

# THE GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT

## 2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-18

Like most professions, when a pastor wants to relocate to a new church he sends out his resumé. Of course, a resumé is a listing of his skills, traits, and experiences - *what might be assets to a congregation.*

Churches in need of a pastor read through these resumé's - then invite candidates in for an interview.

But a prospective pastor needs to be careful what he includes on his bio. Recently, I ran across the Top Ten statements a pastor should NOT put on his resumé.

**10)** In the five churches I've faithfully served over the last two years...

**9)** My extensive counseling of church members has produced a rich source of illustrations for my sermons.

**8)** I have the stamina to preach hour-long sermons.

**7)** My personality type has provided me ample opportunity to develop a wide range of conflict-resolution skills.

**6)** I've been told every sermon I preach is better than the next.

**5)** With a suspended driver's license a car allowance won't be necessary.

**4)** Hobbies include pit bulls and automatic weapons.

**3)** I require Sundays off.

**2)** I have learned to cope with financial crisis at every church I've served.

**1)** I have five jokes that are so funny I tell them over and over.

I mention pastoral resumés, because there were critics of Paul in the church at Corinth who were questioning the apostle's resumé - *or the lack of one*.

His detractors were using this to cast doubt on his credibility. Chapter 3 opens with a reluctant defense...

“Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?”

A common practice in the early days of Christianity was for traveling preachers to carry with them *letters of commendation*, or *referrals* from their home church.

Even today when a ministry seeks our support, or a minister wants to speak or sing at Calvary Chapel, it's standard protocol for us to look for “*letters of commendation.*” A reference from someone we trust is a good way to validate the legitimacy of the ministry.

And this was particularly vital in the early church.

Christianity was still new, and believers in most cities were a persecuted minority. They were eager when help came from other quarters. The churches had to be cautioned that not everyone *claiming to be of God was really from God*. There were false prophets. That's why, legitimate teachers carried letters of reference.

Even Paul himself participated in this practice. In Romans 16 he recommends Phoebe to the church in Rome. Later in 2 Corinthians 8 he commends Titus.

In fact, Paul's letter to Philemon was in reality a letter of

commendation for a brother named, Onesimus.

But what Paul was careful to do for others, he saw no need to do for himself. When he addressed the church at Corinth he didn't appeal to paperwork!

Paul started this church. He preached the Gospel to them. It's members were believers he led to the Lord.

You would've thought the existence of the Corinthian church would validate Paul's ministry. Why does Paul need credentials to verify His ministry and calling from God, when the Corinthians themselves were his proof?

Several years ago, a group of us from CCSM went to Winder to plant a new church. For four years I drove there and back on Sunday mornings laying the foundation for the new fellowship. Today, Calvary 316 ministers under the leadership of my son, Pastor Zach.

But what if I filled in for Zach one Sunday... and just before I stood up to teach one of the elders leaned over and asked to see my ordination certificate. **“Hey, we just want some proof you're a legitimate pastor!”**

I'd be a little upset! Hey, God birthed the church, but he gave me the vision and used me to launch, *and now I have to show them my credentials?* How ridiculous!

Yet, this is exactly how the Corinthians were treating Paul. They expected him to show some paperwork, when they themselves were evidence of his anointing.

The Corinthians demanded to see Paul's resumé, but in verse 2 he tells them **they are his resumé!**

“You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men.” Here’s an important principle, **the proof of a man’s ministry are the fruits of that ministry.**

I don’t care if a pastor has a gold-embossed, onion-skinned certificate of ordination - in a matted frame.

If God hasn’t ordained him, all his paperwork is as valuable as toilet paper. If a man hasn’t been ordained by heaven it doesn’t matter how many preachers lay hands on him and how many seminaries ordain him.

