

The Glory of the New Covenant, Part 6

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:16-18

Code: 47-20

We return in our study this morning to II Corinthians chapter 3, and all my good intentions of finishing today are gone already. We'll have to wait until next Sunday, and that's I think as it should be because what remains when we're done this morning should stand alone as a message from the Lord to us. II Corinthians, chapter 3 looking at the glory of the New Covenant. I regret for those of you who are visiting with us or have been away for a while; this is part 6 in our series, and the rest is available on tape, one of the most important series we've done. I might encourage you to pick those tapes up. They're available at our tape center.

We're looking at the glory of the New Covenant here in this chapter. Let me just begin by bringing you up to speed very briefly. The Christian message is that Jesus Christ died to forgive sin. That is the gospel. That is the good news, that God promises to forgive sin to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's good news. That's the Christian gospel. That's our message. All men and all women are sinners. They cannot do anything to rescue themselves from the consequence of their sin, which is eternal hell, endless punishment under the judgment of God. That's the bad news. The whole world is sentenced to hell. Every mouth is stopped. The whole world is guilty, every living person; past, present, and future. And they're all on their way to hell.

The good news is that Christ Jesus, God in human flesh came into the world to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. His death was a substitute for sinners to satisfy the wrath of God and the justice of God and thus allow God to forgive since the penalty had been paid by Jesus Christ. That's the Christian gospel. That also is the New Covenant. That's the New Covenant. It is the promise of the forgiveness of sin because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. That's why Jesus said, "This New Covenant is in My blood." It is a covenant ratified by shed blood. The New Covenant, the gospel, the good news, the Christian message is all the same. God promises forgiveness of sin to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ because Christ satisfied the justice of God by dying a death that fulfilled the required penalty for sin.

Jesus' death on the cross, therefore, was no a death for Him, but a death for you and for me for our sins, and allows God to offer us the promise of complete forgiveness if we repent and believe. That is the New Covenant is His blood. That is the promise.

In the passage before, starting in verse 6 and running down through verse 18, the Holy Spirit presents through the apostle Paul the superiority of this New Covenant to the Old Covenant, which

came through Moses. The apostle Paul in verse 7 calls the Old Covenant, “a ministry of death,” and in verse 9 calls it, “a ministry of condemnation.” Paul said, “I saw the Law of God, and I died. I saw what a sinner I was and it slew me.” It was intended to drive the sinner to despair, and in this despair, he would run to God and say, “I can’t keep the Law. I can’t keep the standard. I know I’m under the curse of death. Please forgive me.” And with a penitent and a broken and a contrite spirit, the sinner would cast himself on the mercy and the grace of a forgiving God.

As we read in Psalm 99 this morning, we know they knew that God was a forgiving God, that He was a pardoning God, that He gave grace and mercy and forgiveness to one who came and asked. We reject any message that preaches salvation by works, by morality, by ceremony, by ritual, by right. The only true preacher, verse 6 says, “Is one who is a servant of a New Covenant.” And we preach that everyone must come to Jesus, the Mediator of a New Covenant, as Hebrews 12:24 says, if they want to be saved.

Even Old Testament saints who, of course, lived long before Christ was ever born still had to come to God and plead mercy and grace, which God gave them on the basis of the death of Christ, which hadn’t happened, but when it did happen would have retroactive effect. So we’ve learned that Old Testament saints were saved by the death of Christ. They didn’t fully understand that. I’m sure they knew that God would provide for them just as Abraham knew that God would provide a lamb. They knew but couldn’t see and yet the effect of the death of Christ was retroactive. And so it allowed God the freedom to forgive sin, sin in the Old Testament, and still be just and righteous because that sin would be atoned for in the sacrifice of the Lamb who was slain from before the foundation of the world.

Into Corinth came false teachers, and they were preaching Old Covenant, and Paul is writing back and saying, “They’re not true teachers. They’re not true apostles.” A true preacher and a true teacher and a true apostle is a servant of a New Covenant. We preach the gospel. That’s the New Covenant, the good news. He is defending himself in this epistle, and here he defends himself as a true preacher as over against those false preachers because he preaches New Covenant truth. And then he launches, in verse 6, into discussing the superiority of the New Covenant. It is superior to the old for a number of reasons.

Now, let me give you the ones we’ve already gone over. One, it gives life, verse 6. The old one kills. The new one ministered by the Spirit gives life. Secondly, it provides righteousness. The old one, verse 7, is a ministry of death. Verse 9, is a ministry of condemnation. The New Covenant is a ministry of righteousness abounding in glory, says verse 9.

Thirdly, the New Covenant is permanent, permanent. That’s why in verse 11 at the end he says, “The New Covenant is that which remains.” It’s not fading away. It remains. There never will be another one. This is it. This is the final one. This is the culmination. This is the high point. This is the finish.

Gives life, provides, righteousness. It's permanent.

