

## **"THE GLORY THAT EXCELLETH."**

**"For if the ministry of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory; for that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect by reason of the glory that excelleth." – 2 Cor. 3:9,10.**

The Apostle is here contrasting the two covenants – the law covenant, which ministered only condemnation to death to those under it; and the new covenant in Christ, which ministers righteousness, the imputed righteousness of Christ, or justification to all who by faith in Christ come under its gracious provisions. And while he points us to the superior glory of the new covenant, which glory is as yet only apprehended by faith, he reminds us of the glory of the old covenant, and calls attention to the typical character of that glory.

In referring to the law covenant as the ministration of death and as less glorious than the new covenant, it is not the Apostle's object to underrate the truly glorious character of that covenant; nor does his language, when properly understood, do so. Let the reader call to mind his noble defense of that covenant and of the righteous law upon which it was based, when he said, "The law is holy, and the commandment [to obey it, and to expect its reward of life for such obedience, is] holy and just and good." (Rom. 7:12.) There was nothing wrong with the holy, just and good law of God: it was a law "ordained unto life." (Verse 10.) Its object was to grant life to all its obedient subjects. And God's first covenant or promise of life on condition of obedience was sure to all the obedient. But nevertheless, says the Apostle, this law, though it was "ordained unto life" proved "to be unto death." (Verse 10.) Why? how is this? It is because of our inability, as a fallen race, to keep that law, no matter how sincerely and earnestly we endeavor to keep it. We have inherited from our

fallen parents mental, moral and physical infirmities which incapacitate us from keeping that law, which, to a perfect man, would be easy and natural. All that we imperfect men and women can now do is to strive against the increasingly downward tendencies of the fallen nature and to press painfully forward toward that perfect standard of character which the law of God requires.

But even though we do thus strive against sin and press toward perfection, there is no promise of life for the striving. The covenant or promise of life is only for actual conformity, without the slightest deflection for a single instant, from the very dawn of existence and forever. This was the covenant made with Adam in Eden, and the very first small act of disobedience forfeited the covenanted blessing of life: and from that moment forward the dying man and his dying posterity were incapable in their dying condition of obeying that law. Hence that law which was "ordained unto life" (whose principles are not only worthy of life, but are absolutely necessary to life and happiness) proved, after the fall, to be "unto death," because no man was able to comply with its covenanted conditions of life. Then, **[R1403 : page 148]** as the result of sin, the negative side only of the covenant came into force: Because Adam (who was originally able to keep inviolate the law of God then inscribed in his nature) had forfeited the blessings affirmed on condition of obedience, he and the race represented in him came under its negative provision of death, the absence of life.

Since the whole race was thus involved in sin and brought under the negative provision of the first covenant, which provision was unto death, if God would ever again offer them life, it must be under some new covenant whose prescribed conditions man could fulfil. Such a covenant Israel, not discerning the philosophy of God's plan, thought they had. Theirs, however, was not a new covenant: it was the very same

that was made with Adam in Eden – a promise of eternal life on condition of perfect and continuous obedience to God's perfect law. It was given to Israel on tables of stone; but it was given to Adam written on the fleshly tablet of the heart: in other words, his was a law-inscribed nature. Adam could have kept that law, but Israel could not; and its presentation to Israel on tables of stone, with the promise of life if they should keep it, was not with any expectation on God's part that they could keep it, though he knew they would try to do so, and many of them made commendable progress. It was merely to convince them that they could not do it, and thus to prepare them to accept the favor of life upon new conditions, which God afterward would provide – viz., the conditions of a new covenant. "The law was a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ."

The making of a new covenant with man was a legal impossibility while yet, under the negative provision of the first covenant, he was still condemned to death. He must be released [**R1404 : page 148**] from that condemnation before anything could be granted to him. Such a release, he in his completely bankrupt condition, and under the just sentence of death, was utterly unable to secure; and no man could by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for his soul, because all were under the same condemnation. Thus we see that man's first probation ended when the old Edenic covenant passed away, leaving him under its condemnation to death. And since he could not be under condemnation and on probation at the same time, there must be both a legal release from the condemnation of the old covenant and the establishment of a new covenant before a new probation or trial could be instituted. The former was accomplished by the sacrificial death of Christ, our Redeemer; and the latter will be granted to the world in general in the Millennial age. But to a select few, the Church, it is granted in the present Gospel age. God devised and executed the wonderful plan for our deliverance: he sent his only begotten

Son, who redeemed us from death by the sacrifice of himself – who "gave his flesh [his human existence] for the life of the world," and who was raised again – not as a man, because he had sacrificed his human nature for our redemption, but as a spirit being, of the divine nature, henceforth to be unto us a merciful high priest who, having redeemed us by his blood, might afterward by his life and teachings lead us back to harmony with God, and to the original likeness to him.

