

# The Glory of the New Covenant

by Fred Zaspel

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*Fred Zaspel's sermon explores the transformative power and glory of the New Covenant in contrast to the Old Covenant, emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives.*

**Duration:** 39:40

**Scripture:** Romans 7:18, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 5:22

**Topics:** "New Covenant"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of reflecting Christ's glory through our behavior as a test of genuine faith. He shares his personal experience of encountering Christ and being transformed by the Spirit of God. The preacher highlights the radical change that takes place in believers, both inwardly and outwardly, as they are conformed to the image of Christ. He contrasts the old covenant, characterized by harsh commands and condemnation, with the new covenant of grace, where God provides all that He requires of us. The sermon references Augustine's prayer of 'give what you command' and emphasizes the pursuit of God and compliance with His law.

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## Transcript

If that singing doesn't bless you, your blesser is broke. Wednesday night, every year at the conference, can't wait to sing It Is Well. There's a rumor going around that at some point during my sermon this evening, Marlene Theobald will go, Ha! And Donna's preaching on marriage, and we will learn a lot about that home.

I need to say something about Jim Eliff. When we asked him to come speak this year, we asked him to speak on the subject of evangelism. He came back and said, OK, let's name it the aggressive Holy Spirit.

This afternoon I said, Jim, remind me, when I asked you to speak, he said, yeah, evangelism, right? And we called it the aggressive Holy Spirit. Yeah. He said, well, it was the aggressive Holy Spirit that led me to preach on church discipline instead.

Which is fine, except that in the last message, he strayed deep into my territory for this evening. But not too far. I'm sure it will work all right.

Second Corinthians, Chapter 3. The glory of the new covenant. Second Corinthians, Chapter 3. And then when you have that, if you will, please just put your finger there or something and hold it, and we'll look

back first to Jeremiah, Chapter 31. Jeremiah, Chapter 31.

I want to thank all of you for coming this year again. It's been a blessed time. I've heard it from several and I've mentioned it myself to several people that the Lord has done it again.

It seems each year we meet together and we recognize that the Lord has met with us as well. And there's just not an experience anything like sitting and hearing the ministry of the Word of God. And there's Him.

And there's me. And you just are very aware of a third party ministering the Word to your soul and building you up. And that's been happening this week.

And we thank God for it. We thank you for coming. We enjoy your fellowship.

The frustrating thing is, of course, that we never have time to spend with each person individually and we say hello and we have brief chats and we never quite finish. We need to thank Linda Connor as well, my very favorite conference pianist. She's just marvelous.

And the dear saints from Word of Life Baptist Church in Pottsville. We couldn't do this without them. They put in so much work for us.

You folks are blessed. Jeremiah 31, beginning with verse 31. The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant though I was a husband to them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds.

I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God. They will be my people.

No longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. 2 Corinthians chapter 3. I'll begin with verse 1. Are we beginning to commend ourselves again, or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone.

You show that you are a letter from Christ, the results of our ministry, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God, not on tables of stone, but on tables of human hearts. Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God, not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He 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 reflecting the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the spirit. Anyone who has been a Christian in a church for more than five minutes or so has noticed that the Bible has two major sections to it, Old Testament and New Testament.

And they immediately somehow become aware that this is a literary division. And of course it is that. But what is this Testament language? That's something that remarkably few of our church folk have been instructed on, and somehow it gets passed over.

Actually, as you know, Old Testament and New Testament would be better rendered. Old Covenant, New Covenant, the two major covenants of Scripture. The covenant made at Sinai with Moses, the covenant that was cut at the cross in the sacrifice of Christ.

And we have then the Old Testament and the New Testament. And we use that language to speak of the literature that is associated with each covenant. The Old Testament is the literature written during the time in which the Old Covenant was in force, reflecting the terms of the Old Covenant.

The New Testament is that literature written after this new covenant became in force and reflecting its terms. An Old Covenant age and a New Covenant age. That's a very simplistic overview, but it's extremely important and it's basic to our understanding of the Bible.