Fourthly, it brings hope. In verse 12 he says, "Therefore, having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech." The New Covenant is a covenant of hope. Then fifthly, we saw that it was clear. We remember now that all of this is built around the incident of Exodus 34 where Moses saw the glory of God and put a veil over his face. And we talked about that last time as we closed out that Moses had to put a veil over his face. And then when he went back up to see the Lord in the mountain, Exodus 34:34 says he'd take the veil off, and he'd see God's glory, and the glory would get on his face. And he'd go down and he'd speak to the people; then he'd put a veil over his face.

Paul makes the point that the Old Covenant was veiled. There was something missing in there. There was something in the Old Covenant hidden and veiled and closed. He says, "Until this very day," in verse 14, "wherever the reading of the Old Covenant takes place, the same veil remains over their faces." There's something obscure about it. There's something dark about it. There's something that's not revealed. You look at it today – if you look at the Jews who know the Old Covenant so very well and the traditional Jews who study the Old Covenant, and yet there's mystery. There's deep profound mystery. Where does it all lead? What does it all mean? Where is it all going? Veiled, obscure, and made even more difficult to comprehend because their hearts are hard and their minds are blinded. It makes the veil even worse. Verse 15 says, "Wherever Moses is read even to this day, a veil lies over their heart."

The New Covenant is not like that, verse 13 says. It's not like Moses. It's clear. It's absolutely clear. We saw that clarity, how that when you come to the New Covenant, everything is clear. A wayfaring man, though he be a fool need not err. You can become like a little child. It's so simple. It's crystal clear. The new promise in Jesus Christ is crystal clear. The old one was symbols, mysteries, obscurities. The new one is reality. Mystery is dissipated. Obscurities are gone. The gospel is simple and clear.

Now, let's go to a sixth one. That's the review. The New Covenant is superior because it is centered in Christ. It is Christ-centered. It is Christ-centered. Go back to verse 14, the end of the verse. The veil is removed in Christ. All the pictures and symbols and types and obscurities, all the mysteries are gone like a fog blown away by a high wind when you come to Christ. In the New Covenant reality, the veil is lifted. The beloved prophet Isaiah saw this and wrote about it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah chapter 25, he talks about what the Lord is going to do someday, what's going to happen in the future when God exalts Himself. "The Lord," verse 6, "is going to prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain, a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, refined aged wine." A great celebration.

And then verse 7, and that's certainly talking about salvation. That's talking about the time when Israel is saved, and not just Israel, but all the nations are going to come to recognize Christ. This is

the time of the end that he's speaking of eschatological times around the time of the Kingdom. And verse 7, "And on this mountain, He will swallow up the covering, which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations." There's going to come a time when the veil is removed, when they look on Him whom they've pierced and now instead of seeing Him with obscurity and confusion and even animosity and hostility; they're going to look upon Him whom they've pierced and mourn for Him as an only Son. The face of Jesus will become clear to them, and everything will take a different turn.

The veil is removed in Christ. The only way you will ever understand the meaning of God's Law, the only way you will ever understand the Old Covenant and its purpose is to see Christ, is to look into the face of Christ and everything becomes clear. Even Old Testament saints, follow this, Old Testament saints who saw the Law for what it was; it drove them to repentance. They came to God. They pled with God for mercy and grace. He granted that to them on the merits of Christ who would die for them. Even those people couldn't fully understand all the glory of God revealed in that New Covenant because they didn't know Christ. He hadn't come yet.

Moses, you remember, when he went back up in the mountain, Exodus 34:34, went back in to see God again and speak with God, he would take the veil off. And he would look at the glory of God that was there being revealed to him, at least a small portion of it being revealed to him. And he would see the glory of God, and that's how it is for a Christian. The veil comes off, and you see the shining glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 6 of chapter 4, verse 6 of chapter 4 says, "God who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' that is God who is the one who brings light in the midst of darkness is the same one who has shone in our hearts." He turned the light on in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of His own glory in the face of Christ. That's what happens when you're saved. All of the sudden, God turns the light on. You look at Jesus Christ and you see in Him the glory of God shining.

Friends, that's not something that happens because somebody has come to you with some pretty clever polemics. That's not something that happens because all of the sudden, you woke up one day and said, "This is rational." That's not something that happens to you because somehow you looked through the arguments and it made sense to you some argumentative standpoint that Jesus Christ was probably God in human flesh based upon the things that He did and said. The reason you awakened one day and could look at the face of Jesus Christ by faith and see that face the blazing glory of God is because God Himself turned on the light in you, and it all became clear.

But before the New Testament was written, there was so much difficult in fully understanding all of redemptive process and so the Old Testament saint didn't really fully see in the way that we see. The New Covenant is so much superior because the glory of God is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. There's no better way to see it. Oh, the Old Testament saint might say, "I saw the glory of God once.

It was floating in the sky. I saw the glory of God once. It came into the Tabernacle or the temple. I saw the glory of God once; it was revealed.”