The release from condemnation having been thus provided for all who desire to accept it (for God will not force his favors upon any who do not appreciate or desire them), God now makes a new covenant with all who still love his law and desire to keep it. This new covenant is based still upon that same inflexible and gloriously perfect law whose integrity can never be impeached nor its force abated, but it contains a promise which exactly meets the conditions of our case. Having shown us that we cannot, in our fallen condition, fully obey his law, and that we are all condemned to death by it, but that provision has been made for our release from that condemnation and for a return to divine favor and life through Christ, God now covenants with all such who are at heart loyal to his law, and who are therefore trying to the best of their ability to keep it, to give them life on the simple condition of faith in Christ and continued loyalty to truth and righteousness.

Glorious covenant! how perfectly it fits our case. "For what the law [covenant] could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh [because **[R1404 : page 149]** of the infirmities of our flesh on account of sin], God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh [the human likeness], and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh [condemned the sin to an overthrow], that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For they that are after the flesh [who have no ambition to keep the law of God, but simply try to

please the flesh – the fallen, unregenerate nature] do mind [observe and follow] the things of the flesh; but they that are after the spirit [who desire and endeavor to cultivate in themselves the spirit of God], mind [observe and follow] the things of the spirit. To be [thus] carnally minded is death [Those so minded are still under condemnation – unjustified]; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." – Rom. 8:3-6.

While we are thus shown the blessed provision of the new covenant for the infirmities of our flesh, the fact is here made very clear that faith in Christ will profit nothing except to those who love God's law and who desire and endeavor to keep it, and who yet, realizing and acknowledging their short-comings, humbly claim the promised boon of life as the gift of God's bounty, through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Lord, whose righteousness, imputed to us by faith, makes up for our deficiency. Thanks be unto God, who giveth us this great victory over death and over the downward tendencies of our fallen nature, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

It will be observed that these two covenants are really one in substance and purpose; and that the only difference existing between them is in the special provision of the new covenant which releases man from the condemnation incurred under the old, and enables him to fulfil its righteous conditions by proxy (through Christ) in so far as he is unable to fulfil them actually and personally.

The old covenant required perfect obedience to the fullest extent, as our Lord explained it (See Matt. 5:21,22,27,28), but the new covenant makes allowance for all the slips occasioned by our imperfections and takes cognizance of our efforts to discern and follow its spirit – its general disposition – while Christ our Redeemer makes up for our deficiencies, our faith in him being counted to us for righteousness – for full obedience to

the perfect law. And it was with reference to this difference that the Apostle wrote (2 Cor. 3:6): "God hath made us able ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter [the absolute, strict, personal conformity to every jot and tittle of the law, as required under the old covenant] killeth, but the spirit [the manifest disposition to obey the law, and the acceptance of the righteousness of Christ to supplement our deficiency – the conditions of the new covenant] giveth life."

This expression of the Apostle has been greatly abused by some who wish to have this understood as a general principle laid down by the Apostle for the interpretation of the Scriptures. Wishing to put various fanciful interpretations on the Word of God, different from its plain and obvious meaning, they call the former the spirit of the Word, while the real meaning of the Scriptures they thus characterize as "the letter which killeth." Very reckless, if not indeed deceitful, handling of the Word of God is this, and very far indeed from the Apostle's thought. Let the true sheep beware of all such false teachers who thus open wide the flood-gates of error and endeavor to swamp the Church in human philosophies and sophistries.

It was that old covenant of absolutely perfect obedience to the very letter – to every jot and tittle of the law of God – that killed every man who came under its conditions, except the one perfect man – "the man Christ Jesus." To him alone was it a ministration of life. Under it he stood approved of God, and his willing sacrifice of the life to which he was thus proved worthy was therefore accepted by God as our ransom-price. But the new covenant, which requires only that we have the spirit or disposition of Christ with reference to God and his law, giveth life: "Now the Lord is that spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17) – he is a manifestation or pattern to us of the spirit or disposition which we should have toward God's law. We should love it as he loved it (Psa. 119:97); we should study and endeavor to conform to it

as he did; and we should glory in it and by word and example [R1404 : page 150] teach it to others as he did. And in whatever heart this spirit of the Lord dwells together with the same trustful faith which he manifested in Jehovah's covenants, there indeed is liberty from the condemnation of the old covenant under which all the rest of the race still rest through Adam's transgression.

Such is our favored condition, beloved household of faith. But let us observe particularly the glory of this divine covenant. When the old covenant was given to Israel, written on tables of stone, there were great manifestations of supernatural glory: A cloud enveloped the mountain where the presence of God was manifested; and there were thunderings and lightnings and the voice of a trumpet, and the mountain quaked. – Exod. 19.

And when Moses came down from the mountain the skin of his face shone so that Israel could not behold him without a veil between. Such was the glory of that first covenant, which proved to be only a ministration of death. But the Apostle gives us to understand that that glory was only a typical representation of the greater glory of the new covenant – the glory that excelleth. That glory we may now behold by faith; but let us not, like Israel, put a vail before it, so that we cannot see it; for we all with open (unveiled) faces may behold in the mirror of God's Word the glory of the Lord as revealed in this new covenant. And as we thus behold his glory – the glory of his majesty and wisdom and power and love and grace – we ourselves shall be changed, transformed, into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. – Verse 18.

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