

New Covenant Glory

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[0 : 00] Because to turn back today to 2 Corinthians chapter 3, 2 Corinthians chapter 3, where we will carry on our study in this pistle.

And just kind of by way of introduction, we're reminding ourselves that Paul is writing to this Corinthian church in many ways to defend the gospel.

And the gospel always needs defending. You may be find that tomorrow. As a Christian, you'll be asked to defend the fact that you're a Christian, that you believe in Jesus Christ.

And sometimes within the church, we're asked to defend the gospel from false ideas and false teaching. And those who would take from it and make it something that it was never intended to be.

That in many ways is what the false teachers who had infiltrated the church in Corinth, that's what they were doing. They were basically saying, Christ's very good and it's grand that you preach the gospel, Paul.

[1 : 06] But you also need to believe in the commandments in the Old Testament. And you need not just to believe them, but you need to obey them in order to please God. So that it's Christ, yes, but also the kind of good efforts that you can make yourself.

So it's a bit of a hybrid gospel that we try our hardest and that we obey the law and that we obey the Old Testament commands and that we kind of what we fall short on with that, then we just top it up with Christ.

We just top up our own failure with Jesus. And that makes a nice package to bring to God. Our own obedience and also what Jesus has done for us. And that's kind of what the false teaching was.

They were wanting the Old Testament, Judaistic belief in the law and obeying the law to be part of the New Testament gospel. Now, you might think that's very distant and far away from your own life and from mine.

But I wonder if it is that far away. Are we not very... Do we not find it very easy to slip back into some kind of legalistic Christian living where we are a bit like that, where we want to do our very best because deep down we think we can earn our favor with God.

[2 : 24] And that Christ is great and we just have Christ to top up our failure. And we would never maybe admit to that theologically.

We would never maybe consciously say that. But in the way that we act and the way that we live, we can often think like that. Maybe it's the way we judge other people.

I'm much holier than them. I'm doing much better than them. I'm much more godly than other people. In effect, we're saying we are better.

We're trying harder. We're more righteous. We're better lawkeepers than other people. As if it's anything we can do in ourselves that we then think we can transport to God and say, look at me.

Look how good I am. And look why I think you ought to accept me when I die. Because while I believed in Christ, I'm a Christian, but I've also done these things which I think gain me merit as well.

[3 : 23] And so we kind of, we hybrid the gospel and we kind of rub it all together and there's a bit of our own self-righteousness. There's a bit of our own works. And while there's a bit of grace as well.

Paul is arguing very strongly against that here. And I hope that we will go to this stake to defend the gospel as well.

And not be content with a hybrid understanding of grace or the gospel. Paul speaks in this passage, or the theme very much, is about glory.

It's mentioned 12 times in 13 verses. So it's obviously significant to Paul here. And it's glory or glorified or glorious as mentioned 12 times.

And I'd like that to be our theme this morning as we think about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and why it is wonderful and why it's great to be a Christian and why we shouldn't be down in the mouth about that or we shouldn't castigate it or throw a side lightly as if it's, ah no, it's Sunday again and it's Christian things and I guess like bad medicine, I better take it for a day and then get back to just living my own life for the rest of the week.

[4 : 46] Ah, it's the glory of God. And can we just speak about that for a moment as we introduce this comparison that Paul makes between the Old Testament and the New Testament and what is revealed in both of these parts of the Bible.

Glory here, the New Testament word here for glory. It really just means the opinion in a sense, the opinion or the standing that we give to someone, the honor that we ascribe to someone because they are worth it.

You know, and James has been speaking about and I've been speaking about the word for glory in the Old Testament which is the heaviness, it's kind of this idea of weight, of worthiness, of worthness because it's something that's not light and throw away but it's heavy.

Well, the New Testament's more just about the standing, the opinion that we have of someone that makes them worthy of glory. If I could modernize it, it would be someone who's a hero or someone as we would say, the young people would say, there's a legend, that doesn't mean they're make believe, but just someone who's a legend, someone that's a hero, someone that is worthy of our adoration.

And we know that concept today. You know, you can understand that and I can understand that. We honor people who are brave, we say they're worthy of honor, they're worthy of glory, people who are kind, we recognize that.

[6 : 10] People who are good, we respect and we honor that. People who are talented, we ascribe to them worth, we ascribe to them value because of these things.