Even the apostles might say, “I saw the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ in his transfiguration,” but there’s nothing to equal – and Peter even said this – there’s nothing to equal to seeing the unveiled revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ revealed in Scripture. That’s where you really see His glory. You don’t see with your human eyes. You see with the eyes of faith and understanding that have been moved by God himself. The New Covenant glory is that it looks right into the face of Jesus and sees God’s glory. The veil is off. We’re walking right into the mountain, right into the presence of God, right into His glory, and we’re seeing Him shining in the face of Jesus.

We don’t have to look at the prophetic word and try to figure it out and understand it, and who is He talking about, and when will it happen, and what kind of manner is it going to be? We don’t have that obscurity. We can look into the blazing revelation of the glory of God and the face of Jesus. We comprehend His grace. We comprehend His mercy. See, the glory of God is simply His manifest attributes, and they’re all embodied in Jesus Christ. That’s why John chapter 1, verse 14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

What did we see in Him? We saw glory. What is glory? Grace and truth, the attributes of God manifested in the life of Jesus Christ. We looked at Christ one day by God’s mercy, and we saw that He who made all things in creation was made flesh to provide salvation. We looked at Jesus Christ one day and we found that He who made man was made in the likeness of man, that He who made the Law was made under the Law; that He who was clothed with honor and majesty was wrapped in swaddling clothes; that He who came in weakness will come in power. We looked at Jesus Christ one day and it was all so clear. We saw that He who is the wisdom of God could still increase in wisdom and stature; that He of whom it is stated, “Behold your God,” could also be stated by Pilot, “Behold the Man.”

We saw Christ and we saw He before whom every knee should bow, bow His own knees and wash His disciples’ feet. We saw Christ and we saw the One who knew no sin, who did no sin, who was without sin, the One in whom was no sin, and He was bearing our sins in His own body on the cross. One day the light shone and we looked at Christ and we saw the Earth-rejected One was none other than the heaven-accepted One. We saw that He who wore the crown of thorns was to be crowned with glory and honor. He who was on a tree was to be on a throne. He who appeared to put away sin is now appearing in the presence of God for us. He who came to die will come to reign. And it all became clear to us because the light shone in our hearts to show us the glory of God and the face of Jesus Christ.

“And so,” says verse 16, “whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” No more obscurity. And He’s talking there about salvation. Turning to the Lord is a term for salvation. Turning from sin to the Lord; when that happens, the veil is gone. There’s no more obscurity. You look into the face of Jesus Christ and you see the glory of God. It’s all there. You want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. You want to know how God acts? Look at Jesus. You want to know how God reacts? Look at Jesus. He’s the glory of God manifest in human flesh, but you’ll never look at Him and see that glory unless God turns the light on inside, right? Unless He gives you the spirit of wisdom and knowledge and understanding the revelation that He has made in Christ.

One more verse contributes to this great truth that the New Covenant is focused on Christ. Look at verse 18. “But we all,” I have to stop at that point. “We all” is a very interesting statement because up to this point in this analogy with the experience of Moses there was only one person who actually took the veil off and looked at God, right? Moses. Moses was the only one who could look into the face of God, as it were, who could look at the glory of God and go back up the mountain, Exodus 34:34, take off the veil and he’d see the glory of God.

Now, Paul says not just Moses, not just one man on one occasion can see the glory unveiled. We all, we all. Not just prophets and apostles and preachers, but all of us. We all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. We can all see it, all of us, all who are in Christ. Why would you want to go back to shadows? Why would you want to go back to types and ceremonies and symbols and rituals? I don’t need to go to a religious service that does that. I want to go to a religious service that exalts Christ! Why? Because I see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. I don’t need to look at Holy hardware. I don’t need to go through ceremonies and rituals and routines. I just want to see Christ revealed. You don’t have to show me the symbols. I can take the reality. It’s not too much for me. The veil is off and I can look at the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ.

He uses a simple little expression. He says, “It’s like looking in a mirror.” Why does he choose that? Well, because of its clarity, because of its intimacy. You don’t to make any more of it than that. The emphasis is not on the idea of the mirror and what a mirror does, but the idea that you can bring something that close, that intimate, and look right at it. Mirrors, by the way, were polished metal. And in a time when there weren’t any glasses and obviously most people have eye problems, people didn’t see clearly. But you can see clearly the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ like a piece of polished metal as finely prepared as it could possibly be prepared to make the vision as clear as it could possibly be. Bring it right up to your face and look at it. That’s what he’s saying.

Our vision of the glory of God and the face of Jesus Christ is crystal clear in the New Covenant. Little footnote to that, couldn’t resist this. Those old metal mirrors, they were made out of polished metal. As malleable as the metal might be, as hard as they would work to pound it out and make it flat would

still have some little waves in it. It wouldn't be perfect. They wouldn't have the technique we have today, and so the vision would be clearer than anything else, and absolutely unobstructed because there's nothing between my eyes and what I'm looking at, but it would be a little less than perfect.