And sadly, I see this often. Since I’m the guy in our area who affiliates Calvary Chapels, men come to me wanting to be added to the list, *before they’ve done anything*. They’ve got business cards and a website, just no people! I have to tell them, **“We don’t affiliate good intentions.”** *How can you be a shepherd if you’ve got no sheep? Before we list a flock, get some sheep.*

A true man of God won’t poach from other churches. He’ll lead some people to Christ, and disciple them.

Someone once told me, **“The way you know you’re a leader is to look over your shoulder and see if anyone is following.”** This was the proof of Paul’s leadership! Everywhere he went he left behind a growing church...

In the movie **“Mr. Holland’s Opus,”** Richard Dreyfus plays a frustrated musician named Glenn Holland.

Circumstances conspire to force this inspiring composer to give up his dreams of grandeur and take a job as a High School music teacher. Mr. Holland never gets to write his symphony, and views his career as a letdown... Until his final

day on the job...

All his former students gather in the auditorium to show their appreciation and honor their teacher. In fact, one of his earlier students has become the governor.

She addresses the crowd, "Mr. Holland had a profound influence in my life (on a lot of lives), and yet I get the feeling that he considers a great part of his life misspent. Rumor had it he was always working on this symphony of his, and this was going to make him famous and rich (probably both). But Mr. Holland isn't rich and he isn't famous. At least not outside our little town. So it might be easy for him to think himself a failure, but he would be wrong. Because I think he's achieved a success far beyond riches and fame."

The governor points to the people in the crowd, and says to him, "Look around you. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched, and each one of us is a better person because of you. We are your symphony, Mr. Holland. We are the melodies and the notes of your opus. And we are the music of your life."

This is what Paul says, the Corinthians are his opus.

And this is true of every Christian ministry. Our legacy isn't *the programs we start or the buildings we build*. People are our symphony. Ministry is an opus of praise to God, and the lives we touch are its notes.

Paul continues writing to the Corinthians in verse 3, "Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart." Paul was the pen

God used to write on the hearts of the Corinthians. But he calls them - not his epistle (*or letter*) - but they are "*an epistle of Christ.*"

The author of their transformation was Jesus.

And in the rest of the chapter Paul discusses the means of that transformation - the New Covenant.

Today we send text messages, and emails, but when Paul wanted to correspond he picked up a quill and parchment. He inked his letters. And ink can smear, or smudge, or fade over time... As a matter of fact, emails aren't exactly foolproof either - *they can be deleted.*

In fact, there're problems with all forms of physical communication. Books get lost, letters smudge or fade, emails get deleted, text messages get dropped...

And even when the writing remains legible words alone can still be misinterpreted. Often, mere words leave out the tone, and heart behind them. *Ever hit "send" on an email that ended up misunderstood?*

This is what happened with the Old Covenant. In Israel, before the coming of Christ, God wrote His will - His Law - not with ink, but on stone tablets.

The Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses, He chiseled into the stone with His very own finger.

Talk about conspicuous and monumental. I would imagine engraved letters in stone slabs are the most permanent of physical forms of communication.

But the same problems existed with stone tablets as occur with other forms of tangible correspondence.

The problem wasn't *what was written*, it was *how it was written*. As with all kinds of physical postings the mode of communication was tenuous and unreliable.

At times, God's people **misinterpreted** His will. They took His laws to extremes or took them out of context.

On one occasion, they actually **lost** God's Law.

At other times, they simply **ignored** the tablets.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments in his hand, in essence Dr. God was telling His patient, Israel, "**Take these two tablets daily, and you'll get better.**" But the Jews neglected the prescription. And even the world's most well-written prescription can't make the patient take his medicine.

Say someone recommends a new restaurant across town, and they hand you directions written on a piece of paper. *I know that's old school, but that's my point...* Having that paper doesn't mean you'll arrive on time.

*You can lose the directions between the seats... or misunderstand them... or spill coffee on them and smear the ink... or roll down the window and let them fly out of the car... or get distracted and misread them..*

But what if you were in a car with onboard navigation. There's a GPS in the dash that's calibrating and recalibrating up-to-date directions and traffic - the GPS will prove far more reliable than the paper.

