

THE MINISTRY: ITS NEW COVENANT

2 CORINTHIANS 03:06–18

Introduction

This is a graphic picture of the minister's ministry — he serves the new covenant. This passage is also a graphic contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant.

- I. The minister serves a new covenant (v. 6).
- II. The old was a written law; the new is the Spirit (v. 6).
- III. The old kills; the new gives life (v. 6).
- IV. The old was glorious; the new is more glorious (vv. 7-8).
- V. The old brought condemnation; the new brings righteousness (v. 9-10).
- VI. The old faded away; the new is permanent (v. 11).
- VII. The old spoke with veiled meanings: the new speaks with plain meaning (vv. 12-16).
- VIII. The new covenant brings liberty through the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 17-18).

I. 2 Corinthians 03:06 Minister of the New Covenant

The minister serves the new covenant. Covenant (diathekes) means an agreement made between two parties; a contract drawn up between two or more people; a special relationship set up and established between persons. In the Old Testament period of history, God had set up an old covenant between Himself and man which is here called the covenant of the letter. This simply means a written covenant or the covenant of the law. Since Christ, He has set up a *new covenant* with man which is here called the “new covenant of the Spirit.” This is simply another way of describing the covenant of grace or of the gospel (Heb. 8:8). Vine points out that this covenant is called the “new” (Heb. 9:15), the “second” (Heb. 8:7), and the “better” (Heb. 7:22). (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co.)

The point is this: God used to deal with man by law, but now He deals with man *through the Holy Spirit*. The law was the old covenant between God and man. The Spirit is the new covenant between God and man. Today, since Christ, the minister serves the new covenant of the Spirit, not the old covenant of the law.

This is significant for the minister: it means that the new covenant has to do with God's Spirit, that is, with a *personal relationship* with God. Therefore, the only way a minister can share the new covenant of God's Spirit with people is for God to allow Him. It is God's presence and God's Spirit being dealt with; therefore, no man can share *God's presence and God's Spirit* unless God allows him. God has to make the man fit, able and adequate. This is what Paul is saying. *God has allowed us* to share His Spirit, His new covenant. God has called us and qualified and equipped us to minister the new covenant. And the new covenant of His Spirit — of a personal relationship with Him — is far superior to the old covenant.

II. *2 Corinthians 03:06 Written Law vs. The Spirit of God*

The old covenant was a written law; the new covenant is the Spirit of God Himself. The old covenant was written words and letters, a written document, a set of laws that men had to obey (Exo. 24:1-8). The fact to note is this: the law was external; it sat outside man and insisted that man subject himself to the rule and obey it.

The new covenant is different, entirely different. It is internal, within man. It is *a personal relationship* with God, a relationship that is created by God Himself. When a person believes in God's Son, God places His Spirit in the heart of the person, and the person becomes a *Spirit filled* person.

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

1 Cor 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

1 Cor 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

III. *2 Corinthians 03:06 Law Kills vs. Spirit Gives Life*

The old covenant or law killed; the new covenant gives life. How does the law kill? There are two ways.

First, when society sets a law before a man, he has to obey it. If he fails to obey it, he breaks and severs his relationship with society and he has to bear the punishment of a broken and severed relationship. He has to be put away, cut off and separated from society. The punishment for breaking God's law is the same: when a man breaks God's law, he breaks and severs his relationship with God. He cuts himself off from God; he has no relationship, no connection, no life with God. The law kills him, his relationship and life with God.

Second, the law is only letters and words written on paper, stone or wood. It is external and outside man. It only commands; it does not give man the power to do the command. The will, ability and power to obey are entirely left up to the man. The man may wish to keep the commandment, but he may not have the will or power to keep it. Therefore, he breaks the law, and the law kills him. It should be noted that the law not only kills man eternally, but through guilt and despair, it kills his human spirit and will, sapping his energy, ambition, drive and hope.

Rom 10:5 Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them."

Gal 3:10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

Gal 3:12 *The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.”*

The new covenant is different, wonderfully different. The Spirit gives life. He gives life by doing two things.

1. The Holy Spirit enters a believer’s life, imparting the “divine nature” of God to him (2 Pet. 1:4). The believer becomes a “new creation,” a “new self [man],” a spiritual man with a transformed mind that focuses upon God.