That's an apt thought too, isn't it? Because it doesn't yet appear what we shall be. We're looking into the mirror and we're seeing the glory of God revealed, but we're not seeing it the way we're going to see it when we see it perfectly. I Corinthians 13, "Now we know in part. Some day we'll know as we are known." There is a perfection yet to come, but even with the slightly imperfect view of the glory of God that we have, we see it majestically and marvelously and clearly don't we? With an unobstructed view in the face of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the one in whom the glory of God becomes visible. Matthew 17, they went up on the mountain and Jesus just, in effect, showed them that. Pulled back the veil of His flesh. Verses 1 and 2 says, "And He was transfigured before them." Peter writes about that. In II Peter 1 he says, "We were up in the Holy Mountain, and we saw His glory." He is the glory of God unveiled to the eyes of faith. A person who is not a Christian looks at Jesus Christ and doesn't see it, right? The Romans certainly didn't see it. They just hammered nails in Him and stuck Him on a cross. Jewish leaders certainly didn't see it. Spit on Him and cursed Him and mocked Him and wanted to make sure He didn't reign over them.

But to the eye of faith, He is the glory of God. And the pursuit of the Christian life then becomes the pursuit of Christ. It's only the New Covenant that has the power to remove the veil and to give the eyes of faith the vision of the unveiled Christ. Boy, it was a monumental moment when that happened to Paul. I mean he had a heavy veil. He really did. People think well, he was a very devout and a very religious and a very zealous Jew before he was converted. But he was a very self-righteous Jew too. Nothing is more damning than that.

When I read Paul's testimony, I don't read about a man who was broken by the Law of God. I read about a man who had achieved salvation by keeping the Law of God he thought. I read about a man who had a lot of spiritual pride. I don't read about a man who was really a true Old Testament saint, really led by God and led by the Spirit of God. I'm not sure about it. If he was really led by the Spirit of God, would he have engaged himself in murdering Christians? Wouldn't there have been some more ready transition into a New Testament kind of faith? I think he was a proud man. I think he was a man who had misused the Law of God to gain salvation.

At the same time, I think he was a sincere man, but I think he was clearly, from his own testimony, going about to establish his own what? Righteousness. He says that. He says it. Let's look at Philippians chapter 3 and look at something of the awakening that happened in this man's life. He was a letterist. He was under the killing letter of the Law, trying to achieve salvation through means that couldn't produce it. Look what he says in verse 3. You want to talk about confidence in the flesh?

Verse 4, "I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more." I have got the fleshiest flesh on record.

You want to talk about achievement? I'll stack mine up against your any day. Let's talk about fleshly achievement. That's not the talk of a spiritual man. That's not the talk of an Old Testament saint. That's not the talk of a man broken over his own iniquity and sinfulness, pleading for mercy and grace with a penitent heart before God. I don't see any chest beating going on here. He's a confident man. Hey, let me tell you my confidence. Circumcised the eighth day. Salvation by ritual? I'm in. Of the nation of Israel. Salvation by race? I'm in. Of the tribe of Benjamin. Salvation by privilege? I'm in. A Hebrew of Hebrews. Salvation by tradition. I kept the tradition. That's what he means. I was a Hebrew of Hebrews. I never deviated from the tradition. As to the Law? A Pharisee. Salvation by religion, by legalism? I'm in. Pharisees, fastidious keepers of the Law, 6,000 of them at that time very elite group. As to zeal, verse 6, I was a persecutor of the church. If salvation is related to zeal, motivation, I qualify. And then this one, "As to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless." If salvation is by morality, I'm in. Saved by ritual, race, privilege, tradition, religion, zeal, and morality. I had it all.

And then in verse 7 he says, he counted these things gain. These gained him his salvation until he met Christ. He was going to Damascus and literally God turned the light on, right? Not only on the inside but where else? On the outside. God blinded him with a heavenly spotlight and the light went on, and immediately all the stuff that was gained he counted, verse 7, as what? Loss. The veil went off. Shoo! Gone. It was clear. Verse 8 he says, "More than that, I count everything to be loss." Everything else is loss, "in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." That's all. Everything is Christ. Christ is everything. I've seen the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, and I gladly suffer the loss of all things and count all of it rubbish. All I want is to gain Christ. Christ is all I want. Why? Verse 9, "That I may be found in Him not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law. That's exactly what he was trying to do.

That's exactly what he was trying to do. He was trying to derive righteousness from the Law. And you can't do it. "By the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be made righteous." He wrote that. And the veil went off and he said, "I wanted to be found in Him," all of a sudden, "not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith."

The veil went off. He looked into the face of Jesus Christ. He saw the glory of God because God turned the lights on. Christ became everything to him. Everything else was rubbish, trash, garbage, human excrement is the actual word in the Greek; the worst. And he says from now on I want to know Christ, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings and be conformed to His death. Christ is all. Christ is everything. That's the glory of the New Covenant. Why would anybody want to go back to the shadows and the pictures that can't save and turn their back on the New Covenant? Why would anybody want to be engaged in any kind of religion that is shadowy and symbolic and

ceremonial and ritual rather than the reality that is in the face of Jesus Christ?