And this is why God wrote His will on our hearts. God was way ahead of the technology. With the New Covenant He was

first to develop onboard navigation.

It's tough lugging around stone tablets, that's why God etches His will into our basic desires and instincts.

He plants His Holy Spirit within us. It's like installing a spiritual GPS in our hearts - *a new nature* - that keeps calibrating us until we're where He wants us.

This is the miracle of the New Covenant - and here, Paul holds it up in contrast to the Old Covenant.

Though we're not told in our text, it's possible Paul's detractors were Jews with an undue devotion to Moses and his Law... Though Hebrew prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel promised a New Covenant - and in the upper room, Jesus told His disciples His work on the cross would activate that New Covenant - still it was something the Jews in Paul's day refused to embrace.

God was providing a better arrangement that would supersede His covenant with Moses. But the Jews wouldn't accept God's New Deal, so they tried to discredit its messenger. Paul knew the issue wasn't him, it was the covenant he preached. So he defends himself by pointing out the glory of the New Covenant.

God made him a caretaker of this new, more glorious ministry. He was a participant in writing *living letters*.

*When we say God replaced the Old Covenant with the New* - don't view it as replacing something *wrong* with something *right*. The Law of Moses was perfect.

It's still valuable to us today. We should study the Old Testament - it reveals God's heart for His people.



When God replaced the Law think of it as replacing something *glorious* with something *more glorious* - or replacing something *passing* with something *lasting*.

With the New Covenant God upgraded the app. As prophets foretold, God gave us a new and willing heart.

God went high-tech! His desire didn't changed. He wants His people to love Him and to love each other, but He no longer conveys that love on stone tablets.

God embeds His love in our hearts by planting His Spirit within us. As Christians we're no longer trying to live up to an external standard. Under the New Covenant our transformation is now ***an inside job!***

This is why Paul says in verse 4, "**And we have such trust through Christ toward God.**" The New Covenant is based on faith. We trust Jesus to work His will in us.

We're always leaning toward Him - hoping in Him.

It takes zero faith to follow a set of directions. You're just reading what's in black and white. In fact, you can follow directions begrudgingly or mechanically. The right attitude has very little to do with obeying orders.

This was one of the problems with the Old Covenant.

People kept the Law for all the wrong reasons. *In some ways, for some people*, trying to keep the Law made them worse than if they had simply ignored it.

Their Law-keeping made them self-righteous, proud, stuck-up, judgmental. They were holy on the outside, but their inner-disposition stunk. This is why God opted for a covenant

that effects *attitudes* as well as *actions*.

God gives us a new heart. You love, *not judge*. You're humble, *not proud*. You learn to trust, *instead of becoming self-sufficient*. And this is why Paul writes...

**"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God..."**

None of us are sufficient in keeping the Law. On the very day God gave the Old Covenant to the Hebrews, they broke it before the sun had set.

As with driving directions, not everyone is good at reading and following what's written. In fact, the worst person on the planet at following directions is me!

I have very little sense of direction.

Here's the adage in our house... **"If you want to get to heaven ask Sandy. If you want to go anywhere else ask Kathy."** My wife has a knack for directions. While I have a knack for getting lost on my way to work.

Actually, I've observed that *most women* are better at directions than *most men*. It's been said, **"The reason Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years is that Moses was too proud to stop and ask for directions."**

Yet success under the New Covenant for men and women alike, has nothing to do with *our ability* to follow the directions. Paul says, **"our sufficiency is from God."**

Under the Old Covenant God handed us instructions and left it up to us to follow them, but under the New Covenant He plants in us a sense of divine direction.

He puts His Spirit in our spirit. He writes His will and His

ways on our heart. Our job is to lean in to Him, and let Him do the work! *“Our sufficiency is from God.”*

I’ve got a short video. It’s about a little boy who thinks he’s Darth Vader and the force is with him.