And that is really the root of this word for God who is glorious and to whom we bring glory in our lives. We make icons of people, we look up to people, we adore people and we take that and we apply it to God in our life.

God is glorious. God has glory and God is glorious. I want to say a couple of things about the glory of God. Well, one thing about the glory of God and then one thing about our reaction to that.

God is glorious. He is a hero. He's a legend. God is unbelievable and he is the one who is beyond compare.

He is absolutely unique in his goodness. There's nobody like him in terms of his goodness. Incomparable. We can't just even measure how good he is, but he is absolute goodness.

[7 : 21] He knows everything about everyone and about everything there has ever been. Not just in the world and externally, but internally in our hearts and in our minds.

He knows our past, he knows our present, he knows our future. He knows when you will die. He knows when you were born. He knows where you will spend eternity. He knows all these things.

He isn't surprised. He isn't going to be taken aback. He isn't going to do anything that is out of character with his goodness and with his love. He's a genius.

He is fully intelligent of every matter in the universe. He is completely just. He never struggles.

He is God. A God who is, as we saw recently, who is love and who is the source of love and is the source of your life today, the source of my life and the source of everybody's life who chooses to stick their fingers up at him and ignore him and reject him and argue against him all their life.

[8 : 25] He is the one who gifts them life, who sends rain down to them as well as to us and sun to shine. And who gives us every good and perfect gift.

He is worthy in his character, in all his talent, in all his inspiration, in all his glory, in his character. He is glorious. But he's also glorious, actually, if I could say that, in his physicality.

He is glorious in that. Because the Bible speaks not of him just as being the one to whom we ascribe glory, but who is actually, who, I find it difficult to know the word, who actually exudes glory physically from, I know God is a spirit, but in his radiance there is glory in his actual being as it were.

We recognise that. You know, Paul speaks here about Moses coming down from the mountain, Mount Sinai, where he'd been in God's presence in a way that really the Bible doesn't say much about.

But he came down from the mountain and his face physically shone. It reflected the glory of God in whose presence he'd been so much so that he had to be a veil over his face when he spoke to the people.

[9 : 49] So there's a kind of genuine radiance, not only in God's character, but in his being that is visible, that is seen. It's revealed to us in the New Testament where Jesus, who is God, is on the Mount of Transfiguration.

And you know that, don't you? It's as if, it's as if the curtains pull back, or it's as if the cover is pulled back and his glory is revealed.

He shone in physical glory. It's his glory so great it can't just be contained in our response to him. It just bursts out from his very being so much so that we'll not need the sun or the moon in heaven, because God will be the radiance of heaven and will be its light and will be its heat and will be its love and will be its core and will be its center, so that we recognize that not just in his attributes as he gloriously, but in his absolute being, he is glorious in ways that we just don't really grasp at all.

But it's great. So God is glorious. And in response to that, I just wanted to ask the question about what kind of heroes we have, because the heroes we have reflect our heart in many ways, don't it?

The people we regard as legends, they reflect where our heart lies even spiritually. The people we admire, the people we honor, the people we respect, the people that we can say we glorify.

[11 : 24] Well, it says a great deal about us, doesn't it? And if God isn't anywhere there, if God's way down the pecking order of our lives and of whom we ascribe glory and legendary status and heroic status to, then it reveals much of our heart, because the sinful world in which we live and the sin in our hearts often doesn't ascribe any glory to God at all, but rather has God in the dock.

God's a small puppy dog. God is someone we can reject, we can ignore, we can laugh at, we can tear apart, we can castigate, we can suspect, we can ignore, we can downgrade.

He's not glorious in our lives, he's unloved, he's not influential to us, he's just an added extra at best. He might be the icing on the cake, but he's not at the core of our being, and we don't ascribe to him or the danger is in our sinful hearts that we don't ascribe to him glory.

And God wants us to realign ourselves to him and to stop necessarily listening to what everybody else is saying, and even what our own hearts say, because from the very beginning, Satan, as I mentioned in the prayer, has been a liar who wants us to de-glorify God, to take the glory from God, to make him not worthy, to make him a nobody. Did God really say, as was Satan has said from the very beginning, said it to Adam, is that what he's... what? If you don't believe in him, you're separated from him.

What? That you need to cross? Surely not. You're good. You do your best. You try and obey the Ten Commandments. How on earth... God will not reject you for that. Believe me, I know him, says Eve Owen.

