a million pieces.

And I look at that, and I think that that magnificently depicts what the law intends to do and what only Christ can prevent it from doing. "Because Christ," says Galatians 3, "bore the curse." The law did come down, only whose life did it take? His life. It smashed His life. And in smashing His life, itself, was smashed in terms of its ability to kill the one He protects. Tremendous.

The letters engraved in stone are a killer. Boy, anybody running around thinking you're gonna get into heaven by keeping the moral law, by being a good moral person, forget it. It'll crush you to powder unless you're protected by Christ. And when it hits him, it'll never touch you. In fact, he'll die in your place. Tremendous truth. Paul says, "This law, don't misunderstand me, came with glory. It came with glory." There was glory on the mountain. The cloud was there, the lightning, the thunder was there. The angels were there, because the law was mediated by angels. God was there writing in a fire...with a fiery finger in tables of stone. There was glory all over the place. Don't think the law is depreciated.

Don't think Moses...Moses elevated what Paul despises. No, Paul did not despise the law of God as His enemies suggested. He says, "It came with glory." It had its place. It was holy, glorious, just, and good. What Paul despises is not the law but misuse of the law, misrepresentation of the law. The law came with glory but...but at the end of verse 7, it says the glory of the law was what kind of glory. Fading glory, right. Fading glory.

It had a glory, but a glory that passed away and is replaced by the glory of the new covenant. The new covenant gives life. The new covenant produces righteousness. The law couldn't give life. It just kills. It couldn't produce righteousness. All it did was excite sin. It produced death and sin. The new covenant, life and righteousness. Now, that's the foundation of the rest of the passage. The rest of it is an illustration.

And you know how he illustrates it? He illustrates it in a most remarkable and amazing way by taking us back to an incident with Moses at that mount when he went in to get the law of God, saw God face to face and came out with God's glory all over His face. Paul selects that marvelous, incredible event in redemptive History as His illustration of the fading glory of the old covenant to be replaced by the permanent glory of the new. So next week, we'll go back to Exodus. We'll live with Moses through that incident which becomes the foundation for the rest of the passage. Let's pray together.

We're so blessed, our Lord, to have an understanding, even a simple understanding of your great, profound truth, of your provision for us in Christ. We're so grateful that you have opened to us a proper understanding of the law and the gospel, the old covenant, the new. Father, we know that

salvation has always been by your grace through the simple faith of the repentant sinner wrought in His heart by the Holy Spirit. Lord, we would pray for anyone who is here this morning who is living under the terrible, terrifying deception that somehow they can keep enough moral laws and be good enough to earn heaven. Oh, Lord, save them from that damning deception.

And Lord, save that person who thinks that if they can do enough ceremonies and go to church enough and light enough candles and say enough beads and pray enough prayers and go through a proper baptism or make a proper mass or engage in a Communion service, that somehow that'll save them. Deliver them from that equally damning deception. And shut up every sinner to His sin. May he realize His sin. May His sin be excited in every dimension of His life and...so he can see the fullness of it. And may he or she then come pleadingly and repentantly to Christ, who will take the blow for the repentant heart. We thank You that the new covenant in Christ gives life, life abundantly, life eternal, and produces righteousness, the very righteousness of Christ imputed to cover us. Father, we thank You for this.

Deliver us from every falling back into the trappings, the external things, when the reality is Jesus Christ. And may we, with Paul, give testimony to the fact that we used to do all of that until we saw the surpassing value of knowing Christ and everything else became rubbish. May we, with Paul, seek to know Christ, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His suffering and be made conformable unto His death. Give us Christ-centered lives that will be to His praise and glory, for we ask in His name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).