

Bible Study Notes
2 Corinthians: Section 9

by Larry Roach

2 Corinthians 3: 6-18

The Glory of the New Covenant

God has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever 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. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect or contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

The Ministry of the Law:

In chapter 2 of our last section, we discussed how we are ministers of a new covenant in procession with Christ, spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere the Lord leads us, cf. 2 Corinthians 2:14-16. In our current section, it is clear that God has made us competent and able ministers of a new covenant, which is not the covenant of the law, but the covenant of the Spirit. It is a covenant that does not bring death for it brings life, cf. 1 Peter 3:18.

The ministry of the law, that brought death, was engraved in letters on stone and came with glory, so much so that the Israelites could not look steadily on the face of Moses, who had been in the presence of God. When Moses came down from the mountain, from receiving the law from God, he was covered with God's glory so much that his face shone like the sun. However overtime that glory began to fade and he put a veil over his face. This is symbolic of how the law was given in glory, but over time it began to fade. Its purpose was not to bring salvation, for no one was saved through the keeping of the law. The reality was and is that no one can keep the law -- so everyone under the law is due certain judgment and death as the law requires cf. Romans 3:23; 6:23. The law faded over time for it was only making way for something greater to come -- the Spirit of God, cf. Romans 3.

The Ministry of the Spirit:

The greater ministry, the ministry of the Spirit, is even more glorious! The former brought condemnation and death; however, the ministry of the Spirit brings righteousness and life. Condemnation of the law results in alienation from God. Righteousness of the Spirit brings right standing with God. No longer are we alienated or enemies of God, for in Christ we are reconciled to God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Now, in the Spirit of God, we stand face-to-face with God, without a veil, and without condemnation cf. Romans 5:1-5; Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 10:20.

The ministry of the Spirit is a surpassing glory -- a glory which does not fade away, but lasts. It is a glory that last forever and will never pass away. We who are ministers of the Spirit have this hope, and are very bold and confident in our proclamation concerning Christ. We are not like Moses who covered his face because of the fading glory of the ministry he was given, cf. Exodus 34:33. On Christ we have set our hope, cf. 2 Corinthians 1:10. Furthermore, we stand dressed in Christ's righteousness before God. In Christ, our radiance is not fading away for it is growing greater daily, cf. 1 Corinthians 5:56.

The Hope of Salvation:

The Israelite's minds were made dull, for to this very day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. This passage has a wide application. Today, this is true for the Jews, for when they read the old covenant, with the law and the prophets, they do not see Christ. They are blind or veiled to the truth. This can be difficult for us to understand because we see Christ plainly in the Scriptures. The veil covers their minds and hearts and can only be taken away in Christ. Now this creates somewhat of a dilemma, since they are not able to see Christ, and only in Christ can the veil be taken away. The work of Jesus Christ is their only hope for salvation.

It could also be said that a veil covers the minds of all unbelievers in the world today, cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4. When those of the world hear us speak about Christ, they don't understand. Or if they pick up the Scriptures and read, they don't understand for they cannot see Christ. For it is only in Christ that you can begin to understand. This dilemma causes me to see how important it is when I encounter unbelievers, Jew or Gentile, that I pray and ask God to remove the veil from their hearts in order that they may see Christ. Moving people to turn to him is the work of God. Jesus said it this way, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," John 6:44.

The Lord is the Spirit:

The "Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom," v.17. There is freedom from sin and death. There is also freedom from the old covenant, with its rules and regulations; therefore, we are no longer subject to its condemnation. Romans 8:1 states, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Because we have this freedom, we are those, who with unveiled faces, freely reflect or contemplate the Lord's glory, cf. Romans 12:2. We no longer have veiled faces or hearts and we can look upon God through Christ. We can stand before God in all of his righteousness, clean before him, and in right standing with him. Now we can see clearly his face, and because we can see his face we reflect or contemplate his glory. Let us not forget that Jesus "is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being," Hebrews 1:3. In reflecting on him, we are becoming like him and are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6.

In conclusion, notice the Scriptures do not say with increasing glory, but it says “with ever-increasing glory.” It is a glory that will not end, for we will be in all eternity, gazing and contemplating on him, and will be forever increasingly transformed into his likeness. The word “transformed” indicates a major change in form, nature and purpose. This ever-increasing transforming glory is infinite and eternal and comes from the Lord -- who is the Spirit now at work within us.

In light of this truth, what would God have you do?