It's a sad thing we hear all the time, all the time from people through the history of this church. There isn't a week that goes by that I don't either hear this first hand because someone is coming to Christ, hear it in the waters of baptism, read it in a letter, somebody saying to me, "I've been in the Catholic Church for years and years and I never knew Christ." Or, "I've been in a Methodist church and I never knew Christ." Or, "I've been involved in this form of religion and it says it's Christian, and I never had a personal relationship with Christ."

The veil was on the whole time. They never saw, they couldn't see the face of Jesus Christ shining with the glory of God. That's a New Covenant reality. And that's what happened to the Apostle Paul when God got him and transformed him and turned the light on. So the New Covenant is superior because it gives life, provides righteousness, is permanent, brings hope, is clear, is Christ-centered.

Now, the seventh point. And I'm only going to give you a part of it. The New Covenant is energized by the Spirit. The New Covenant is energized by the Spirit.

I said earlier and I repeat again, there was nothing inherent in the Old Covenant to energize obedience; but in the New Covenant there is the power of the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 17, this verse opens up all kinds of vistas of things. "Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty."

The Law, let me just put it simply, the Law was a bondage. The Law was a jailer. The Law locked the sinner up to death and hell, but the New Covenant liberates. And the minister of that liberation is none other than the Holy Spirit who is mentioned back in verse 6, "The Spirit gives life." The New Covenant then sets the prisoner free, opens the jail doors and lets the prisoner out of the prison of shame and guilt and remorse and failure and fear and dread and death and hell.

Look at the word "now." "Now," what do you mean "now"? "Now, when sinners turn to the Lord, when the veil is gone, the Lord is that Spirit who brings the liberty." When the Old Covenant hold ends and New Covenant promise of forgiveness begins, it is the Lord who sets the prisoner free. The Lord is the Spirit liberating.

Somebody might say, "Well, I don't know what this New Covenant deal is but it sure isn't from Yahweh cause Yahweh's covenant, Jehovah's covenant, God's covenant is clearly laid out in the Old Testament and Paul says, "The Lord is the very New Covenant liberating Spirit." It's the same Yahweh, the same Jehovah, the same God, the New Covenant freedom is the work of Old Covenant God. God never intended there to be an Old Covenant and nothing more. He intended there to be an Old Covenant to drive men to despair so they would plead for mercy and grace granted on the basis of the New Covenant in Christ.

Salvation then through the New Covenant is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. That's very clear. None other than the Spirit who is the Lord Himself. Salvation, listen to me carefully, any time, absolutely any time whether you're talking about Old Testament or New Testament, salvation any time based upon the New Covenant work of Christ as all salvation is, is always the work of the Holy Spirit, always.

I'm amazed how confused people have been on that very issue. There is no reason to be confused. The Spirit of the Lord is the saving agent, was the saving agent, always will be the saving agent. It is the Spirit; it has always been the Spirit who applies New Covenant salvation and provision to the repentant believer in any age, in any age. The work of the Holy Spirit is the work of regeneration.

Now this brings up the question, and I'm just going to briefly answer it. We'll finish next time. What was the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament? What did He do? And a careful study of the Old Testament reveals that, and it isn't really that difficult. It's a little time consuming but it's not that difficult.

Let me make it as simple as I can. If you survey the whole of the Old Testament, you're going to basically come up with the fact that the Spirit's work could be summarized into four categories. The Holy Spirit operated in four categories in the Old Testament. And I want to share those categories with you because I don't want you to be confused, as many have been confused; particularly those who come out of a dispensational heritage because so much has been said about the Holy Spirit doing one thing in one generation and another thing in another generation and another thing in another, or another dispensation or economy when the fact of the matter is the work of the Holy Spirit is pretty much the same all the time, always has been, always will be, with a few variations. But generally it's pretty much the same.

Now let's look at the four things that we see the Holy Spirit do in the Old Testament. Number one, creation, creation. Very clearly, the Holy Spirit plays an important role in creation. As theologians would say it, it is not an ex nihilo creation, that is to say it is not the out of nothing part. John 1 tells us that Christ is the ex nihilo Creator, that is to say all things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made. What that means is that it was Jesus Christ who created the substance which would be time, space, matter, energy. But in Genesis 1 it says, "God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without," what? "form and void. It was God who is the master Creator, of course, the Creator God, who through the agency of Christ brought out of nothing the things that make up the components of life in the universe. The Holy Spirit then was hovering, it says, over that formless void creation, and it was His role to bring it into the form that God had designed the creation to take.

God had the plan through the agency of His Son the second member of the trinity, matter, time, space, energy was formed. It was formless and void, amorphous until the Spirit of God moved over it and brought it into its appropriate form. We find the testimony of Job 33 verse 6, again affirming this, that it is the Spirit of God who is moving and shaping the creation. Job 33 verse – actually verse 4, "The Spirit of God has made me and the Spirit of the Almighty gives me life." In Psalm 104 and other Psalms, you get the same basic emphasis.