[13 : 30] And we take away the glory from God who is, as we'll go on to see, is glory as most powerful and most clear in the cross, which we remember today. So I want to speak a little bit about the glory of the Gospel and the Old Testament.

My notes are actually a complete shambles today, so just ignore them, the ones that you've got. I get everything wrong as I was doing them. It may come across in the sermon.

But the glory of the Gospel, because that's what Paul is doing. He's separating out how glorious the Gospel is in comparison with the Old Covenant, in comparison with the Old Testament. And that is clear throughout the whole passage that we're reading.

If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, and that's the ministry of the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments, is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness?

We're going to look at that for a moment. We can't just say we're Christians, we believe the Old Testament, we believe the New Testament, they're all in a par, they're all in a level together.

[14 : 52] And the Gospel is simply a kind of mongrel mixing together of the two. A little bit of a beat, a wee shake of obedience here, a wee bit of grace there. And that's how we get to heaven. Somehow that's all mixed in together.

That's not what the New Testament teaches. Certainly not what Paul teaches here. We need to remember, as we think about this, that the Bible revelation is progressive. It's not a flat revelation. It's progressive. It's on a trajectory upwards towards Christ.

Everything in the Bible, even the account of creation, points towards Jesus Christ. We must look at the Bible theologically. Let's stop looking at the Bible merely intellectually and merely philosophically and look at it theologically, because that is how it's given to us.

It's the story of God in relationship to humanity. And that comes to its peak in Jesus Christ. And everything before Jesus Christ explains him.

He fulfills everything that went before him. And only in him can we make sense of the Old Testament, and even can we make sense of the commands of God.

[16 : 07] It's unfolded to us in the Old Testament for a reason. And we're told in verse 7 that the Old Testament really brought death.

In verse 6 he says, these ministers of the New Covenant, not of the letters of the Spirit, but for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. And then he goes on to speak about the ministry in the Old Testament.

Now, if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters of stone, was just talking about the Ten Commandments, came with glory and so on. So the Old Covenant brought death, and as he goes on to say in verse 9, condemnation.

What does that mean? Well, what does that mean? How can this glorious good God bring death? Well, the Ten Commandments are God's law.

They're given to reveal who God is and his relationship that he requires of us. Now, how is that summed up?

[17 : 11] Well, we can sum it up by repeating the Ten Commandments, or we can sum it up by repeating Jesus' summary. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. Love your neighbour as yourself.

That's the summary of the Old Testament law. And in the Old Testament, it was given as an external moral code. This God says is my law. This is what I want from you.

Love me with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself. And it exposes us because we can't live it. It condemns us.

It makes clear that we can't just go to God on the last day and say, here's a little bit of my obedience and here's a little bit of the cross. Accept me because I've tried my hardest. I've done the good things.

I know I'm not perfect, but I've tried to reach the law. I've tried to do these things. It doesn't work that way. It condemns us. It exposes the fact that we can't buy external behaviour or by trying our best satisfy God's perfect demands for us.

[18 : 19] He demands in relationship with us perfection, loving Him with all our heart and loving our neighbour perfectly. So it condemns us.

We can never sit here and say we've earned favour with God. And it's easy to do, you know. It's easy for us to do. We might not, again, I say we might not theologically say it, but we do it all the time when we say, God accept me, I'm much better than them.

I'm much holier than others. I'm doing my best. Please accept me. The Old Testament has brought death. The Old Covenant has brought death.

But let's remember that that death that is God's just separation that we experience because of our sin, because we can't fulfil the law, is good.

The glory of the Covenant of the Old Testament still has glory. If the ministry, verse 7, that brought death, which is in Graven Lear's last tone, came with glory, and then verse 9, if the ministry that condemns is glorious, so the Old Testament did have glory.

[19 : 42] Because it's from God. It's from God. So it has glory. God gave that. God chose to give that command, because it's diagnostic.

It diagnoses our need if it wasn't for the law, if it wasn't for the fact that God makes clear what he needs from us, perfection and love for him and for each other.

We would never have sought him out. It's provisional. It's given to the Old Testament people, but it's pointing forward to Christ. It's pointing forward to someone who will indeed fulfil the law.

See, it was glorious because it was from God. Moses did have radiance from God's presence, but it was fading, as we're told here. It was fading.

