

SESSION 21: A GREATER GLORY, PART TWO

2 Corinthians 3:7-11

September 7, 2025

PREFACE

I believe it would be profitable, at this point in our study, to include a few remarks about *dispensations*, or *dispensationalism*. Any time one is comparing one covenant to another, one's position on dispensationalism will come into play.

We get a general definition of dispensational theology from an essay written by Michael J. Vlach, professor of theology at The Master's Seminary, and an expert on "the nation of Israel and issues related to refuting the doctrine of Replacement Theology"—that is, the (errant) doctrine that the church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people.

Vlach: Dispensationalism is an evangelical theological system that addresses issues concerning the biblical covenants, Israel, the church, and end times. It also argues for a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies involving ethnic/national Israel, and the idea that the church is a New Testament entity that is distinct from Israel.

In *Webster's Second College Edition* (1980) definition number seven for the word "dispensation" is "the ordering of events under divine authority." At its root, dispensationalism says that God has worked in different ways in a number of distinct time periods or epochs (dispensations) in human history. For one obvious example pertinent to this study, there was the "Legal Dispensation" (Law: Moses to Christ) during which God said that to be righteous (right with God) one must follow the precepts handed down in the Mosaic Law. After this, however, there was the Dispensation of Grace, or the Church Age (in which we are presently), during which righteousness is determined by faith in Christ Jesus.

Another example would be the change that took place in man's diet from before the Flood (Antediluvian Dispensation) and after the Flood (Post-diluvian Dispensation). By God's command, *before* the flood, man was not to eat meat.

Read Genesis 1:29-30.

After the Flood, God gave permission for man to eat meat.

Read Genesis 9:2-4.

Note: God Himself does not change, and dispensationalism affirms that salvation has always been by grace through faith alone (Genesis 15:6, “Then [Abram] believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness”). But throughout the history of man God has initiated different covenants, or agreements, for different people at different times. All is part of His plan, and it is my personal view that God Himself does not reckon in epochs or dispensations, but just sees His economy working its way seamlessly, an unbroken thread through man’s history. His purpose, His goal has never changed; from the beginning it has *always* pointed to Christ’s kingdom.

Regarding the issue of Israel, as mentioned earlier there are some who claim that the Christian church replaces Israel as God’s chosen people. Many non-dispensationalists “hold that the OT as a whole is comprised of types and shadows of greater NT realities. In line with this idea, some assert that national Israel in the OT functioned as a *type* of the NT church” (Vlach).

Dispensationalists believe that God’s word clearly differentiates between the two, and that God’s promises made to Israel will be fulfilled to Israel during the Last Things. I love how Michael J. Vlach puts this succinctly: “God keeps His promises to those whom the promises were made.”

Almost every dispensation is inaugurated, or at least associated with a declaration or agreement—a covenant—established by God Himself, with either an individual or a people.

As I stated in an earlier session, the change from the Law to the Covenant of grace was not an instance of the Godhead saying, *Well, this Mosaic Law business isn’t working. We’d better try something else.* Rather, the dispensation of Grace was part of the plan all along.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-11.

Before we get back to our text, I'd like to add a response to a point someone in class last week raised about the verb tense used describing "the ministry of death" being brought to an end. That is, precisely *when* is/was/will the Law be rendered inoperative. My immediate response was to acknowledge that it is difficult to apply the correct verb tense for the demise of the Mosaic Covenant, either in Paul's time or our own. This week I found what Mark Seifrid wrote to speak to this.

Seifrid: We presently encounter God's glory in two forms: the glory of God that accompanies the mission of Moses and brings death, and the glory of God that belongs to the distribution of the Spirit and brings life. The difference between these two ways of encounter with God cannot be resolved in a higher, abstract conception of the divine glory. They have met and have been resolved in the crucified Christ, who is now risen. We cannot yet see how the condemnation of the Law has been swallowed up. We can only hear it in the gospel. Our vision of their unity must await the light of glory. Presently we walk by faith, not by appearance.

I would liken this to the earthly development of our sanctification. We are told in Scripture that we are now, in Christ, new creations, new creatures—yet, to be honest, we do not always see tangible evidence of this in our daily lives. And it is easy to become preoccupied (and frustrated) by our continuing sin and failure to live as our Savior would have us. The change is there already, but we don't see it; we may not, at times, experience it. The full realization of that change must await the day we meet our Lord face-to-face.

v9

In last week's session I lamented our poor perception and acknowledgment of the work of the Spirit in our lives—His power available to us. In a similar fashion even the work of Christ on the cross is veiled to our natural senses. No matter how hard we try, no matter how studiously we try to understand God's word, much of what Christ Jesus accomplished on the cross remains hidden from us. For it is too much for mortal flesh to comprehend. I am convinced that when finally we are in our glorified state, fireworks and sirens will be going off in our glorified brain at the realization of all that we previously missed.

So just as with Paul's use of "ministry" in this passage, his use of "glory" can shoot off in multiple directions—wondrous to contemplate, but not easy for mere flesh to comprehend. Let's take a second look at v9.