Just one other text that I would mention is Isaiah 40 where you have the creative work of the Holy Spirit mentioned in a very interesting way, starting in verse 12, "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His Hand and marked off the heavens by the span, and calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, and weighed the mountains in a balance and the hills in a pair of scales?" This is all creative work. And the next verse, 13, "Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His Counselor has informed Him?" Who helped the Holy Spirit create? Well the point we want to make is the Holy Spirit was creating and He didn't need any help. His duty on behalf of the trinity in creation was to bring about the creative work of the six days, to bring the universe to its final state of design and order, the crowning aspect, of course, of which was to create man and woman in God's image. The Son brought things ex nihilo, out of no existence into existence. The Spirit took the substance, thus created and the principle of life and formed the things designed by the Father in the creation as we know it.

We find then through the Old Testament the Spirit is involved in creation. Secondly, empowerment, empowerment. Any reader of the Old Testament will know that you come across this phrase frequently. It will say, "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon so-and-so and he did this." Do you remember that phrase? It's repeated throughout the Old Testament. Occasionally, "And the Spirit of the Lord departed." That is frequent.

Now listen carefully to what I say. Some people have assumed that because of the frequency of that statement, it is therefore descriptive of the normal relationship of the Holy Spirit to Old Testament believers. That is not its intent. That is not its intent. How long would anybody be a believer if the Holy Spirit left? In any age? They wouldn't be because divine life isn't something you can humanly sustain.

So when you read the Holy Spirit came and went, you're not talking about normal experience of believers. You're talking about abnormal, empowerment. It is always with reference to the Holy Spirit empowering special people for accomplishment of divinely designed tasks that require ability beyond the normal. It is for special tasks.

Listen now, every time, every time the Holy Spirit is said to come upon or leave a person, it is this special empowerment that is in view. And at no time is it an issue of personal salvation. In fact, you can collect all these Scriptures and you'll find that there are four kinds of people of whom it is said the Holy Spirit came on them, or the Holy Spirit departed. Four kinds of people. Number one, judges,

judges who had immense responsibility for the deliverance of God's people Israel. And there were four judges on whom the Spirit came and went, Othniel, Jephthah, Gideon and Samson. You can read through Judges and you'll note that. It was just four of them. On every occasion there was a very unique purpose of God.

What happened to Samson when the Spirit of God departed from him? He became what? Weak. He was just like any other man. And then what happened when the Spirit of God came upon him? He could slay multitudes. He could crash down a whole building. This is something beyond the human capability of Samson or any other man. Othniel, Jephthah, Gideon and Samson were judges on whom the Spirit came.

The second category of people who experienced this were craftsmen associated with work related to the worship of God. They had a responsibility for crafting something related to the worship of God that had to be very special, and so the Spirit of God uniquely enabled them to do that.

Fourthly, leaders, civic leaders, we'll call them, governmental leaders, rulers. Four of them had that experience; Moses, David, Saul and Joshua. They had the same experience. The Spirit came and went. It had nothing to do with their personal relationship with God. It wasn't the norm for their spiritual life. It was simply divine enablement for a very important role of leadership.

It is wonderfully illustrated in Psalm 51:11 where David after he has sinned with Bathsheba and had her husband murdered and is so remorseful about his sin, obviously the Spirit of God prompting conviction in his heart, what he says to God is this, "Lord, take not Your Holy Spirit from me." What is he saying? Is he saying, "Don't let me lose my salvation?" Is he saying, "There's something you do, God, when You get upset at somebody and that is You make them unsaved?" Or, "God, You make them live their life of faith without Your Spirit?" It's not what he's talking about. He is saying, "Don't remove the necessary divine enablement for me to rule." That's what he's saying. It has to do with his kingship, not with his own personal experience. It has to do with the fact that he was given the tremendous responsibility to lead a theocratic nation of people and it was way beyond his capability and that was demonstrated certainly by his sinfulness. And he is asking God, "Don't remove that unique spiritual anointing that makes me an effective king on Your behalf."

There's only one other category of people of whom this is ever said and that is, fourthly, prophets. The Spirit of the Lord came upon so-and-so and he spoke, and this was for revelation. There were many, Ahaziah, Jahaziel, Zechariah, Balaam, Amasai, then there's Elijah, Elisha, Micah and other prophets. It says of them the Holy Spirit came upon them. Why? For the unique and special empowerment of unique duty related to the revelation of God.

One illustration among many would be drawn out of Ezekiel chapter 11, and this would be a pretty typical one. Ezekiel chapter 11 verse 5, "The Spirit of the Lord fell upon me and He said to me –" and

that's pretty typical. That's the way it happened. The Spirit of the Lord comes and He speaks. You find that kind of thing repeated with the prophets.

So what do you have? You have a very unique ministry of the Spirit on judges. Judges were simply deliverers. They were men and women occasionally raised up for the deliverance of Israel. It was a leadership responsibility that required supernatural and divine intervention. Craftsmen uniquely involved in that which was related to worshipping God. Civic leaders, Moses, David, Saul, Joshua. We're talking about prime leaders, and those are the only four of whom it is said that the Spirit came upon them, and prophets.