It did speak of God, but it really only speaks powerfully of God, or clearly of God when we look at it in terms, through the lens of Jesus Christ. And we must do everything through the lens of Christ.

[20 : 49] Our understanding of creation, of the Ten Commandments, of the prophecies, of everything we do in the light of Jesus Christ. And so in a sense, the Old Testament law is like the moon, and Jesus Christ is like the sun.

And in the light of the sun, the Old Glory kind of fades away. It just is incomparably less than what Jesus has come. It's faded, which brings us to the New Testament covenant, to the cross.

To what we believe is the central plank of our faith and of our belief as Christians, which God asks us to remember at the Lord's Supper, because it's so important.

So that the Old Testament and the law of God, and the Old Covenant of the Old Testament, is incomparable with what is revealed in Jesus Christ. If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, verse 9, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness?

How much? How much? For what was glorious has no glory now, in comparison with the surpassing glory.

[21 : 58] Jesus nailed to a tree is surpassing glory. Why is that? Because it brings life, not death. The Old Covenant exposes our need and our failure before God, and it speaks about our condemnation, our death, before Him.

The New Testament brings life. That's the apostolic gospel that Paul was willing to go to stake for, and you should be, and so should I. And we shouldn't dilute it, and we shouldn't mix it up, and we shouldn't just try and bring other things into it, because we're taking from its glory.

It's really glorious because Christ becomes the hero. Christ is our legend. Christ is the one who's worthy of glory, because what He's done, why?

Because He comes to fulfill the Old Testament law, the requirement of God, perfectly loving His Father, perfectly loving His neighbour, yet He dies as guilty.

Can we see how glorious that is, because He's dying in our place? He perfectly fulfills the law. He has every right to life with God, in relationship with God, and His God is part of the Trinity, but He faces death on the cross, because He's dying in our place.

[23 : 29] He takes our sin. What do we get? We get His righteousness, so that we stand before God, and we don't say, well, for a few years I've tried really hard to, and I've been to so many church services, and I've read the Bible so hard, on the day of judgment, we don't say any of that.

We come probably with our head bowed, but nonetheless covered, not in a righteousness that's our own, but with His gift of righteousness, because we've accepted that as substitutionary for us.

Can I just ask you to look up Romans chapter 3 briefly? Romans chapter 3 verse 21 explains it much better than I do.

Romans 3, 21, but now, a righteousness from God, apart from law. Can we see that? We will not get to heaven by obeying the law, by being legalistic.

A righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe there's no difference for all of sin, and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.

[24 : 57] Read that passage when you get home. It's the core of the gospel, and it should stop us from ever thinking that we are better than anyone else, or that somehow God has chosen us because we are nicer or better than anyone else.

We recognize that, and we know that, and we see that, and we appreciate that today. And maybe God is calling you, even this moment, or maybe it's just a mobile phone.

I'm not sure. But anyway, we recognize and we see, and we know, and we appreciate, and we understand. Why is it?

I know there's all sorts of reasons, and I don't want to be simplistic. Why is it the world outside so often thinks that we look down on them because we think we're better than them?

Why is it so often that people look at Christianity and say, ah, well, that's for good people? They'll never accept me. Why is it that we so often stick our noses up, as if, literally, as if we are better than other people?

[26 : 05] And as if we can choose with whom we will share the gospel, or that we make a pecking order before God about how we are justified because of who we are, rather than His gift?

It's a glorious covenant, and this is the true glory of God. The glory of God is in the cross. It's in what Jesus did for you 2,000 years before you were born, but the fact that He had you in His heart before the creation of the world because of His unspeakable purpose of love and His gift to us that we remember today.

That is His glory. That is where God is truly glorified. He's glorified in Jesus Christ and in the gospel and in the glory of the gospel.

And He says in verse 11, it's incomparable, and if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts? So you do today what lasts because you'll be doing it into eternity.

And long after the parties have finished, and long after we've stopped growing old and becoming weak and forgetful, we'll be celebrating what God did 2,000 years ago in heaven, and that is glory.

[27 : 25] And not only is it glory, but it brings glory to us. It doesn't leave glory at a distance. It brings glory to us. Why? Because we are gifted the Spirit of God in our life.

God breathes life into us. Jesus Christ gifts Him this, gifts us the Spirit of God, so we share in His glory. We share in what it is to belong to God. He gifts that to us.