He tries to muster up his power. Yet in the end the only person with any power turns out to be his dad. \*\*\*

That little boy illustrates the problem with the Law God gave to Moses. Receiving the Law, like dressing up in that suit, created the impression that we had the power to keep it... *why would God give a Law He didn’t want us to keep?* And in the short run that was true.

But God’s bigger purpose in giving us the Law was to show us we *couldn’t* keep it - we lacked the power.

*And unless we’d tried, how would we have known?*

The Law proved our insufficiency. Now it’s the New Covenant - *it’s the power of our Dad in us* - it’s the power of God the Father that makes us sufficient!

Paul says in verse 6, *“who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit...”* With the Spirit of Christ inside us a Christian isn’t just sufficient *to live for God*, but *to minister for God* and pass on His good news to others.

Under the New Covenant the Holy Spirit ministers *in us* AND *through us*. Each of us become His ministers.

Paul adds to verse 6, *“for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life...”* This is an often misunderstood verse...

Some folks interpret the *“letter”* as a literal reading of the Bible. They say if you try to take the Bible literally it kills - it produces death. It's the Spirit that applies God's Word to everybody, and to every era, differently.

That's NOT what this verse means! 2 Peter 1:20 warns us the Scripture is of *“no private interpretation.”*

The Bible doesn't mean one thing to one person, and something else to another. It has a proper context and a correct interpretation... But what Paul is saying is that if we try to obey God's Word without the power of the Holy Spirit (*as under the Old Covenant*) it does kill.

It leaves us defeated and frustrated. It's *the Spirit* and a New Covenant that brings us life and power.

Give someone a task without the strength, or tools, or skill to do it, and you're sentencing them to despair.

When Paul writes, *“the letter kills, but he Spirit gives life,”* he's saying it's the demands of God's Law without the Spirit of God to empower us that brings defeat.

In the 1960s no one was bullish on NBA's Chicago Bulls. Their tallest player, Erwin Mueller, was just 6'8".

Once, before a game with the Celtics - in the midst of a seven game losing streak - Coach Johnny Kerr, stood in the locker room and tried to fire up his team.

He said to forward Bob Boozer, *“Bob, go out there and pretend you're the best scorer in basketball.”*

Then he turned to guard, Jerry Sloan, *“Jerry, get out there and pretend you're the best defender the game has ever*

seen." Then Coach Kerr challenged Mueller, "Erwin, pretend you're the best rebounding, shot-blocking, dominating center in the game today!"

The team was fired up! They stormed the court.

Yet when the game was over, the Bulls had lost again, by 17 points. Coach Kerr was so depressed. He didn't know what to say. Finally Erwin Mueller piped up, "Don't worry about it, coach. Just pretend we won."

That's what happens when you live under the law.

You're trying to win a game you just can't win. None of us are good enough to measure up to God's standards. And if you're too proud to admit it you end up just pretending - *you end up playing the hypocrite.*

The way to gain God's approval is to rely on His power. God is sufficient. His Spirit gives life. That's what it means, "*the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*"

Verse 7 recalls the initial giving of the Old Covenant, "*But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.*" Exodus 34 describes the face of Moses after he came down the mountain with the Law in his hands.

His countenance was actually flush with the glory of God. Call it the "divine shine." I call it the "Mo Glow."

Moses looked like he'd stayed too long in the tanning bed. His face beamed. He radiated God's glory.

God actually required Moses to cover his face with a veil. His glory was off-limits to the rank-in-file Hebrew.

But here Paul tells us, the glow faded over time. Like the glory of the Old Covenant - *it waned - it fizzled....*

When God first gave the Law on Mount Sinai it was accompanied with thunder, and lightning, and shaking.

It started out with a bang, but ended up a dud. The Law of Moses was unable to make anyone righteous.

It turns out the Old Covenant was transitory. It gave way to a better covenant. The grace of God and the work of His Spirit under the New Covenant make a more glorious covenant. The divine shine passed away, but the glory of God's grace lasts forever!