So the first ministry then of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament very clearly is creation. The second ministry is empowerment, and this is a special empowerment for unique service. Third ministry, revelation, revelation. And this follows right on in talking about the prophets. The ministry of the Holy Spirit was to reveal the Word of God, was to reveal the Word of God.

It was the Holy Spirit basically who was the author of the Old Testament. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. All Scripture is God-breathed, and it is breathed through God's breath who is pneûma, God's Spirit. All Scripture comes from the Holy Spirit.

What does Peter say? II Peter 1:20, "No Scripture is of any private interpretation but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." He is the Author of Scripture. Listen to Zechariah 7 verse 12, "And they made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the Law and the words of the Lord of hosts which He had sent by His Spirit through the prophets," Zechariah 7:12.

What did the Holy Spirit do in the Old Testament? He's involved in creation, very clearly. He is the one behind the form and the shape. He is involved in empowerment. He is involved in revelation. And fourthly, and this most importantly, He is involved in regeneration. This is where we're going to close. Listen carefully. He is involved in Old Testament regeneration.

People talk about, "Does the Old Testament teach that people were regenerated?" There are many who have written that there is no such teaching; that there is no new birth, there is no regeneration in the Old Testament. But I believe that is wrong. I believe the Spirit is a life-giving Spirit and that the power of the Holy Spirit operated on behalf of the not yet realized New Covenant in the lives of Old Testament believers so that they were actually born again. They were actually regenerated. They were actually renewed, transformed, metamorphosized. And we should not teach that there was no regeneration in the Old Testament.

Now, prior to regeneration what does the Holy Spirit do? What does He do? If we listen to the New Testament, John 16, Jesus says, "The Spirit will convict the world of sin." Is that new? Has the Spirit ever done that before? I think so. All the way back in Genesis chapter 6, God says, "My Spirit will not

always strive with man."

The Spirit of God striving with sinful hearts is not something isolated to the New Testament. The Spirit of God bringing about the conviction of sin is not something isolated to the New Testament. I believe the work of conviction the Spirit has been doing ever since sin entered into the world.

Listen, John Calvin did not invent total depravity; he only defined it. It's been here since the fall. Total depravity didn't start when you understood it. It didn't start with the New Testament. And a totally depraved person left to himself is not going to conclude his own guilt. It is the searching work of the Spirit of God. He is not going to come to an appropriate assessment of his own wickedness, his own sinfulness.

Old Testament people were just as depraved as people today. Either side of the cross doesn't change the fallenness of man. You've got to go back to the garden for that. When Adam fell, the whole human race went and they've been the same since then. So Old Testament people were depraved and depravity means you can't save yourself. That's what it means basically. It means you're sinful, not everybody is as sinful as everybody else, but everybody is sinful and everybody is in the same situation where they can't do anything about their sin.

Listen to a New Testament definition of depravity, Romans 3. Paul wrote this after the cross. You say this is New Testament? Right. Listen to Romans 3; here's a description starting in verse 10 of depravity, "There's none righteous, not even one. There's none who understands. There's none who seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have become useless. There is none who does good. There is not even one. Their throat is an open grave. With their tongues they keep deceiving. The poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their paths. The path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." You know where every one of those words came from? Where? Old Testament, every one of them. Paul took all of that from the Old Testament, most of it from the Psalms. That's a description of man's depravity.

Now you tell me how any depraved person who is that bad off is going to, on his own, come to God? It can't happen. How can it happen? By virtue of the intervention of the agency of the Spirit of God. Then you tell me how that person when the Holy Spirit intervenes is going to all of a sudden be able to say, "Oh how I love Thy Law" if salvation for him was nothing but forensic. If it was nothing but declared and there was no regeneration, how did he get to the place where he loves the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength? How did he get to the place where he loves the Law, where the statutes of God are his delight, where they're sweeter to his lips than honey and where they are more precious to him than fine gold?

How does he get to the place where he wants to follow the Law of God and please God and love God and extol God and praise God and worship God? How could he ever have a Psalm mentality if all he got was a forensic righteousness; God sort of declared him righteous but never regenerated him? He couldn't. You have to have the convicting ministry of the Spirit. You have to have the regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit because you've got depravity to the core of human existence.

They were all totally depraved. They had no power to overcome their sin. Jeremiah says, "The heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked." And the prophet says, can a leopard change his spots? Can the Ethiopian with that ebony black skin change his color? Of course not. They can't do that. How could you explain Noah could be called a just man and perfect in his generation if it wasn't the Holy Spirit? Could he become a just man and perfect in his generation on his own? How about Abraham who became a mighty man of faith? On his own?

