

## SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**II COR. 3:7** But if the ministration of death, written *and* engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which *glory* was to be done away:

**8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?**

9 For if the ministration of condemnation *be* glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

**10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.**

11 For if that which is done away *was* glorious, much more that which remaineth *is* glorious.

**12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:**

13 And not as Moses, *which* put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

**14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *vail* is done away in Christ.**

15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.

**16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.**

17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.

**18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.**

### NOTES

# Glory of the New Covenant

Lesson Text: II Corinthians 3:7-18

Related Scriptures: Exodus 34:29-35; II Corinthians 4:13-18

TIME: probably A.D. 56

PLACE: from Macedonia

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Corinthians 3:17).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **GLORY HIDDEN—II Cor. 3:7-11**

**Death in the law (II Cor. 3:7-8).** In order to explain the difference between the old and new covenants, Paul makes a comparison that shows the superiority of the new over the old. He refers to the old covenant as the ministry of death that was carved in stone (vs. 7). The new covenant, on the other hand, is the ministry of the Spirit and gives life (vs. 6).

The problem with the old covenant is not that it was bad or evil in and of itself (cf. Rom. 7:12). On the contrary, the law fulfilled God's intention for it by showing people their inability to please Him on their own; it revealed personal sin and pointed to their need for a Saviour (cf. Gal. 2:16; cf. Rom. 7:7). The law is a reflection of God's complete holiness and the righteousness He requires from us. Therefore, in terms of obedience, the law should be seen as one unit; violating even one of its commandments constitutes violating the whole law (cf. Jas. 2:10).

Moses' face shone so brightly from the glory of God when he received the law that the Israelites were afraid and unable to look at him (cf. Ex. 34:29-

31). The glory of the law was temporary, however, as Jesus would fulfill it in order to bring in the new covenant that all believers would be saved under.

**Glory in the covenants (II Cor. 3:9-10).** It is a mistake to think that the old covenant, which Paul calls the ministry of condemnation (vs. 9), was of little consequence or impact. It should not be seen as unnecessary. It simply was incomplete.

Christ is the reason the glory of the new covenant far exceeds the glory of the old covenant. Righteousness is much greater than condemnation, and life is preferred over death. The new covenant in Christ brings freedom and liberty, while the old covenant of the law brings bondage and oppression.

Paul is not asserting that the old covenant was not glorious at all, but rather that it had no glory in comparison to the new covenant. It was far surpassed in glory by the new covenant to the point that its glory that was once extremely bright is completely overwhelmed by the glory of the new covenant.

**Glory in the new covenant (II Cor. 3:11).** The new covenant is an everlasting testament that will never be replaced. There is nothing that can possibly be greater than this covenant that brings righteousness and life. Because of Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant, the glory of the new covenant far exceeds the glory of the old.

### **GLORY REVEALED—II Cor. 3:12-18**

**The hope of faith in Christ (II Cor. 3:12-13).** The effects of the new covenant allow us to be bold in our faith because Jesus secured victory over sin for us on the cross. This is our hope in life and death.

The victory that the new covenant gives us over sin causes us to be bold. We are bold in our proclamation of the gospel, but we are to be loving in our presentation (cf. I Pet. 3:15).

The glory from the old covenant was fading even as it shone from Moses' face, showing its temporal effect. It had no eternal impact on the people.

**Veiled to faith in Christ (II Cor. 3:14-15).** Since their hearts remain veiled today just as in Moses' day, many people cannot see the glory of the new covenant. They fail to see and receive the message of the gospel and to realize all the wonderful blessings that God has for those who have faith in Christ.

The only way for the veil to be removed is if they turn to Christ. Jesus is the only one who can take the veil away.

**Obstacles to faith in Christ (II Cor. 3:16).** There is hope for those who still have the veil over their hearts. The hope for these people is the same hope for those of us who have been saved: The hope is in Jesus Christ. Jesus—and only Jesus—can remove the veil and reveal the glory of God.

**Freedom in faith in Christ (II Cor. 3:17-18).** Where the Spirit is working, the people find freedom. There is no bondage in the Holy Spirit. He does

not come to enslave people, but to set us free. Everywhere He goes, repentant sinners find the liberty that the law could never provide for them.

Instead of fading, the new life in the Spirit of God gets better all the time. We go from one degree of glory to another, and unlike the glory that shone from Moses' face, the glory that comes from life in the Spirit never fades or diminishes. This blessing only comes from the Holy Spirit and will never be produced by good works, no matter how devout we may be. Religion cannot produce the life that only the Holy Spirit can bring.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. What terms does Paul use to describe the old covenant?
2. What terms does Paul use to describe the new covenant?
3. How did the old covenant fulfill its purpose?
4. How should we view the law in terms of obedience?
5. Why were the children of Israel unable to look at Moses' face?
6. Why did the glory of the new covenant far exceed the glory of the old covenant?
7. What did Paul say about the old covenant in comparison to the new covenant?
8. What is the basis of the Christian's hope, according to Paul?
9. Why can we be bold in our proclamation of the gospel?
10. What does the fact that the glory faded from Moses' face tell us about the old covenant?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

## Golden Text Illuminated

1. In the Old Testament, God's glory made Moses' face shine, but the glory of the Holy Spirit dwelling in New Testament believers is far greater (II Cor. 3:7-8)!
2. In Christ through the Holy Spirit, believers have the power to glorify God before the whole world through their humble love and service (vss. 9-11).
3. Since we have the saving power of Christ in the gospel, we have no need of worldly sophistication (vs. 12).
4. Many cannot understand God's Word because of their worldly pride and traditions (vss. 13-15).
5. The gospel has power to soften the hardest of hearts and open the blindest of eyes (vs. 16).
6. Believers experience more and more freedom as we become more like Christ (vss. 17-18).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

**“Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (II Corinthians 3:17).**

Spiritual freedom is a great theme in Paul's epistles (cf. Rom. 8:15-21; I Cor. 9:19; Gal. 5:1). However, Paul was not giving license to the Corinthians to do whatever they wanted. There was already too much of the wrong kind of freedom at Corinth, since some church members were sinning openly. Freedom to transgress is not genuine freedom, for Jesus Himself declared that whoever commits sin is a slave to sin (John 8:34).

What, then, is spiritual freedom as defined by the Bible?

1. Freedom from adherence to the ceremonial laws under the old covenant, such as circumcision, sacrifices, and dietary laws. “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom. 10:4).

2. Freedom from the power of sin. “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

3. Freedom from the fear of death. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1-2; cf. Heb. 2:14).

4. Freedom to joyfully serve. “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Jesus made the startling announcement in Nazareth that He had come to set the captives free (cf. Luke 4:18). Now, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that freedom continues in all who believe.

—Mark Winter.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What are some major differences between the old covenant and the new covenant? Discuss.
2. Why was Moses veiled after encountering God? Discuss.
3. What are some examples of modern-day “veils” that hinder people from trusting Christ as Lord and Saviour?
5. Describe your own experience of having the veil lifted from your understanding of the gospel.

—Cheryl Y. Powell.