Verse 10, "For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels."

Compared to the glory of the New Covenant, the glory of the Law looked dull - lackluster - second-fiddle.

"For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious." The prominence and splendor of the Old Covenant, like the shine on Moses' face, was fleeting. But the significance of the New Covenant that Jesus initiated will last forever and ever.

"Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech - unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the

end of what was passing away."

Under the Old Covenant the Hebrews were unworthy to behold God's glory. This is why Moses was commanded to hide his facial glory behind a veil.

This veil became a symbol of the blindness that existed in the hearts of the Jews. They read the Law. They knew its demands, but they were unable to obey.

The Law produced *guilt* not *confidence*. It was a source of *frustration*, rather than a *sense of freedom*.

Verse 14 explains the effected this had on the Jews, "But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.

But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart." The Old Covenant wasn't just obsolete, it created a spiritual impediment for Jewish hearts...

Whenever we study the Old Testament and read passages like Isaiah 53, "He was despised and we did not esteem Him... He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all... He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth..." verses that obviously speak of Jesus - I'm always asked, "It seems so clear, why don't the Jews recognize Jesus as their Messiah?"

And there are multiple reasons I can give - *not the least of which are the atrocities they've suffered at the hands of Christians...* but the short answer is in verse 14, "*Their minds were blinded... when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.*"

*It's a spiritual blindness...*

When the Law is read, pride rises up... The thought is inflamed, *"we can do it, we're a good people, we're God's chosen, we can earn God's favor, and keep His Law."* The Jew's patriotic zeal keeps them from God.

There's only one cure. He says it next, **"Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."**

*Do you recall the moment you turned to the Lord?*

It's not just the Jews who have a veil over their hearts. Everyone who doesn't know Jesus gropes along - feeling guilty - condemned behind that veil.

The relentless drone of the Law's demands... *do this, don't do that - do, don't, do, don't...* It creates a hopelessness in us. God seems a million miles away.

You'd sooner travel to the nearest star than get to God through obeying the Law. You can *want* to see God... You can do all you can to draw close... but your nose keeps butting up against that veil of despair.

Yet, when anyone turns to Jesus - *just confesses his sin, and stops pretending to be what he or she isn't.* Suddenly, this spiritual blindness - the veil - is taken off.

Instantly you're invaded by a sense of God's presence and pleasure. His Spirit takes up residence. God comes into focus. His glory fills your emptiness. The distance you felt evaporates. *The veil is removed.*

Verse 17 says it best, **"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."**



The work that Jesus did on the cross, the Spirit now takes up in our hearts. Neither are earned by our good works. Both are experienced by grace through faith.

There's now a peace in God's sufficiency. You know that you're forgiven. You know you're right with God. You feel free from sin and the guilt that comes with it...

*“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty!”*

Yet here's what happens to some Christians. We believe we're saved by grace through faith - but then we try to live the Christian life in our *own strength*. As if it's our duty once more... as if we're sufficient after all.

We go right back to an Old Covenant lifestyle.

Rather than *trust more*, we *try more*. We live by *grit* - not *grace!* And we end up right back behind the veil.

Our faith gets buried under a mound of guilt. Rather than the feeling of freedom and liberty, we're overwhelmed with the bondage of guilt. *We have a New Covenant, but we live as if we're under the Old.*

Author and speaker, Warren Wiersbe, has traveled extensively among churches across North America.

Wiersbe writes about what he's observed, *"There are Gospel-preaching churches that have legalistic tendencies and keep their members immature, guilty, and afraid. They spend a great deal of time dealing with the externals... they exalt standards and denounce sin, but they fail to magnify the Lord Jesus. Sad to say, in some New Testament churches we have an Old Testament ministry."* Let's not be a church that emphasizes *rules and requirements*. Let's be a New

Covenant church that's all about *faith and freedom*.