Paul refers to those two covenants here in 2 Corinthians 3, and he compares them. It's important for him to mention that he is a minister of the New Covenant. It's important for him to mention that, not because of some kind of party spirit.

It's important for him to mention because of the vast superiority of the New Covenant over the Old. And the superiority of the New Covenant bound up with it is the gospel itself. Moreover, he tells us, verse 11, the Old Covenant is passing away, obsolete.

The New Covenant remains. And the reason for that is that the provisions, the comparative provisions of the two covenants. The Old Covenant made at Sinai was, in a very real sense, summarized in the Ten Commandments.

And of course there are many dimensions to that law as it was fleshed out as God gave that law to Moses. There are various aspects of it. We like to refer to them in handy little terms like there were moral demands that were given, there were dietary demands that were given, there were regulations concerning the clothing in your vegetable gardens and the structure of society, regulations concerning the ceremonial religion and worship of Israel and so on.

And that covenant was not a bad covenant. In fact, Paul tells us here it was glorious. He tells us in Romans it was holy and just and good.

Here he tells us it was a glorious covenant. And such was the glory that it made Moses' face shine with the reflecting glory when the covenant was given to him. But while that covenant was not bad, it was lacking in one very important respect.

And that is it could not bring about what it demanded. It could command, but it had nothing in its terms to bring about efficaciously what it commanded. And the reason for that is it was a covenant that was written merely on stones.

You write it up on a sign and it doesn't do much for you. There's nothing inward making you obey. I thought of an illustration of this several months ago when I was riding in the truck with my son.

I don't recommend that. Jimmy was turning a corner and about 50 yards from the corner there was a stop sign. He didn't see it.

Ran right through the stop sign. Jim, you just ran a stop sign. He looks back at the stop sign.

They need to get a new sign. That one doesn't work very well. He doesn't get it.

The problem wasn't with the sign. But in a sense that was the problem of the old covenant. All it could do was make the demands.

And there's something about us that just doesn't grab hold of that and comply. In fact it's worse than that. Paul expounds on that at length in Romans chapter 7. The law is given and it actually promotes sin.

It's an amazing thing. A law that is holy and just and good promotes sin. And you know how that works.

You see the speed limit sign on the freeway and it says 55. And you're not content unless you can do 65. And it's not that you want to go 65 because if the speed limit changes to 65 you want to do 75.

Isn't that right? There's something about us that's just rebellious. And it's the same in relation to the law of God. God says thou shalt not and we shall do or bust.

And there's something about us that just rebels against the law of God. And God gives his law objectively, writes it in stone so we can read it, and it makes no difference. There's nothing in the stone tablets to bring about what those words demand.

Given all of that, glorious as the old covenant was, all it could do was condemn. That's the net effect. It demands.

We don't keep the demands. It condemns. That's what Paul tells us in verse 6, the letter kills.

Verse 7, the letter or the old covenant brought death. Verse 9, it is a ministry that condemns. That's all it could do by the nature of it.

There's no provision for sinners except it provides for sinners' condemnation. That's it. And it's the nature of the case.

Law cannot provide forgiveness. Law issues demands. Law issues commands.

And when those commands are violated, the law condemns. Glorious as that old law was, the net effect, all it could do is condemn. And this is the failure of the old covenant.

It just couldn't bring about what it demanded. It couldn't help those who heard it to obey it, and it certainly couldn't provide anything for those who had violated it. And so Jeremiah comes along, and God speaks to Jeremiah, and he says, announce that I will make a new covenant.

And it won't be like that old covenant. The old covenant issued demands. They broke those commands.

And so I'll issue a new covenant. And in this new covenant, I'll provide for what I require. And in this new covenant, I will give forgiveness of sins.

In this new covenant, I'll write my law on their hearts. I'll put it on their minds. I'll give them the knowledge of me.

They will be my people. I will be their God. And all that I require of them, I will provide for them in grace.

Notice the contrast in verse 9. The ministry that condemns, the ministry that brings righteousness. The ministry that condemns, and the ministry that brings righteousness. The old covenant brought condemnation.

The new covenant brings justification, righteousness. This is what Jeremiah said. I will forgive their wickedness, and I'll remember their sins no more.

