

2Corinthians 3:10 - 17
Dig Deeper, May 5, 2004

After calling attention to his role in their having received Christ, and lovingly calling them an “epistle written in his heart” Paul contrasts the old and new covenants between God and man. He does so because there was a group among them that were pushing the Law of Moses as relevant for a believer today. Not necessarily as a means of salvation but as a rule of living a life pleasing to God, (and incidentally pleasing their sense of righteousness as well). This discussion comes as a parenthesis, verses 7 - 16. Last week we noticed the many deep contrasts between the old and the new. Paul and others with him were ministers of the new covenant (new testament) promised in the old testament. For example:

Jeremiah 31:31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: 32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: 33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

This new covenant, or testament, (the same Greek word) is referred to fifteen times in Hebrews where it is contrasted with the covenant Jehovah made with the children of Israel at Mount Sinai. Many more references are made throughout scripture.

This new and better covenant was originally prophetically promised to Israel to replace the old given by Moses. But (nationally) they rejected it when the crucified its Mediator Jesus Christ. After His resurrection they nationally rejected further opportunities of grace presented them by Peter on Pentecost, the apostles, and lastly by Stephen whom they stoned. But in the future God will keep the promises of the new covenant given without condition to Israel in the Old Testament. He will do this after the rapture of the Church and the seven years of Tribulation. Romans 9-11 describe this postponement.

1Corinthians 3:14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail 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 vail is upon their heart. 16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail

shall be taken away.

But meanwhile the **blessings of the new covenant** are bestowed upon all believers today, both Jew and Gentile. These are Christian blessings received from God based upon the completed sacrifice and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The future application of the new covenant to the nation of Israel are based upon that same work of Jesus Christ its Messiah (Christ). While they have been set aside nationally by God, individual Jews are earnestly invited to become Christians and enjoy the blessings the Nation has forfeited.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the new covenant because there was confusion amongst them about it. They were setting their sights too low. Those among them who were making merchandise of the word of God, ch. 2:17, were directing their thoughts to Old Testament attitudes and principles. By focusing their thoughts on self, which the law does, instead of Christ, they appealed to the flesh in all of us while gaining power over souls. The Corinthians remained in the flesh, as babes, immature, stagnant, 1Corinthians 3. Their low spiritual state had allowed them to tolerate wickedness instead of mourning over it. Now having responded to Paul's prompting to clear themselves of evil, they had taken up an attitude of harsh retribution characteristic of the Old Testament Law of Moses. They were to forgive the repentant brother. They needed encouragement to focus upon Christ Himself, not just the letter of the Scriptures much less the Law of Moses. The epistle of Christ written in our hearts, not in letter but “of the spirit,” v. 6, is what counts in God's sight. We learn that “the Lord is that spirit” in verse 16. This is what changes us so we glorify Him in our lives and thinking and teaching. We are being changed, brethren, brothers and sisters, young and old. Not by strict application of the letter but by gazing intently upon the glory of the Lord. In a Human Face. The face of Jesus Christ. Shining with a glory far beyond the bright shining in Moses face after he had been with God on the mount receiving the Law. He had to veil his face, first because of the glory, and then to hide the fact the glory was fading away. Nor do we physically see Jesus' shining face “white as the light” as did Peter, James and John on the mount of transfiguration, Matthew 17. But we with open face, by faith, see through Paul's eyes what he saw on the road to Damascus. A risen, ascended glorified Christ, a Man in glory, where we will soon be with Him.

We with open face behold Christ, and what happens? WE ARE CHANGED. Not yet completely.

Not instantly. But changed step by step, from glory to glory. Beginning immediately upon conversion and never ending, except as we are ultimately changed to be like Him forever. He is not obscure but as in a mirror, face to face. And we **behold!** Not with a fleeting glance or even a careful scrutiny but to **gaze**, that is **with wide-open eyes, as at something remarkable**. It is like Stephen was transformed when he saw the glorified Lord as he was stoned, Acts 7:59-60. He echoed the forgiving words of his Lord on the cross, as he commended his spirit to God.

How does this happen? By faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are changed in ways imperceptible to ourselves but more obvious to others. We are changed if we are **not occupied with ourselves**. We do not change our hearts by setting up some rule of life for ourselves, not even the letter of the New Testament. It is a Person we are to focus upon. We don't change ourselves by measuring ourselves on how we are doing or how good our service is for the Lord. He is watching that, and we will give account before Him in glory. More on that in chapter 5. Nor do we examine one another for spirituality, service, or conformity to Christ, much less the Law. Some in Corinth were examining others and comparing themselves to one another, ch 10:12, but neglecting to examine themselves and compare themselves with Christ. They were examining the apostle Paul himself. But they forgot to humble themselves and routinely judge themselves before God so that they might eat the Lord's Supper in a manner worthy of Him. We instead are to delight in nourishing and encouraging continuing spiritual growth and progress in grace and truth in others as they continue to be transformed into greater conformity to Christ. And if in doing this we also notice someone who seems to be faltering by the way, we can step in to help, not condemn, Galatians 6:1. (If they should refuse help and continue into wickedness, then the assembly must act, as Paul commanded the Corinthians, 1Corinthians 5.)

God's goal is stated in Romans 8.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 ¶ For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

He originally created Adam in His image and likeness, but Adam corrupted that by disobedience. Now the Man has come and revealed Himself as the Image of God. Of

course, that perfect Man but condemns all those in Adam. But Christ is the second Man, the Last Adam, 1Corinthians 15. And we are promised we will be changed upon His return. Those in asleep in Jesus will be raised incorruptible and changed. Those alive and remain will be changed in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye. We shall see Him as He is, 1John 3:2. Yet we have already been changed spiritually. From death into life. God doesn't go about changing the old man into His image. He makes us a new creation, ch 5:17, born again. Then He changes us as we grow into the image of His beloved Son. This word change is translated from the Greek word "**metamorphoo**," to transform (literally or figuratively), change, transfigure, transform. It is the English word "metamorphose" we use to describe the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. What a marvelous thought! To use the gradual change God makes to an insect inside a chrysalis as an illustration of the change He is making in us as we incubate down here, in the world but not of it. Soon we will emerge with our heavenly bodies. Will we be as startlingly different as the butterfly is to the caterpillar? Yes, for we shall see Him as He NOW is.

This change is made by the Spirit of the Lord. He delights to present Christ to the believer, and to all men for that matter. Not a series of commandments, although the Lord has given us commandments which are not grievous.

1John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

His commandments and His words are the delight of the soul who is attentively beholding his Lord. The soul has full liberty to live a full, abundant life walking in the Spirit, walking in the light. Not under bondage or threat of punishment but a voluntary slave of the Love of God. Not under the law of Moses or of any other "rule of life" imposed by ourselves upon ourselves, much less that imposed by others. Even the idea of our indebtedness to Him falls short of love. We rightly feel we truly owe the Lord a great debt of gratitude for what He went through for us on the cross to save us from our sins. He brought us to God and to Himself. All He wants is our simple heartfelt love for Him personally. From that springs the worship, praise, thanksgiving, loving devotion and communion He desires from us. Now we are at liberty to love Him.

And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

By Ron Canner, May 5, 2004