He gifts that to us, that we belong to God. I don't understand how you can't see that if you're not a Christian today. Well, I can, because the Bible says our faces are veiled.

But I'm grieved that I can't even see it clearly myself. That He gives us His Spirit, and He breathes life into us, and He testifies to our heart that we are God's children.

And we share His love because of what He has done for us. And in so do we share God's glory when we live and act and follow Jesus Christ.

[28 : 38] See, becoming a Christian, it's not God that changes, it's us. I heard testimony of someone, maybe it was even myself.

He used to think he used to sit in that seat there, just where Raymond's sitting. He used to sit in that seat because that was the man's pew. And when I was young, he used to sit and listen to my dad and think he was terribly boring. Ah, gone for ages preaching, wouldn't listen to a word. Boring stuff.

And then one day he started to get interesting. And I started to listen, and he started to make sense. And it started to move me.

But it wasn't dad that had changed. He was still preaching the same gospel, it was me. God had begun to open my eyes and to see my need of salvation.

And the Lord changes us so that we begin to see His glory. And begin to see how good He is, and how He can change us.

[29 : 37] And in so doing, we are gifted this. I think this is one of the loveliest verses in the Bible, verse 17. When anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit.

And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So God, it's not like God, Jesus goes just back to heaven and says, I'm going to leave you the Holy Spirit.

We can sometimes make three persons, distinct persons of the Godhead. We can make them separate, but they're not. They're part of the one God. And God, the Lord is the Spirit.

So Jesus Christ's Spirit is in us. And with us we share His glory, the glory of His righteousness, the glory of His acceptance, the glory of His love, the glory of His life is given to us.

But we only see that when the veil is lifted. And when we see our need to turn to the Lord. When we turn to the Lord and see our need, then the veil is lifted.

[30 : 43] There's no point in staying away from the Lord and waiting for the veil to be lifted until you have all kind of intellectual knowledge and insight. And you have all the questions answered. He says, come to me by faith.

Come to me and then the veil is lifted. See. The veil be lifted from trying to please just yourself before God or being afraid of your future or being burdened by guilt or needing to justify yourself or wondering whether God will ever accept you or comparing yourself to others or earning your favour before God or being accepted or being in love.

All these things will be dealt with in Christ and you will find freedom. You will not be enslaved by popularity and enslaved by the need for pleasure and enslaved by the need to be like and do like what everyone else is doing who has a veil over their face.

You'll not have that. You'll be free to be transformed. He says in verse 18, we with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory.

We reflect the Lord's glory and are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory. We share that glory and our life's work is in turn a million pounds.

[32 : 00] It isn't to be the best that there is. It isn't to justify ourselves before God. It's to reflect His glory and it's to be transformed to be like Him.

We share in Him. He wants us to be legends and heroes spiritually. That's what God's doing.

He doesn't want us to scramble about in the gutter of spiritual living. He wants us to be spiritual heroes and legends. He wants us to live for Him. He wants us to look up, to raise our eyes above the everyday living that people are doing as if that's all there is.

He wants us to be filled with His glory and live like legends for Him and be heroes in His kingdom. That's what He wants. That's what He wants. He empowers us to do that and He wants us to share in His glory.

How do we reflect that glory by just loving like Him? By being filled with grace like Him. And that gives us, as we flick back to verse 12, a great hope and a great boldness.

[33 : 05] Therefore, since we have such a hope, we're very bold. We're bold when we begin to see His glory. Why are we ashamed of Jesus? Why do we make excuses when people ask us what we did yesterday on a Monday?

Why do we keep our Bibles closed? Why do we not share the Gospel? Usually, I think it's because we're ashamed, because we don't see the glory of Jesus Christ and we therefore don't have any boldness, because we don't sense our own need and we don't sense the wonder of His gift of righteousness.

But as we begin to see that, as we ask Him to show us it, we can walk tall and we can walk free and not be burdened by our own failure and also by our own need to justify ourselves before God.

Is God glorious to you? Do you value Him? Do you love Him? Or is it a legalistic Christianity that we have?

We celebrate Him today and we rejoice in what He has done and what He has done on our behalf. And we seek His glory and His grace to be with us in our lives and in our hearts this morning.

[34 : 25] Amen. Let's bow our heads briefly in prayer. Heavenly Father, bless us. Bless us as we come to your table. Fill us with your spirit and forgive our sins in Jesus' name.

Amen.