

STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

2 CORINTHIANS 3:5-11

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

DAVID MURRAY
OCTOBER 24, 2021 (PM)

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, *Office Administration*, an office supplies business, was prospering through selling high quality paper, envelopes, and pens to various local companies. However, with the advent of the personal computer and email, demand for these products began to diminish. The management, however, were unfamiliar with the new technology. Moreover, they felt that they had good products which had been much appreciated for many years. So, instead of adapting to the new situation, they decided just to keep selling paper, envelopes and pens. Sales continued to plummet. Eventually, their warehouses were full, but their order books were empty.

At this point, the managing director's son, who had been trying for some time to change the company's product range, offered to buy out the older management. A deal was soon concluded and the son took over. The warehouses were emptied of old stock, and in came personal computers, printers, and business software. The well-respected company name, *Office Administration*, was retained, but below the signs and the letterheads was written 'Under New Management.' The company soon began to prosper again. The company name and business was the same – *Office Administration* – but the product range was now suited to a new age and the new ways that offices were administered.

In a sense, the story of the whole Bible is about *Grace Administration*. However, what Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:5-18 is that the coming of God's Son, Jesus Christ, has changed the way grace is administered. The Old Testament administered grace in a way that suited the times and the people then – through prophecies, types, and symbols. It was glorious – for its time. But now, the same grace is to be administered directly, and only, through Jesus Christ. *Grace Administration* is 'Under New Management.' And, as such, it is even more glorious. **For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory** (2 Cor.3:11).

This passage and that illustration help us answer the question: **What's the difference between the Old and New Testament?** This is an important question because our answer will determine the place of the Old Testament in our lives and how much we enjoy the glory of grace.

BACKGROUND

Paul was being attacked and undermined by Judaizing false teachers in the church of Corinth. In verses 1-4, Paul argued that his letter of recommendation (the Corinthians' lives) was far superior to his opponents' recommendations.

In verses 5-11 he argues that his New Covenant ministry is far more glorious than the Judaizers' Old Covenant ministry.

In our next sermon, we'll see how he argues that his New Covenant ministry is far more transformative than the Judaizers old Covenant ministry (12-18).



How is the New Covenant better than the Old Covenant?



1. WE HAVE MORE SPIRIT (6)

God...has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (6).

The key questions here are: What does Paul mean by 'the letter' and 'the Spirit.' In the context, he's contrasting the Old Covenant ('the letter') with the New Covenant ('the Spirit') to show the superiority of the New Covenant (3, 6).

Is Paul saying there was no Spirit in the Old Covenant, and that there is no letter in the New Covenant? No, the Holy Spirit was at work in the Old Covenant (Ezek. 11:19); there are letters in the New Covenant. He's saying that the Old Covenant in general had more letter and less Spirit; and the New Covenant in general has less letter and more Spirit, and therefore more life. So why would you want to follow the Judaizers back to the Old Covenant?

MORE SPIRIT
= MORE GLORY



What's the effect of more Spirit?



2. WE HAVE MORE LIFE (7-8)

Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory...will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? (7-8).

'The ministry of death' is clearly a reference to the Old Covenant. Some conclude from this that the Old Testament only resulted in death and that no one was saved. It said, "Do this and live!" But no one "Did this", and so no one lived. However, Moses, and many Old Testament sinners who followed him, were saved (Hebrews 11). So, if 'the ministration of death' did not ensure only death for all, what does 'ministry of death' mean? It means that there was more death in the Old Covenant compared with the New Covenant (millions of animal sacrifices compared with the one sacrifice of Christ).

MORE LIFE
= MORE GLORY



So, how did people get life in the Old Testament?



3. WE HAVE MORE RIGHTEOUSNESS (9)

For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory (9).

The Old Covenant was a 'ministry of condemnation' whereas the New Covenant is a 'ministry of righteousness.' Again, this cannot mean that there was only condemnation and no righteousness in the Old Covenant, or that there is only righteousness and no condemnation in the New Covenant. It's not a contrast between bad and good (an absolute contrast) but between good and better (a relative contrast). It's not a contrast between darkness and light, but dawn and noon.



Righteousness was provided and given to believing sinners in the Old Testament as well as the New (Gen. 15:6), just as condemnation was announced in the New Testament as well as the Old (John 3:17). However, in terms of effects, there was more condemnation in the Old than the New, and more righteousness in the New than the Old. There were more brought to know and feel they were condemned in the Old, and more to whom righteousness was revealed in the New.

MORE RIGHTEOUSNESS
= MORE GLORY



How long will this New Covenant glory last?



4. WE HAVE MORE PERMANENCE (10-11)

For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory (11).

The glory that shone through Moses faded and was brought to an end (7, 11), reflecting the temporary and transient nature of the Old Covenant. Moses's old administration of grace was temporary but Christ's management of grace is permanent.

MORE PERMANENCE
= MORE GLORY

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Rejoice in God's grace and glory in the Old Testament. If there was grace and glory in the Old Testament, then we should read it, learn from it, and teach it knowing that it can make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:14-17). We read the Old Testament to find and enjoy the grace and glory of God in his words, acts, and people.

Rejoice more in God's greater grace and glory in the New Testament. The New Testament is not a new 'business' but a new way of administering the same 'business' of grace. It is *Grace Administration* 'Under New Management.' It has more Spirit, life, righteousness, and permanence.

This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation, and is called the Old Testament (Westminster Confession 7.5).

Under the gospel, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed, are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not, therefore, two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations (Westminster Confession 7.6).

SUMMARY



PRAYER: Gracious and glorious God, thank you for the greater grace and glory of this time. Help me to find more grace and give you more glory.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What role has the Old Testament had in your Christian life?
2. How has this sermon changed the way you view and read the Old Testament?
3. Why are we so tempted to trust in law rather than grace?
4. How does more grace bring more glory to God?
5. How does Luke 12:48 relate to this passage and your life?
6. How did the sections from the Westminster Confession of Faith teach you?

First Byron Christian Reformed Church
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Phone: (616) 878-9768
www.firstbyroncrc.org

Pastor David Murray
www.HeadHeartHand.org
www.livingthebible.net