But God doesn't forgive the sins just by divine fiat. He doesn't just declare it's okay. What he does is provides for his sinful people a substitute who in their place will bear the condemnation of their sin so that they will go free.

And that's what Jesus tells us in effect when he institutes the Lord's Supper in commemoration of this new covenant. This cup is the blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins. In this covenant, it is not a provision of condemnation.

It is a provision of forgiveness. And my people, what I require of them, I will give them. The righteousness demanded, I will give them in the Lord Jesus.

His righteousness will be theirs. The condemnation that they deserve will be borne by him in their place. This is the message of the gospel.

This is the new covenant ministry that the apostle says here that he preaches. This covenant makes provision for sinners. It gives what it demands.

Paul notes here that the new covenant provides more than simply legal provision for our sinfulness. It provides more than justification, as if that weren't enough. Notice the contrast in verse 6. At the end of the verse, the letter kills, but the spirit gives life.

It has overtones of not simply life in a judicial sense, justification, but life in a sense of enablement. It has echoes, doesn't it, of Jeremiah? I'll put my law in their minds. I'll write it on their hearts.

It has echoes of enablement. Of course, the whole problem with God's law, so far as we are concerned, is we have no ability to do what it requires. But the new covenant gives life.

Jeremiah says, I will write my law on their hearts. I'll put it in their minds. In Ezekiel, the language is, I'll take out their stony heart and give them a heart of flesh, make them responsive to me.

This is the kind of thing we find very often through the New Testament. For instance, in Romans 6 and onwards in Romans, sin's powerful grip on us is broken, and we're freed, freed to follow God according to His commands. And it seems to me that in verse 9 that's involved as well when he says this is the ministry that brings righteousness.

Certainly that's speaking in terms of justification. But it seems in this context, with what goes before and what comes after, as we will see, that he's speaking here not only in terms of justification, but bringing righteousness in terms of worked out righteousness in the life of the new covenant believer. And Paul tells us here this is a great glory of the new covenant, and this is a part of its newness.

God the Holy Spirit, powerfully at work, transforming the new covenant believer and making him to be what God requires him to be. Working in us powerfully, freeing us from sin, producing in us the righteousness that He requires of us. David Morris has a saying in his preaching, when God saves a man, He well saves him.

That's the idea here. When God saves a man, it's not simply a ticket to get out of hell free. He transforms the man, top to bottom, inside out.

He transforms him into the image of Christ. And ultimately, at the beginning of this chapter, this is the vindication of the Apostle's own ministry. As you know, in 2 Corinthians, there were those in the church at Corinth who had opposed the Apostle calling into question even his very apostleship.

And Paul writes in these first verses of this chapter, what do I need a letter of commendation from someone with authority to you? I don't need that. Look at yourselves. Your lives have been transformed from the inside out.

You are our letter of commendation. Your very lives prove the effectiveness of this new covenant ministry. It has transformed you and changed you from the inside out.

This is the joy and the privilege, Paul says, of the new covenant ministry. And his point here is that this is what God does for all of His new covenant people. This is His new covenant promise.

But notice how he says it in verse 18. We who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into His likeness. A reflection of Christ.

Every new covenant believer a reflector of the glory of Christ. Conformity to Him. A striking resemblance to Jesus.

This is that whole New Testament theme of Christ likeness on the part of His people. Now that's not something that you or I are very good at. Looking like Jesus.

We can't. We have stony hearts. But that's the basic difference, he says, between the old covenant and the new covenant.

The one is in letter only. The other, the spirit which gives life and brings about by the powerful workings of the spirit all that it demands. But I think this in verse 18 is fascinating language.

Reflecting the Lord's glory. Reflecting Christ's glory. Like in a mirror.

That's an odd kind of mirror. I look in the mirror and I see myself. And the Bible uses that kind of imagery with the mirror as well.

I look into the mirror of the Word and I see just how ugly I am with all of my sins. And that's reflected back at me. But here it's a different kind of mirror.

I look into the Word and I see the glorious image of Christ. And somehow or other that image comes back on me. And I begin to reflect the glory of the Lord that I see in the pages of Scripture.