For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.

A more precise way to read v9 would be how we see it, remarkably, in the newer NIV and CSB:

- ministry of condemnation = the ministry **that brings** condemnation
- ministry of righteousness = the ministry **that brings** righteousness

Greek: subjective genitives

Thus we can consider "righteousness" as the causal opposite of condemnation; as that we can refer to it as "acquittal": the ministry of the Spirit brings about acquittal.

David Garland: When the people of Israel sinned, Moses could valiantly attempt to intercede on their behalf but was helpless to remove either their guilt (Exodus 32:31-33) or his own. He could not make them righteous. He was entrusted only with a ministry of the letter that specified crimes and stipulated punishment... The Law was transitory because God's purpose [all along] was not to condemn but to save (Romans 3:21-26). God does not intend to bring the judgment of death but righteousness that leads to life. The new ministry of the Spirit makes this clear. The Spirit converts hearts of stone into hearts that are receptive to God's righteousness... The new covenant does not completely jettison the Law but offers a new way to keep the Law through a transformed heart... The Spirit acquits because Christ not only intercedes for the condemned, but His death effectively atones for their sins.

Read Galatians 3:21-26.

v10

For indeed what had been glorious, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it.

If I get up in the middle of the night to check out a strange sound I have heard downstairs, I might brighten my way with a flashlight. Entering the room downstairs the flashlight does a wonderful job of illuminating isolated areas of the room, but I will flip the wall switch to illumine the *entire* room at once.

The flashlight beam is still there, but now it has been overwhelmed by the room light, rendering it almost invisible.

The glory of the ministry of the Mosaic Covenant remains; it is still there. But with the advent of the new covenant, the old covenant's glory has been overwhelmed by the glory of the ministry of Christ Jesus. He fulfills the old by answering all its demands in Himself—and that is glorious beyond all comprehension.

Israel could see the glory of Yahweh glowing in the face of Moses, but they could only view it from afar, as third-party witnesses. It was real, but it was restricted to only one man, since only one man could come into the presence of Yahweh. Moses—one man—was momentarily transformed by Yahweh's glory.

But now look down at v18 to see the difference under the ministry of the *new* covenant.

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 from the Lord, the Spirit.

There is far, far more to this verse, which we will be examining in the coming weeks, but just looking at the surface of the text we see an astonishing change from the situation with Moses and Israel.

(Not just Moses but) “we all”

“with unveiled face” (Not hidden)

“are being transformed” (Our transformation is not temporary, but permanent)

“from glory to glory” (not static, but increasing, from one degree of glory to the next)

And this difference—especially the permanent, increasing glory—is what points us to the most important point Paul makes in v11, which then leads into the remaining verses in Chapter Three.

v11

For if that which was being brought to an end was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.
(emphasis added)

Here we see the primary difference between the two covenants of “the letter” and “the Spirit.” The first is being “brought to an end” (the same word we saw at the end of v7), while the second “remains” (*menon*, to stay, abide, endure).

It is important that we understand what is being said here, translated in the LSB and ESV, “that which was being brought to an end,” with the NKJV a close second with “what is passing away.” Verb tense is important, as well as our getting the proper picture in our mind about the status of the Mosaic Law—“the ministry of death, in letters having been engraved on stones...which was being brought to an end.”

Linda and I recently adopted two, four-year-old cats who had for that period of time been with a young woman who loved them but had to give them up because her new baby was allergic to them. Now those two cats live in a vastly different environment; they have been given new names, which they already acknowledge; they have been transitioned over to different food; and they now seek their human affection from us, and show *their* affection toward us, rather than the previous woman.

Those four years spent in their previous home were not wasted. That time contributed to who they are today. And that woman is not dead and gone; she and her family continue on as before—but are no longer a part of these two cats’ life. It will not be long, just a matter of a couple of months (if not already) before she will be a stranger to them.

The ministry of the Law played and still plays an important role in God’s sanctification and salvation economy, but to those who are now in Christ, it represents an old and obsolete life. Those in Christ now dwell in a brand new environment; they have new names, and are sustained by a different diet; and though their God remains the same, they now show their affection to a new Master: the Messiah, Jesus the Christ—a Lord not recognized in their previous life.

that which remains...

And the most profound difference above all is that *this* new life is not in the process of being brought to a close, but is permanent, eternal, with a fixed culmination of dwelling forever, in joy and peace and worship, with their loving and affectionate Lord.

There was glory in the Mosaic Law because it was all of God, but the glory that came with the Law is nothing compared to the surpassing, eternal glory in Christ Jesus.

Garland: The old covenant was impermanent because it did not represent God's ultimate purpose to save both Jew and Greek through faith (Galatians 3:19-25; Romans 10:4). From the outset, then, it was destined to pass away. When Christ came, the old had run its course. The gospel, with its forgiveness based on free grace and direct access to God, is God's last word and is permanent. The gospel, like God's righteousness, abides forever (9:9).