As Paul puts it, "**where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.**" Under the New Covenant we no longer dwell on *our deficiencies*. Our failure is covered by the blood of Jesus - we're free to live in *the sufficiency of Christ*.

In 1927 Cecil B. DeMille made his famous film, "**King of Kings.**" British actor Henry Warner was cast to play Jesus. DeMille was concerned that any behavior by the lead actor deemed inconsistent with the image of Christ would result in negative publicity for his film.

That's why DeMille enforced strict guidelines on Warner. He tried to help him keep up a good "holy" image of how he thought Jesus should act. Warner was kept isolated from the rest of the cast. The *places he could go and activities he could do* were limited.

Yet, as you can imagine, rather than make him more Christ-like, the rules and regulations drove Warner the opposite direction. He ended up overwhelmed by his alcoholism. Henry Warner was being asked to do what he had no power to do. His desires hadn't changed.

And this was the problem living under the Old Covenant. Outward conformity doesn't make you Christ-like. It takes a transformation on the inside...

This is what Paul explains in verse 18, "**But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.**"

Here's what happens to a believing heart living under the

New Covenant... God strips away the veil...

It's like walking into a darkened room in the middle of the day, and ripping open the blinds. Suddenly, light streams in from every corner... not because *we tried hard*, or *earned the right*, or *proved our worth* - but the blindness was removed. Simple faith opens the door.

The glory of Jesus pours in - *transformation begins*.

The Greek word translated "**transformed**" is the term, "**metamorphosis**." And it speaks of a *radical* change.

When a rock crystalizes - or a caterpillar leaves its cocoon and flies off as a butterfly - it's *metamorphosis*.

It denotes a dramatic and qualitative change.

Under the Old Covenant we *conform* to a standard, and produce a holier-than-thou attitude. But under the New Covenant we're *transformed*. We absorb - then **reflect** - God's love and purity. We become like Jesus.

Paul said the glory of the Old Covenant faded and diminished, but the glory of the New Covenant swells and intensifies. Notice, we go "**from glory to glory...**"

The Christian life is a progression. *The glow grows...*  
*And here's how...* it's like "**beholding as in a mirror...**"

Spend time in the presence of Jesus and you'll be like Him. Cling to Jesus. Keep the attention and focus of your heart God-ward and He'll rub off on you.

We go from "**glory to glory.**" Rather than end up a crotchety old man I want to grow *more pleasant to be around... more humble... more joyous... more caring!* I want to live my time on earth going from glory to glory!

Once during communion, the Scottish preacher, A.J. Gossip, exhorted his congregation, “Do you believe your faith? Do you believe this I am telling you?”

Do you believe the day is coming, when you will stand before God’s throne, and the angels will whisper together and say, ‘*How like Christ he is?*’ That is not easy to believe. And yet not to believe is blasphemy.

For that, not less than that, is what Christ promises.”

This is the glory of the New Covenant. As we look to and trust in Jesus, His glory is mirrored in us!

Under the New Covenant a metaphysical miracle occurs in the believer's heart. We change... *first our spirit... then our thoughts and attitudes... ultimately our actions* - and it's amazing, **we weren't trying that hard!**

We just kept our face toward Jesus. *He effects the transformation.* It's God's Spirit who does the work.

The Old Covenant was characterized by a veil and spiritual blindness that led to death. Whereas, the New Covenant is about an **"unveiled face"** - a look - an awareness of Jesus' presence - that transforms us.

We become like Jesus by hanging out with Him - by spending time with Him. His glory rubs off on the believing heart. But we have to keep our eyes on Him.

This is our job to supply **a sustained look...** *Not a peek from time to time. Not a momentary gaze. Not an over-the-shoulder glance as we race off to something else.* But a lingering look, a fixated focus.

*Are you supplying a sustained look? We can't afford to get distracted. We need to maintain an open face.*

Oh, the power of a look!

Fix your eyes on Jesus and it will change your life. Maintain that focus and you'll go from glory to glory!

*With an unveiled-faith, let's look to Jesus!*