It's a fascinating concept. And he gives a contrast, of course, to Moses at the giving of the old covenant. And the reference is back to Exodus chapter 34 that you're all familiar with.

When Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of stone, his face began to shine with the glory of the presence of God. And the people saw it shining so brightly that they were afraid. They didn't dare look on it.

And so there was a veil put in front of his face. And Paul draws the analogy. Just as Israel could not see the glory on the face of Moses, so also today, he says, Israel still today is unable to see Christ in their old covenant.

There's still a blindness. It's as though that curtain is still there. When they read their Scriptures, they're somehow amazingly unable to see the obvious.

But this is precisely what the Holy Spirit does for us under the terms of the new covenant. He opens our eyes to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Paul tells us about that in terms of his own testimony into chapter 4 again and chapter 5. I used to view Christ, he says, according to the flesh.

I viewed him like anyone else would view him. And in fact, I hated him for what I saw. And it's not that I didn't understand his claims.

I understood them well. And that's why I hated him. I saw him.

And I saw his claims and heard them and understood them and hated him for it. But suddenly, this God who made the light shine out of darkness, I wish Dr. Moo were here. I'd tell him, see, I have read Genesis 1 and 2. This same God who made the light to shine in the darkness, this God who said, Let there be light.

And there was light in the whole world. He has shined in our hearts and made us to see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Suddenly, there's a new perception of Christ entirely.

Isn't that exactly your testimony? That's mine. I remember I was saved at a very young age. I was only six years old.

I'm almost embarrassed to say it because it's so uncommon. Nobody believes it. But I remember it so well.

I had the privilege, as most of you know, of being born in a Christian home. My father preached the gospel. I heard him preaching every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, every Wednesday night.

From before, I could understand words. Sunday after Sunday after Sunday after Sunday. Sermon after sermon after sermon.

And finally, one Sunday morning. It's 1964. I heard him for the first time.

I had no plans for that that morning. But God invaded my heart. And the lights went on.

And all of a sudden, I saw Christ as I had never seen Him before. And there He was in all of His loveliness and His beauty and His attractiveness and His glory. And I found Him irresistible.

But what we find here in chapter 3 is that's just the beginning. Somehow, as the Spirit of God opens our eyes to see the image of Christ in Scripture, mysteriously, He begins to transform us into that same image. So that now, He says, we reflect His glory.

It's really an amazing thing. He takes ugly, rebel sinners and so impresses them with Christ that they begin to look like Him. Radically changed.

Morally transformed inside and out. With His law written on our hearts. Put in our minds.

Loving God with all of our heart and soul and mind. There is this pursuit of God. A pursuit of Christ.

A pursuit of His law. And a longing to comply with all that He demands. We begin to look like Jesus.

This great change is the experience of every New Covenant believer. It's illustrated in various ways in the New Testament. It's spoken of in terms of a change of clothing.

Put off those old, dirty shirts and put on a clean one. It's spoken of in terms of a new creation. It's spoken of in terms of being made holy.

It's spoken of in graphic terms of the forming of Christ in us. The indwelling of Christ in us by His Spirit. It's spoken of in terms of growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

Here, it's spoken of in terms of reflecting Christ's glory. Not outwardly as though we have a face that shines like Moses did, but inwardly with the image of Christ stamped on our character so that we are transformed from the inside out. This is the great New Covenant promise.

The New Testament describes the Old Covenant as a harsh taskmaster, commanding, commanding, commanding, rebuking, rebuking, rebuking, condemning, condemning, condemning, beating us up, killing us. But the New Covenant is a covenant of grace. I say it so often at church, cornerstone where I am, that I've begun to hear it back from the people themselves, and I love it, that God provides for us all that He requires of us.

God provides for us in grace all that He requires of us. God provides for us all that He requires of us. You're familiar, of course, with the prayer of Augustine.

Give what you command. Give what you command and command what you will. Of course, he got into trouble with that with Pelagius.

How can you talk like that? Our responsibility is grounded in our ability. And Augustine recognized the power of grace, and he recognized the sinfulness of the human heart, and he prayed very rightly, give what you command and command what you will. There's an old hymn that speaks like that.