2 Pet 1:4 *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

2 Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Eph 4:24 *And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Col 3:10 *And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

2. The Holy Spirit infuses the desire to please God. And, although the new man fails often, he is pricked by the indwelling Spirit of God to confess, ask forgiveness and to cast himself afresh upon the strength and care of God. His whole desire is now to trust God, to depend upon Him completely for life and breath and all the necessities of life. Simply put, his whole life is now wrapped up in God and the things of God.

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

1 Pet 5:7 *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Mat 6:33 *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

IV. 2 Corinthians 03:07–08 *Glorious vs. the More Glorious*

The old covenant or law was glorious; the new covenant is more glorious.

1. How can the law which kills and ministers death be said to be glorious?
 - => The law was glorious in that it was given to Moses by God Himself — face to face.
 - => The law was glorious in that it reveals the nature of God Himself, that He is holy and righteous and must be approached in holiness and righteousness.
 - => The law was glorious in that it pointed men to their desperate need for salvation. It showed men as nothing else could that they were sinners and short of God’s glory and desperately needed a Saviour.

The glory of the old covenant is illustrated by Moses' experience in receiving the law from God. God Himself gave Moses the law face to face, and being in the presence of God caused Moses' face to shine with the glory of God. In fact, the glory upon Moses' face was so bright, the people could not continually look upon him (Exo. 34:30).

Note what Paul says: the glory of God which was upon Moses' face was to pass away. Paul is saying that this was a symbol of God upon the old covenant. The glory of God upon the old covenant was to pass away. The old covenant, the law, was meant to be only a temporary arrangement between God and man.

2. The new covenant is different, gloriously different. The difference is clearly seen in the thought provoking question asked: if the old covenant that ministered death was glorious, how shall the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? The answer is obvious: the ministry of the Spirit is to give life to men and the power to live life; and life is far more glorious than death. In fact, life is eternally more glorious than death.

V. 2 Corinthians 03:09–10 *Condemnation vs. Righteousness*

The old covenant or law brought condemnation; the new covenant brings righteousness. The law condemned a man when he broke the law: the law condemned him to a broken and severed relationship with God. The man was to die. However the new covenant, the Spirit of God, imparted righteousness, the very nature of God to a man (2 Pet. 1:4). Therefore, the glory of the new covenant exceeds the old covenant so much that by comparison the old covenant has no glory at all (v. 10).

VI. 2 Corinthians 03:11 *Fading Away vs. Permanent*

The old covenant or law faded away; the new covenant remains and is permanent. As Mathew Henry points out: when the sun rises, the light of a lamp fades and diminishes. It might be added: its function is no longer needed. The light of the lamp is superseded by a much greater light.

The glory of the new covenant is permanent. Its glory and function will never be superseded. There will be no new relationship set up between man and God, no new way for man to become related to God. The final covenant between God and man has been set and established forever. If a man is ever to have a relationship with God, he must allow God's Spirit to enter his heart and life. There is no other way to live with God. If a man wishes to live forever with God, he must invite God's Spirit into his life.

***Rom 8:9** You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

***Rom 8:11** And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life [eternally] to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live [eternally].*

Thought 1. The point of this whole section (v. 6-11) is to discuss the new covenant which the minister serves. The minister does not serve the old covenant of the law; he serves the new covenant of God's Spirit.

Mat 26:28 *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

Rom 11:27 *"And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."*

Ezek 36:26-27 *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (cp. Heb 8:8-13)*

VII. 2 Corinthians 03:12–16 Spoken with Veiled Meaning vs. Speaks with Plain, Clear Meaning

The old covenant spoke with veiled meaning; the new covenant speaks with plain (outspoken, clear, and bold) meaning.

1. The new covenant gives such a glorious hope that the minister of God can proclaim it clearly and boldly. Of course, the reason he can proclaim it so clearly and boldly is because the new covenant is given by the Spirit in a clear and unveiled message.

1 Cor 2:12-13 *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.*

2. The old covenant was not like the new covenant. The old covenant was set up by God with veiled meanings.
 - a. The veiled meaning is illustrated by Moses. When the people saw the glory of God shining in the face of Moses, Moses had to put a veil upon his face. Why? Because the people withdrew from the glory of God, and because the people were not to see the fading away of the glory from Moses' face. Note the exact words of Paul: Moses veiled his face "to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away."

Paul is saying that what Moses did was an illustration of how man sees the old covenant or law. Man looks at the law and sees that he is to obey it if he wishes to please God. Therefore, man works and works to keep the law, believing all the time that he is earning the favour and acceptance of God. Man is blinded to the real meaning of the law. The glory and meaning of the law are veiled from his sight; he is unable...