How about Moses who got to the place where the reproach of Christ was more important to him than the treasures of Egypt? You mean he just did that on his own, that depraved Moses? Or how could it ever be said of David that his heart was perfect with the Lord his God, 1 Kings 15:3? Beyond that, how could Abraham in Romans 4 and Abraham in Galatians 3 be the model for our faith? How could he be the model of what regenerate faith looks like if he wasn't regenerate? We're not talking about some forensic thing, some declared thing, some legal thing. We're talking about reality here and Abraham was a changed man, and who changed him? It had to be the Spirit of God.

Then you go to the eleventh chapter of Hebrews and you read about all these people and they're all Old Testament people. And these are the people who are proving to us the validity of a life of faith. These are the people who show us how to live. And it's Abraham and it's Jacob and it's Sarah and it's Moses and it's all those people, all those people of whom the world was not worthy. And they're all Old Testament people. And we ask the question, how could they live an exemplary life of faith that we are to model our lives after if they hadn't been regenerated by the Holy Spirit? They had to have been. Just because the theology of it doesn't get fully defined until the New Testament doesn't make it less a reality.

I'm going to close with one illustration. John 3, John 3. Now in John 3, I want you to get this. You've already gone past that middle part of your Bible that says you're in the New Testament by the time you get to John. But you're not yet in the New Covenant, are you ready for that? Because Jesus hasn't died yet and He hasn't been raised yet and the Holy Spirit hasn't come yet. So what we've got here, folks, is an Old Testament conversation between Jesus and a Jewish ruler by the name of Nicodemus. And the terms of this conversation do not connect with the cross and the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost because it hasn't happened yet.

So this man comes to Jesus in the night and he wants to know how to get into the Kingdom of God. He's not asking how he can join the local church. He wants to know how to get into the Kingdom. And

in verse 3 Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is," What? "born again he can't see the Kingdom of God." You've got to be transformed. Now is that some New Covenant truth? No. That's a standard answer for a Jew living before the cross about what happens if you're going to enter the Kingdom. You've got to be regenerated. You've got to be transformed or you're not going to see the Kingdom of God. It isn't just for people who have a declared righteousness; it's for people who have been regenerated, who have a new life principle in them.

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he's old? He can't enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Now before you misjudge Nicodemus and think, what a stupid thing to say. He's not saying that. I mean, this is a brilliant man. This is a very brilliant man. What he is asking is, "I'm so far down the path of religion that I'm down, how could I ever start this thing all over again? What are you saying?"

You see, to them religion was a life time of achieving righteousness. You understand that? Just like Paul. And he's saying, "What? I'm already this far down the deal and I've accumulated my list of stuff like Paul that's in the gain column. How am I going to start this deal all over again?" And Jesus says, "Look, truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he can't enter the Kingdom of God." And the water and the Spirit comes from Ezekiel 36, doesn't it? Where in the New Covenant in the salvation that God is going to provide through Christ in the New Covenant which was applied, of course, to the saints in the old, there is a cleansing. There's a washing, and that's what the water refers to, and there's a working of the Holy Spirit.

He says, "You're not going to enter the Kingdom apart from the Spirit." Verse 6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." You just keep going on cranking out the fleshly stuff. You just keep accumulating the fleshly righteousness and it's just more flesh, more flesh. The spiritual Kingdom depends upon the Spirit of God. "That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you you must be born again, the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it's going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." This is something you can't see, this is something spiritual.

Now here's a wonderful picture of Old Testament witnessing, telling a man he needed to be purified from his sins and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. That's Old Testament conversion. That's what that is. The evidence is that the Spirit of God convicts. The Spirit of God forces the sinner to see his sin. The Spirit of God then when faith – when the Spirit of God produces faith in an Old Testament saint, He regenerates that saint. And He takes whatever that individual was and makes him in to a lover of God who loves the truth and loves the Law and wants to obey and wants to please and wants to worship and wants to serve. And all those wants are reflective of that regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

Well, that's just maybe a third of the way into that point about what the Holy Spirit does. I've got a lot more to say, but that will be next week.

Let's pray. We thank You for Your truth, Father. And, Lord, even though we're dealing with some theological things and some doctrinal things, we just ask that Your Holy Spirit would press them to our hearts in the practical area so that we can, first of all, experience the practicality of worship and praise and thanksgiving for Your marvelous consistency. Oh Father, we thank You for the blessings of the New Covenant, we thank You that everything is in Christ, that the Spirit has set us free. Lord, we thank You that wherever the Spirit is there's liberty, that the letter kills but the Spirit gives life, and He's always given life.

He gave life to Noah and He gave life to Moses and He gave life to David and gave life to all the heroes of the faith that are listed in Hebrews 11 and many more unnamed. And He gave them freedom and liberty from the bondage of the Law. We thank You for His regenerating work that gave them a love for You and a longing to worship and praise and obey and a hatred of sin and a heart of penitence, all evidences of regenerating power. We thank You for the consistency of Your work, and that it's going on even now on this side of the cross. Thank You that You've given us the easier part. We can see Christ. We can see the full glory unveiled as we look in His glorious face. Thank You, Father, for all that You've done for us because of Your love and we deserve nothing. And thank You from the bottom of our hearts for it all. In Christ's name. Amen.

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