Run, run and work the law demands, but finds me neither feet nor hands. But sweeter news the gospel brings. It bids me fly and lends me wings.

This is why, in turn, in the New Testament, practical godliness is held up as a test of the genuineness of saving faith. New Covenant faith. Issues in New Covenant behavior.

There is a great change. Next, notice that this reflecting of Christ's glory is not a once and done event. It's ever increasing.

Did you notice that in verse 18? We who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. The experience of the Christian is not a stagnant one. But it's always this upward progression.

It's one that grows continuously from one level of glory to the next, to the next, and to the next. Reflecting the Lord's glory in increasing degree. One of the things I have pressed frequently on the minds and the conscience of our elders at church, and I've said it publicly to our people as well, that they ought to be able to expect this of us.

And that is in 1 Timothy 4. The Apostle tells Timothy that he is to grow in his knowledge of God, increase in piety, increase in godliness, and all of these things. And he says, that your progress may be evident to all. That is, they are not only to grow and increase, but to grow and increase in such a way that is noticeable to those who watch them.

But what's interesting is that Paul can give that command to the elders because it's precisely what is expected of every believer. Every one of us is to be reflecting the glory of Christ in increasing degree, from one glory to glory to glory to glory. That is to say, this coming December, it ought to be true of me that my experience in grace in 2006 ran deeper than it did in 2005.

It ought to be that my communion with Christ, my practical godliness, my love, my faithfulness, my patience, all of this, must be in higher degree than it was last year. Or in the language of this verse, I ought to look more like Jesus this year than I did last, reflect more of his glory. As the Spirit of God acquaints us further with the glory of Christ, mysteriously, he transforms us into that same image.

Amazing, isn't it? And as our acquaintance with Christ deepens, somehow correspondingly, we are made to look more like him. This is the value of the increased exposure to the Word of God. I would like to spend some time here, but I'll just mention it in passing, that it is our increasing acquaintance with Christ, gospel truth, that results in increased reflecting glory.

Tom mentioned in one of his messages this emphasis in the New Testament of be what you are. This is the whole foundation of that. God promises in the New Covenant to bring about in us what he requires of us.

Therefore, be what you are. You find that over and over and over again through the New Testament. In fact, let's take a moment.

We'll be back here in a minute, but look at Philippians chapter 2. A familiar passage, but I want you to make sure you see something in it. Philippians chapter 2, verse 12. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Now notice, by the way, he doesn't say work in your salvation. He doesn't say work it up. And he doesn't say work for it.

He says work it out. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. And notice the first word of verse 13.

4. He doesn't say and. Work out your salvation because it is God who works in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. That is, our responsibility rests on his initiative already at work in us.

Precisely because God has covenanted with us to bring about in us what he requires of us. We are responsible then to work out our salvation and to reflect in increasing degree the glory of Christ. And what is more exciting still is that this progressive work in us will continue until it is complete.

Paul tells us in Philippians he will transform our lowly bodies to be made like his glorious body. John tells us we don't know what we'll be. But we do know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him.

Did you know that the New Testament teaches entire sanctification? May the God of peace himself sanctify you through and through. May your whole body, soul, and spirit be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he who calls you who also will do it.

My whole problem, my whole problem in life is that I don't look yet enough like Jesus. If you don't mind my saying so, your whole problem, you don't look enough like Jesus. Every year at the conference we enjoy fellowship with each other in various dimensions and one of those dimensions is we share with one another in terms of the burdens of ministry and what not and seek encouragement and sometimes counsel from one another.

And often those discussions lead to the church problems. The whole problem, the whole problem is that neither we nor our people look enough like Jesus. Ah, but one day, one day God will finish this work that he has begun in us and we will be like him.

Then we shall be where we would be. Then we shall be what we should be. Things that are not now nor could be soon shall be our own.

Changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place. This is the privileged experience of every New Covenant believer, radically transformed into the glorious image of Christ progressively and continuously until finally we are with him and share in his glory and are made like him. Amen.

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