- to see the real meaning of the law.
- to see that the law was given to reveal the nature of God's glory and perfection.

- to see that man comes short of the glory and perfection of God.
- to see that man cannot keep the law, not perfectly.
- to see that the law was given to show man his desperate need for a Saviour.

Acts 28:27 'For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

2 Cor 3:14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.

2 Cor 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Eph 4:18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

2 Tim 3:7 Always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.

Psa 82:5 "They know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken."

Micah 4:12 But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord; they do not understand his plan, he who gathers them like sheaves to the threshing floor.

- b. Even today when the Old Testament is read, those who still follow the law are blinded to the truth. The veil still remains covering the true glory of God. They still do not understand the true purpose of the law: to point men to their need for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Christ and Christ alone who has removed the veil to the glory of God. Men can face and see the glory of God only in Jesus Christ.

John 10:30 "I and the Father are one."

John 10:36-38 What about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

John 14:9-10 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work."

- c. The veil of the old covenant is removed only when a person turns to the Lord. When a person truly turns to Jesus Christ, he is shown how Jesus Christ is the glory of God

and the *end*, purpose and fulfilment of the law. The veil is removed from the law, and he understands the marvellous glory of God.

Gal 3:24-25 *So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.*

VIII. **2 Corinthians 03:17–18 Liberty of the New Covenant**

The new covenant brings liberty through the Lord Jesus Christ. Note that the Lord is identified as the Spirit: “the Lord is the Spirit.” This does not mean that the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the same Person. They are two different Persons, but they are one in their Godhead and Deity. Jesus Christ is One with the Spirit in the same way He is one with God the Father: one in mind, spirit, being, nature and essence. Therefore, they are one in will, purpose and work.

John 16:14-15 *“He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”*

Note how the Father, Christ and the Holy Spirit are all involved in showing and revealing salvation to man. This is what is meant by saying the Lord is that Spirit. The Lord Himself was actually the One who secured salvation and liberty for man, but it is the Spirit who is actively involved in revealing the truth of salvation and liberty to man. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

1. In Christ there is liberty and freedom: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

a. Christ frees the believer from the mastery of sin.

Rom 6:14 *For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.*

b. Christ frees the believer from the law.

Rom 7:4 *So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.*

Rom 7:6 *But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.*

Gal 5:18 *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

c. Christ frees the believer from being a slave to fear.

Rom 8:15 *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”*

d. Christ frees the believer from the power of Satan, which is the fear of death.

Heb 2:14-15 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

- e. Christ frees the believer from the bondage of decay and corruption.

Rom 8:21, 23 *That the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God...Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

2. In reflecting the Lord's glory, believers are transformed into His image. The phrase "And we,...all" means believers, those who have turned to Christ...
- who have had the veil removed from their face.
 - who stand face to face with the glory of the Lord.

When a believer receives Jesus Christ as his Saviour, he is given the privilege to stand face to face with Christ. This simply means that he is given the privilege to know and understand Christ. Note several points.

- a. The phrase "unveiled faces" means that the believer is given the privilege of standing face to face with Christ, the privilege of knowing Christ personally and learning all about Him. There is no veil over the face or eyes of the believer, nothing to keep him from knowing the Lord.
- b. The object of the believer is to behold the glory of the Lord. This means to behold the Godhead and deity of the Lord, the splendour, brilliance and excellence of His person and Being. Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became Man. His "glory" refers to the glorious fact that He as the Son of God did become Man. When a person grasps this fact, he understands the "the Lord's glory," the incomprehensible fact that the Lord paid the supreme and ultimate price, the unbelievable price, for the salvation of man.

John 1:14 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

- c. The believer, however, never grasps the full glory of the Lord. No man, who is only finite and flesh, could ever understand the Lord, who is infinite Spirit. The believer only sees and understands the Lord's glory as in a glass or a mirror. That is, he only sees a reflection of the Lord, not the full image. Presently, the believer is able to see the Lord only through the Word and the Holy Spirit; in the future, he shall stand face to face with the Lord throughout all eternity. Then he will know the Lord even as the Lord now knows him.

1 Cor 13:12 *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror: then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

- d. The believer is changed or transformed into the image of Christ from glory to glory. This probably means two things.
 - => When the believer reflects (grasps, understands, studies, lays hold of) the Lord's glory, the same glory is created in him.
 - => When the believer reflects the Lord's glory, the believer progresses and grows from one stage of glory to a higher stage. ■